

LOOKED AFTER
CHILDREN:
MISSING FROM
CARE

April 2014

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Introduction by Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM

There is now a growing recognition that a scandal exists in all parts of the country involving children missing from the care of local authorities.

It is highly regrettable that it has taken the cases of child sexual exploitation in Rochdale and in other places to alert politicians and the public to the magnitude of a problem that has until recently been almost entirely unnoticed. The recent report "If Only Someone Had Listened" from the Office of the Children's Commissioner gives stark details on this growing danger to vulnerable children and young people.

The facts are quite simple. A local authority looked after child who goes missing for 24 hours or more is at serious risk, including at risk of physical abuse. As Scotland Yard have recently confirmed in giving evidence to the London Assembly there are across the capital at least 10 organised criminal syndicates targeting girls and boys for sexual abuse. Many of these gangs will specifically target runaway children, a significant proportion of whom are local authority looked after children.

The purpose of this study was to highlight just how serious these problems are across London. The results, obtained by freedom of information requests submitted to 32 London Boroughs sadly speak for themselves, revealing that a serious problem exists in every part of London. Whether it is the high number of recorded missing children from so many boroughs, or the failure of some London Boroughs to even have accessible data on record relating to the children they are legally responsible for in terms of care and protection.

The widespread failure to keep some of the most vulnerable children in our society safe while they are in the legal care of a local authority is nothing short of a disgrace.

I hope this report plays a role in pushing these issues up the agenda and leads to real action to address the scourge of the serious neglect facing so many of London's most vulnerable children.



Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM
Liberal Democrat London Assembly Police and Crime Spokesperson

Report Methodology

A Freedom of Information (FOI) request was sent to each London Borough in the first week of February 2014 :

**“Please state the figures, broken down for each year since 2009, of:
(a) how many incidents there have been of looked after children and young people who are living within your borough and who are in the care of your borough, that have gone missing for more than 24 hours, and
(b) how many looked after children and young people in total who are living within your borough and who are in the care of your borough that have gone missing for more than 24 hours?”**

**Please also state the figures, broken down for each year since 2009, of:
(a) how many incidents there have been of looked after children and young people that are the responsibility of your borough, but are resident outside of your borough, that have gone missing for more than 24 hours, and
(b) how many looked after children and young people in total that are the responsibility of your borough, but are resident outside of your borough, that have gone missing for more than 24 hours?”**

Please also state how many looked after children and young people who are living within your borough and the responsibility of your borough that are currently missing for more than 24 hours.

Please also state how many looked after children and young people who are the responsibility of your borough, but are resident outside of your borough, that are currently missing for more than 24 hours?”

The FOI asked for four specific data sets:

- 1. The number of looked after children¹ that had been placed inside their borough who had been missing for 24 hours or more.**
- 2. The number of looked after children that had been placed outside their borough who had been missing for 24 hours or more.**
- 3. The number of incidents of looked after children going missing from placements within their borough for 24 hours or more.**
- 4. The number of incidents of looked after children going missing from placements outside of their borough for 24 hours or more.**

¹ A looked after child is a child in public care of a Local Authority in accordance with section 22 of the Children Act 1989.

Data collected from FOI requests to London Boroughs

Borough	Year	Looked After Children Missing for 24hrs+		Incidents of Looked After Children Going Missing	
		Placed IN Borough	Placed OUT of Borough	Placed IN Borough	Placed OUT of Borough
<u>Barking & Dagenham</u>	2009	9	5	15	7
	2010	11	6	21	11
	2011	8	7	11	9
	2012	6	5	6	10
	2013	3	2	5	6
<u>Barnet</u>	2009	13	8	39	14
	2010	24	14	75	19
	2011	18	13	29	19
	2012	19	16	39	33
	2013	29	24	120	63
	2014	11	5	16	8
<u>Brent</u>	2009	12	8	14	13
	2010	20	22	32	30
	2011	27	27	40	45
	2012	21	21	43	74
	2013	14	14	18	81
	2014	2	2	2	4
<u>Croydon</u>	2009	15		16	
	2010	16		21	
	2011	21		34	
	2012	21		47	
	2013	12		19	
<u>Ealing</u>	2009	1	3	1	3
	2010	1	0	1	0
	2011	1	4	1	4
	2012	0	3	0	4
	2013	2	2	2	3
<u>Enfield</u>	2009	9	11	23	20
	2010	16	13	21	34
	2011	13	10	15	14
	2012	5	6	8	16
	2013	9	15	17	28
	2014	1	1	1	2
<u>Hammersmith & Fulham</u>	2009			15	
	2010			14	
	2011			16	
	2012			5	
	2013			22	
<u>Hackney</u>	2009	0	0	0	0
	2010	4	1	4	1
	2011	1	1	1	1
	2012	1	7	1	7
<u>Haringey</u>	2009	0	6	0	8
	2010	8	20	10	31
	2011	4	6	4	8
	2012	3	11	3	12

Borough	Year	Looked After Children Missing for 24hrs+		Incidents of Looked After Children Going Missing	
		Placed IN Borough	Placed OUT of Borough	Placed IN Borough	Placed OUT of Borough
<u>Harrow</u>	2010	16	11	36	21
	2011	15	12	40	23
	2012	19	18	29	40
	2013	16	9	23	21
<u>Havering</u>	2009	5	3	7	6
	2010	2	5	6	5
	2011	7	5	13	6
	2012	7	6	8	10
	2013	4	2	5	2
<u>Hounslow</u>	2009	6	7	7	14
	2010	4	8	8	11
	2011	5	9	6	13
	2012	3	10	4	15
	2013	1	2	2	3
<u>Islington</u>	2009	0	<10	0	<10
	2010	0	<10	0	<10
	2011	<10	<10	<10	<10
	2012	<10	<20	<10	<20
	2013	<10	<10	<10	<20
	2014	0	0	0	0
<u>Kensington & Chelsea</u>	2009			72	
	2010			50	
	2011			17	
	2012			12	
	2013			6	
<u>Lambeth</u>	2009	5	10		
	2010	8	9		
	2011	12	13		
<u>Lewisham</u>	2009	7	12	15	31
	2010	26	27	60	47
	2011	19	25	26	57
	2012	20	22	31	54
	2013	11	17	25	33
<u>Merton</u>	2009	0	<5	0	<5
	2010	0	<5	0	<5
	2011	<5	<5	<5	<5
	2012	<5	<5	7	10
	2013	<5	<5	<5	9
	2014	0	0	0	0
<u>Newham</u>	2014	5	2		
<u>Redbridge</u>	2009	5	0	7	0
	2010	2	0	4	0
	2011	2	2	2	2
	2012	3	3	3	4
	2013	3	13	9	46

<u>Borough</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Looked After Children Missing for 24hrs+</u>		<u>Incidents of Looked After Children Going Missing</u>	
		<u>Placed IN Borough</u>	<u>Placed OUT of Borough</u>	<u>Placed IN Borough</u>	<u>Placed OUT of Borough</u>
<u>Richmond</u>	2009	0	<5	0	<5
	2010	0	0	0	0
	2011	0	0	0	0
	2012	<5	6	6	9
	2013	<5	12	14	43
<u>Sutton</u>	2009	<5	10	<5	13
	2010	<5	7	<5	7
	2011	<5	<5	<5	6
	2012	<5	10	<5	30
<u>Tower Hamlets</u>	2010	2	7	3	9
	2011	6	4	7	4
	2012	4	3	12	5
	2013	9	8	25	23
<u>Wandsworth</u>	2009	1	1	1	1
	2010	0	1	0	1
	2011	0	1	0	1
	2012	6	5	10	8
	2013	2	8	2	13
<u>Westminster</u>	2009	26		48	
	2010	14		25	
	2011	15		55	
	2012	13		30	

***Highlighted Boroughs have the most worrying data sets.**

**** Some London Boroughs chose to send approximated figures rather than actuals.**

<u>Borough</u>	<u>Looked After Children Currently</u>	
	<u>Missing for 24hrs + (April 2014)</u>	
	<u>Placed</u> <u>IN Borough</u>	<u>Placed</u> <u>OUT of Borough</u>
Barnet	0	3
Brent	2	2
Croydon	1	0
Ealing	0	0
Enfield	1	0
Hackney	0	0
Haringey	0	1
Harrow	0	0
Hounslow	0	0
Islington	0	0
Kingston	0	0
Lewisham	0	2
Merton	0	0
Newham	5	2
Redbridge	1	0
Richmond	0	<5
Sutton	0	0
Tower Hamlets	0	0
Waltham Forest	5	0
Wandsworth	0	0
Westminster	0	1

***These are the responses we received from London Boroughs in response to the final two questions in the FOI request:**

“Please also state how many looked after children and young people who are living within your borough and the responsibility of your borough that are currently missing for more than 24 hours.

Please also state how many looked after children and young people who are the responsibility of your borough, but are resident outside of your borough, that are currently missing for more than 24 hours?”

Summary

We unfortunately did not hear back from every London Borough within the 20 day time limit set for responses to FOIs under the Freedom of Information Act.

Boroughs that are not included in the table above either have not responded or not complied fully with the FOI request.

Sections 9 and 13 of the Freedom of Information Act allow public authorities to charge for answering requests in certain cases. Public authorities are allowed to either charge for or decline requests for information that would cost a public authority more than £600 for central government or £450 for other public authorities to deal with.

This is referred to as the appropriate limit. Public authorities are required to estimate whether a request is likely to breach the 'appropriate limit'. Unfortunately some of the London Boroughs responded to our FOI stating that providing the data requested would breach this "appropriate limit".

It is important to remember that behind these numbers there are vulnerable children who are at risk.

Some of the figures that were sent through are worrying, but equally concerning is the fact that some boroughs did not have the data or believed that the staff hours required to retrieve such data would exceed the "appropriate limit" of costs.

Claiming that providing the information requested would exceed the cost limit of collecting data under Sections 9 and 13 of the Freedom of Information Act suggests that some London Borough record collecting systems on this issue are very inadequate.

The failure of safeguarding partners to share information effectively has been highlighted in many public enquiries, case reviews and reports. It has been recently confirmed in the findings of both the Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups report¹ and Ofsted's first ever annual report on the state of children's social care across England².

The Office of the Children's Commissioner's report stated ***"Local response lacked leadership"*** and ***"..failed to commit adequate resources"***, whereas Sir Michael Wilshaw, Ofsted Chief Inspector went as far as to say ***"vulnerable children are being let down by councils with ineffective and incompetent leadership.."***

¹ "If Only Someone Had Listened", Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups, November 2013
http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/content/publications/content_743

² "Social Care Annual Report 2012/13", Ofsted, October 2013
<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/social-care-annual-report-201213>

“Going missing from care can present a significant risk to children. It’s often an important warning sign that they are suffering serious harm or at imminent risk of doing so. If any other child went missing their parent would rightly move heaven and earth to find them. It’s only right that the same level of care is given to children looked after by the state...it’s vital all local authorities proactively gather data on children going missing and use it to identify patterns that could help keep children safe.”

Tom Rahilly

NSPCC lead for looked after children

April 2014

Recommendations

1. There should be a review of data collection systems used by London Local Authorities to ensure they are fit for purpose and adequately safeguard looked after children going missing from care in placements both in and out of Boroughs.
2. Local Authorities should have systems in place to monitor the prevalence of, and the responses to, looked after children who go missing from care. These systems should include the gathering of data from partners, local stakeholders and the local authorities where looked after children in their care have been placed in 'out of area' placements in order to understand trends and patterns.¹
3. Local Authorities should share an annual statement with Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs). This statement should include: the number of children from its local authority who are placed 'out of area', the distance from the placement to the 'home' local authority, the type of placements and how many go missing from care.²
4. For independent care providers to be required to notify their local area authority of all new 'out of area' placements they receive and when the placements end as a means of strengthening communication and data collection.³
5. At this year's meeting of the Congress of Leaders, the Mayor of London should raise the issue of looked after children going missing from the care of London Boroughs and how they can improve the collecting and sharing of relevant data and form actions to better safeguard these vulnerable children.
6. Corporate Parents should be fully aware of their responsibilities and regularly presented with information on children missing from the care of their borough.

¹Check list for Local Authorities, published in the Statutory Guidance on Children Who Run Away or Go Missing From Home or Care, June 2013.

²Recommendation 9 from APPG for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers. Report From The Joint Enquiry Into Children Who Go Missing From Care, published June 2012

³Recommendation 16 from APPG for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers. Report From The Joint Enquiry Into Children Who Go Missing From Care, published June 2012

Appendix

Bexley	Bexley did not comply with FOI, estimating compliance exceed appropriate costs.																					
Bromley	Waiting for response																					
Camden	Camden did not comply with FOI, estimating compliance exceed appropriate costs.																					
Greenwich	Still awaiting response to FOI																					
Hammersmith & Fulham	Hammersmith & Fulham did not fully comply with FOI, estimating compliance exceed appropriate costs. They sent limited data																					
Hillingdon	Hillingdon did not comply with FOI, estimating compliance exceed appropriate costs.																					
Kingston	Kingston have only recorded this data since August 2012. 1 LAC child placed in the borough went missing with one missing incident since 2012 and 34 missing incidents involving 9 children that were placed outside of the borough.																					
Kensington & Chelsea	K&C did not fully comply with FOI, estimating compliance exceed appropriate costs. They sent limited data. During the period in question there were 34 LAC in care of the borough who went missing. There were 157 missing incidents.																					
Lambeth	Lambeth sent through numbers of missing children but not how many individual incidents																					
Newham	Newham did not comply fully with FOI, estimating compliance exceed appropriate costs.																					
Lewisham	Also sent over figures for children whose location had never been recorded. <table border="1" style="margin-left: 20px;"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="3">Location Not Recorded (Lewisham)</th> </tr> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Children</th> <th>Incidents</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2009</td> <td>10</td> <td>21</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2010</td> <td>4</td> <td>9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2011</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2012</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2013</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Location Not Recorded (Lewisham)			Year	Children	Incidents	2009	10	21	2010	4	9	2011	0	0	2012	0	0	2013	0	0
Location Not Recorded (Lewisham)																						
Year	Children	Incidents																				
2009	10	21																				
2010	4	9																				
2011	0	0																				
2012	0	0																				
2013	0	0																				
Southwark	Awaiting response Ref: 366129.																					
Waltham Forest	Do not hold any data for children missing from care prior to 2010. Between 2010 and 2013 information is held but it is not in a systematic form. A new recording system was put in affect from August 2013, for recording whether children were missing or absent. There are currently five children and young people looked after by Waltham Forest that have been missing for more than 24 hours. These children reside in the borough.																					
Westminster	Westminster did not fully comply with FOI, estimating compliance exceed appropriate costs. They sent limited data																					