

Somerset County Council
Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families
Committee
16th January 2023

RESPONSE TO OFSTED FINDINGS – MISSING RETURN INTERVIEWS

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Executive Member: Tessa Munt

Division and Local Member:

1. Summary

- 1.1.** The inspection of the Council's Children's Social Care Services in 2022 rated the services Good across the board and named two areas for improvement and this report provides details on return home interviews. Somerset local authority offers all children who go missing a return home interview, and the Council is working towards the improved take up of return home interviews, with improved use of data to inform individual and service planning.

2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

- 2.1.** Missing Return Interviews are completed by a small sub team within the Family Intervention Service (FIS) – preventing missing and exploitation team (PMEX).

Having a dedicated team within FIS who focus on missing children has enabled us to identify trends, areas of concern and patterns that may otherwise be missed, as where we see groups of children going missing several different social workers or FIS workers are likely to be involved.

- 2.2.** PMEX comprises one full time Team Leader, 4 FIWs delivering case work with young people being exploited or at risk of exploitation and 4 workers completing Missing Return Interviews (MRIs) and associated work. The significant uplift in demand is causing ongoing capacity issues which will hamper attempts to improve

performance in this area.

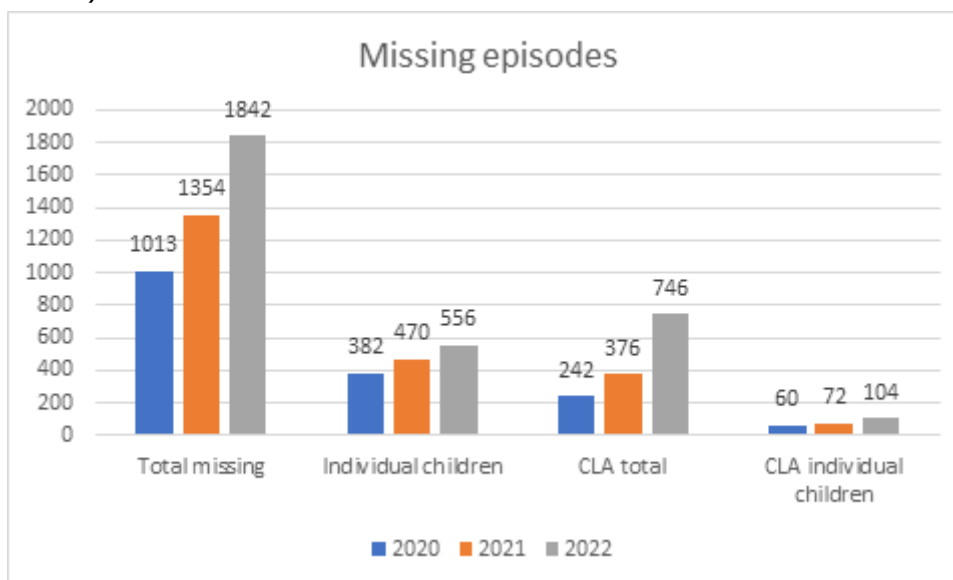
The Committee is asked to consider and comment upon this report.

Some case studies will be shared at the meeting.

3. Background

3.1. Overview of missing episodes

The numbers of missing reports continue to increase year on year increasing from 1013 in 2020 to 1842 so far this year (up to 31st Nov 2022).



The largest increase is within the Children Looked after cohort where we have seen a 208% rise in missing reports (this includes children from other local authorities placed in Somerset) with overall numbers having increased by 81%.

3.2. Managing Risk

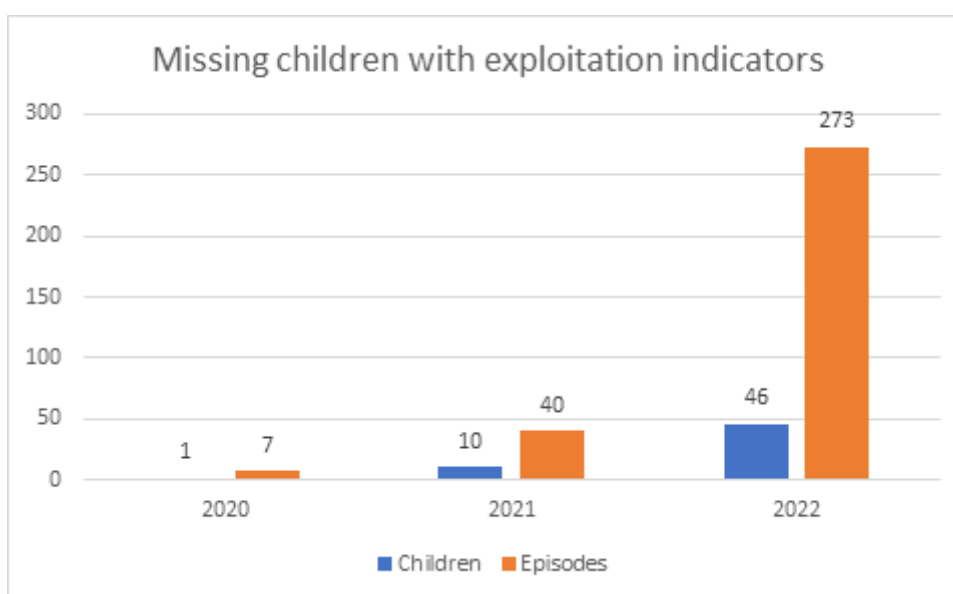
Over the last 3 years we have seen an increase in identified children with a risk around exploitation.

The increase could be attributed to better identification and recording through the work completed by our lead Social Workers for Exploitation roles and the multi-agency discussions which take place weekly around children who are reported missing and thought

to be a risk of harm (High Risk Misper Meeting).

It would also be valid to assume that the increase of known factors, such as county lines and gang type activity, into Somerset has had some impact on the rise.

Whilst the increase in the number of children identified as having an exploitation risk in 2022 was high, the number of missing episodes shows that we had a cohort of children who were being reported missing on a regular basis, rather than more individual children going missing.



4. Consultations undertaken

4.1. Actions taken following OFSTED

Pre Ofsted it was recognised that work needed to be undertaken to refresh and redesign the service, and the work detailed below was largely already in hand but not yet at the point of realisation of benefits:

- I. The ***return home interview form*** has been reviewed and reworked to ensure capture of all the information gathered allowing effective data reporting (reporting is in final completion stages with BI colleagues).
- II. The recording process has been changed to reflect a child has

been given the opportunity to discuss a missing episode through direct contact, even if they then decline. The number of children subsequently being recorded as having engaged has risen by 26% since Ofsted visited.

- III. Work completed with Avon and Somerset Police to roll out the [Philomena Protocol](#), which is ongoing into the spring of 2023)
- IV. Updated the Local Guidance for Missing Children (awaiting sign off) to ensure *meaningful social work contact post return* is better recorded.
- V. Engaged the wider CSC Children's Social Care management team (through the County Managers' Meeting process) to refresh the purpose and process of MRI work and identify challenges and barriers.

5. Implications

5.1. Actions still required and in progress

- I. Somerset Missing Protocol to be updated in line of the above developments
- II. Increase the correct recording of meaningful contact by social workers following missing episodes to allow accurate data capture (During the period Aug to Oct 2022 meaningful SW contact recorded on 27% of Children Looked After? CLA cases – note this does include children placed in Somerset by other LAs which we cannot separate for data purposes).
- III. Collaboration with CSC to refine the number of duplicated reports to streamline information and maximise effective safety planning
- IV. Dashboard data to be reviewed once other parts of the process are finalised.

5.2. Challenges

- I. Capacity within the missing team to offer RHIs within 72 hours of being informed of return. Increased demand and staff absence has impacted success rates
- II. Increased volume of CLA being reported missing. Impact of the Philomena Protocol to be monitored.

- III. Increased volume of calls to EDT concerning children not in placement or at their home where the police do not consider them as missing creates significant additional work across SCC teams in gaining additional information and completing background admin tasks

- IV. Separating Somerset children from other LA children in the case management system data

6. Background papers

6.1. None.

Note For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author