

**Terms of Reference:**  
**Inquiry into looked after children who runaway or go missing**

**About the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults**

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults works to raise awareness in Parliament of issues connected to children and adults who go missing or run away. The Group meets throughout the year to explore, discuss and debate key issues connected to going missing or running away. Through inquiries, stakeholder presentations and engaging with children, young people and families, the Group seeks to encourage the Government to put in place the best possible policy and legislation for children and adults who go missing or run away.

**About the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers**

The Group was set up in 1998 to ensure that the voices of young people with experience of public care are heard by Government and that legislation addresses the particular needs of children and young people in and leaving care and to debate key policy and practice issues. The Groups' meetings are attended by members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords, representatives of voluntary organisations, childcare professionals and people who are currently in care or have past personal experience of the care system. The Group seeks to be a powerful voice on behalf of children and young people in and leaving care.

**Introduction**

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers are joining together to undertake an inquiry into the care and support provided for children who run away or go missing from care.

The Groups are keen to engage with relevant stakeholders to build a clearer picture of what support is provided for looked after children who go missing or runaway from a range of agencies and other organisations and learn about possible solutions and effective interventions.

**Background**

The broad theme of the inquiry would be the safeguarding of children in care who runaway or go missing which would enable members of the Inquiry to look at a range of issues at both the national and local level. Issues that could be explored in more detail include:

1. Cross boundary Looked After Children
2. Data collection and information sharing
3. Police responses, including the current ACPO pilots to reduce bureaucracy relating to missing children.
4. Ofsted's role to safeguard children in care who run away and how care placements are assessed
5. Safeguarding trafficked children who go missing from care

### *Why we are launching this inquiry*

When children run away they will be in great danger of being physically or sexually abused or exploited. Research from The Children's Society shows a quarter of the 100,000 children who run away from care or home each year will be at serious risk of harm. As children in care are three times more likely to run away than other children, agencies' understanding of and response to this issue are critical.

Concerns have recently been raised regarding the data collected on children who run away from care – with figures held by Local Authorities being contradicted by police figures and freedom of information requests. A lack of Local Authority data on cross-boundary looked after children has been highlighted by a report from Lancashire County Council, whilst the question of Ofsted's role in safeguarding children and young people who run away from care has also been raised by the police and other agencies. Pilots run by the police with a revised definition of 'missing' have particular significance for repeat runaways from care. The Groups therefore feel an inquiry into looked after children who run away or go missing to investigate these issues would be timely.

### *What we want to achieve*

We intend to develop a clear set of practical recommendations for policy makers, both nationally and locally, to improve the response and support provided to children and young people in care who go missing or run away. The inquiry's report will also showcase best practice from across the sector.

### *Who we want to hear from*

As part of this inquiry the Groups would like to hear from: children and young people with experiences of being looked after and running away or going missing, local authorities' children's services, voluntary organisations working with children in care or who go missing/runaway, the police, fostering organisations and any other interested organisations. The Inquiry will also write to all local authorities to ask them to provide any data and evidence.

## **Inquiry timelines**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity</b>
12 March 2012	Inquiry opens
23 April 2012	Deadline for written evidence
16 April 2012 – 27 April 2012	Oral evidence sessions
May 2012	Report published

## **Terms of Reference**

Members of the APPG on Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers will consider written evidence and oversee the oral evidence sessions. Written and oral evidence will inform the final report. The final report and its recommendations will be submitted to the Secretary of State for Education, as well as the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families, for their consideration and response.

*For children and young people*

The Groups would like to hear from children and young people with experience of being in care and running away or going missing.

1. Some young people run away because they don't like care. Why do you think young people run away from care?
2. What do you think would make care better so people would be less likely to run away?
3. What could the police, teachers, social workers and others do to stop young people from running away or help them run away less often?
4. What could social workers do to help prevent young people from running away or help them run away less often?
5. What could residential social workers or foster carers do to help prevent young people from running away or help them run away less often?
6. How do you think the police treat young people who run away and what could they do to help young people to stop running away or run away less often?
7. How do you think teachers and other school staff could do to stop young people from running away or to run away less often?
8. What do you think police, social workers or teachers should know to help them better support young people who are running away?

*For organisations and practitioners*

Please provide evidence on the following questions from the perspective of your organisation. Or if you are an individual please provide details of the type of professional you are. In addition, the Groups would welcome details of any relevant research or information from your organisation that you would be willing to share with the Inquiry.

Cross boundary Looked After Children

1. Before approving a decision to place a child outside their area of responsible authority are Local Authorities carrying out their statutory requirement under the Care Planning Regulations of The Children Act to ensure that the Local Authority for the area in which the child is to be placed has been notified?
2. If Local Authorities are not carrying out this statutory requirement, what issues, if any, arise as a result?
3. What could be done to improve performance on this statutory requirement?

Data collection and sharing

4. The cross-Government Strategy for Missing Children and Adults states that in any area *local agencies need to understand the picture and context of 'missing'*. Do you feel current data collection supports this objective?

5. What practical steps could be taken to improve data collection on children who runaway or go missing from home or care by the police and by Local Authorities?

#### Police responses

6. Please give your assessment of police responses to repeat runaways in your area.

7. Do you have experience of the current ACPO/police pilots using a revised definition of 'missing'? How have these improved/reduced police responses?

#### Ofsted's role in safeguarding children in care who run away

8. How well does Ofsted work with Local Authorities and the police to safeguard children who runaway or go missing from care?

9. Do Ofsted's inspections of children's homes pay sufficient regard to their duties under Standard five of the NMS for Children's Homes?

#### Safeguarding trafficked children who go missing from care

10. Please give your assessment of how well your local authority complies with the Children Act duties to safeguard and protect trafficked /exploited children. Does your local authority provide an effective standard of care and suitable accommodation for all trafficked or exploited children? How do they ensure the child's best interests are at the centre of their decision-making?

11. Are there any differences in local authority care and accommodation provision for children under immigration control (UASC) compared to services provided to other looked after children?

12. The Government's 2011 Human Trafficking Strategy commits to tackling the issue of trafficked children who go missing from care. What can local authorities and voluntary organisations do to better safeguard trafficked or exploited children and ensure they do not go missing from care?

13. How can the police better identify, track, protect and safeguard trafficked or exploited children who have gone missing from care. Please also give your assessment of police responses to trafficked children in your area.

14. How would providing a guardian for separated migrant children as set out in International Legislation help protect trafficked or exploited children going missing from care?

#### **Written evidence**

The deadline for receiving evidence is **23 April 2012**.

There is no maximum word count, and previously published evidence may be submitted.

Submissions from persons and organisations will be published unless specifically requested. Where a person or organisation has stated that they wish for their written evidence to be anonymously, it will be published under the title anonymous.

### *Email*

You can email your evidence to [Ruby.Peacock@childrenssociety.org.uk](mailto:Ruby.Peacock@childrenssociety.org.uk)

### *Website*

You can submit written evidence through the website at <http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-lobbying/parliamentary-work/appg-inquiry-children-who-go-missing-or-run-away>

### *Post*

You can send us a hard copy of your evidence to:

Policy Team  
The Children's Society  
Edward Rudolf House  
Margery Street  
WC1X 0JL

### **Oral evidence**

The Groups are planning to hold oral sessions in April 2012 at the House of Commons. Please indicate in your written submission whether you or a representative from your organisation is willing to give oral evidence to the inquiry.

### **Any questions?**

This inquiry is supported by The Children's Society and the Who Cares? Trust. These organisations provide administrative and organisational support to members of the APPG on Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers respectively.

For updates on the progress of the inquiry please visit

<http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-lobbying/parliamentary-work/appg-inquiry-children-who-go-missing-or-run-away> or [www.thewhocaresrust.org.uk](http://www.thewhocaresrust.org.uk)

For questions or to add your name to the mailing list please contact Ruby Peacock at [Ruby.Peacock@childrenssociety.org.uk](mailto:Ruby.Peacock@childrenssociety.org.uk) or on 0207 841 4485.