

REPORT TO:	Scrutiny Children & Young People Sub-Committee 17 October 2017
SUBJECT:	CHILDREN'S IMPROVEMENT – DEEP DIVE MISSING CHILDREN IN CROYDON
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CABINET MEMBER:	Alisa Flemming Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning
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ORIGIN OF ITEM:	This paper follows the resolution made at the 5 September meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee that each Children and Young People's Scrutiny Meeting would have a standing item to focus on a key theme in the Improvement Plan.
BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE:	This paper provides a description and analysis of the profile, performance and practice challenges in working with missing children. It also describes actions taken by Croydon to improve interventions.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 At its meeting on 5 September 2017, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee resolved that each Children and Young People's Scrutiny meeting would have a standing item to focus on a key theme in the Improvement Plan. Missing Children is the theme for this meeting of the Sub-Committee and the choice of this theme flows from its recent consideration by the Improvement Board.
- 1.2 Members of the Sub-Committee are asked to scrutinise the information provided in this deep dive, consider whether the recommendations put to the Improvement Board are adequate and offer any additional or alternative suggestions as they consider necessary.
- 1.3 The Ofsted Inspection of Children Services and Review of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (September: 2017) made two key recommendations in this area. The Ofsted Recommendations were:

- Ensure that there is appropriate and timely action with regard to understanding and reducing risk to all children, especially those at risk of sexual exploitation and those who go missing from home or care; ensure that social workers have the necessary skills and knowledge to help children at risk of sexual exploitation.
- Ensure that children missing from home or care have every opportunity to speak to an independent person about the reasons they go missing so that appropriate action can be taken to support them effectively, and reduce risk.

1.4 The information considered by the Improvement Board, and the suggested actions, are as follows in this report.

2. OVERVIEW OF OUR PROFILE: HOME, CARE AND EDUCATION

- 2.1 The cohort of missing children mirrors the national picture in that 76% of children and young people in Croydon who go missing are aged 14 to 17. 83% of missing episodes in the last 6 months were from Croydon Looked After Children (LAC). Of these Croydon LAC episodes, 56% were from Local LAC and 44% LAC Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). Ninety-six Croydon LAC, who were placed out of borough, had a missing episode. The most frequent reason for going missing was returning to see friends or family.
- 2.2 All of the top 10 children and young people who were identified as having repeat missing episodes were looked after (6 Local LAC, 4 UASC LAC). UASC LAC who had a missing episode were 97% male. The most frequent age of UASC LAC who had a missing episode was 16 years old and their most frequent ethnicity was other white; Albanian.
- 2.3 The largest single cohort of males who went missing was UASC LAC (48% of total males who went missing). For females the largest single cohort who went missing was local LAC (37% of total females who went missing). 16 years old is the most frequent age of those who went missing, for both genders. 31% of males and 24% of females who went missing were 16 years old. In the past six months there has been a fairly sharp increase in the number of boys that went missing between ages 15 and 16 (20% and 31% respectively) compared to girls where there is an even proportion that went missing between the ages of 15 and 16 (24% for both).
- 2.4 Looked after children have a much higher count of missing episodes. White British is the single largest cohort of missing girls who are Local LAC (33%), and Black British for boys (33%). The ethnic breakdown of missing children is highly diverse mirroring Croydon's youth population with the largest group 'Any other White background' which accounts for 18.3% of the total cohort. Albanian young people are categorised within this broad ethnic code and account for 48% of missing unaccompanied minors. (A specific International Organisation for Migration project has been established to improve service and practice to this cohort).
- 2.5 The second largest group of missing children are White British (14%). There are then a range of categories including; Any other African 12%, Asian; 11%, Caribbean 10%, Any other Black 6% White and Black Caribbean 5%, any other ethnic group 4%, White and African 3%, any other mixed 3% and white Irish 1%. Indian, Pakistan, Irish traveller and not recorded made up the other 2%.

There are some limitations in the quality of data. For example; 11.6% of missing children do not have an Ethnicity recorded. Most of these children are from other Local Authorities (“OLA”).

Children missing education – “CME”

- 2.6 The mean for referrals made from Primary and Secondary schools in 2016 was 41% and 28%. The mean for referrals made from Primary and Secondary schools in 2017 was 59% and 37%. Moving out of Croydon remains the highest reason for CME referrals. Other reasons are: children going to live outside of the borough with another parent, as well as families moving abroad. Despite the increased referrals, data shows no major shifts in the reasons for referrals.

3. Performance information. How well are we doing?

- 3.1 All data was reported from the 1st March to the 31st August 2017. Following the inspection Croydon have enhanced and developed the dataset referred to as a Missing dashboard which is available to the Improvement Board upon request. Croydon can now provide a detailed range of information about missing children. Croydon is confident in the robust nature of this data.
- 3.2 Between March and August 2017 there was a total of 1090 missing episodes recorded. This involved 262 children (“MISP” – missing people) of whom 172 were Looked After to Croydon. In order to better connect data to improving practice, we will include the addition of alerts to social workers and managers when children go missing.

No of children “MISP”	263	100%
No of children with “MISP” – Council LA	172	65%
No of UASC with “MISP”	76	29%
No of Missing Episodes	1092	100%
No of Missing Episodes - 1 day or more	800	73%
No of Missing Episodes - 2 days or more	365	33%
No of Missing Episodes - 5 days or more	134	12%
No of Missing Episodes - Council LA	928	85%
No of “MISP” Episodes - rc as Away from placement	798	73%
No of Missing Episodes - Council LA - Outside LA	696	64%
No of Missing Episodes - 1 day or more - Council LA	328	30%
No of Missing Episodes - 2 days or more - Council LA	215	20%
No of Missing Episodes - 5 days or more - Council LA	91	8%

- 3.3 The service which has the most number of missing children is Permanence 1 & 2. Within these service Permanence 2 Unit 1, had the most numbers recorded 25, which is 13.5% of the total number of children recorded as “MISP”.
- 3.4 The highest number of Return Home Interviews (RHI) offered were in the month of July, but the acceptance rate was less than 50% at 33.64%. Figures show that the average RHI acceptance rate has been less than 50% for the past 6 months. Out of the 436 RHIs offered 195 were accepted, which is 44.72%. Breaking down this performance further the highest number of RHIs offered were in the month of July, but the acceptance rate was less than 50% at 35 %. Figures show that the average RHI acceptance rate for Council Looked

After Children (CLA) has also been less than 50% for the past 6 months. Out of the 354 RHIs offered only 151 were accepted, which is 42.65%. The table below provides an RHI performance report by month.

RHIs percentages from March 2017 – August 2017

Month of Start Date	March	April	May	June	July	August
No of RHIs Offered	52	39	47	90	108	68
No of RHIs Accepted	19	18	22	48	38	34
No of RHIs Offered - CLA	37	31	31	69	89	64
No of RHIs Accepted - CLA	13	13	12	37	27	31
No of RHIs Accepted - CLA Outside LA	10	8	10	27	21	25
RHI Offer Rate % - Episodes	31.9%	26.17%	26.4%	40.91%	45.38%	47.22%
RHI Offer Rate % - Episodes - CLA	26.81%	24.8%	21.99%	37.50%	42.58%	48.85%
RHI Acceptance Rate % - Episodes	36.54%	46.15%	46.81%	53.33%	35.19%	50%
RHIs Done % Episodes	11.66%	12.08%	12.36%	21.82%	15.97%	23.61%
RHIs Done % Episodes - CLA	9.42%	10.4%	8.51%	20.11%	12.92%	23.66%

- 3.5 The total number of referrals for Children Missing Education (CME) between March and August 2017 was 554. That is an increase of 164 referrals for the same period last year. Total CME cases currently open at 20/09/2017 is 89. Despite this increase of referrals, CME have improved on the average number of days open from 32 days in 2016 to 28 days in 2017, with the number of cases closed under 30 days increasing slightly from 63% to 65%.
- 3.6 The rise in referrals is likely to be related to the changes in the Pupil Registration Legislation in September 2016, which now requires all schools to inform the local authority of any pupil removed from their roll. This has opened up a range of new notifications from private schools that have previously been unrecorded. In light of these changes CME internal processes and referral systems were reviewed. These changes have enabled the local authority's CME and Croydon schools to improve tracking and monitoring of pupils of the London Borough of Croydon.
- 3.7 Despite the increased referrals CME have been able to close 65% of cases within this period under 30 days. We aim to improve on the number of referrals closed within 30 days, by reviewing our processes, this includes making quicker referrals to Attendance Improvement Officers. When families do not fully engage with the CME officer School Attendance Orders will be actioned.

4 AUDIT FINDINGS

- 4.1 An audit was completed in September 2017 to evaluate social work practice and compliance with Croydon's Missing from Home and Care procedure (v2015). A dip sample of 15 children and young people who are currently missing or were missing between September 2016 and 2017 were audited. The children and young people were either subject to child protection plans or looked after by the local authority. From the local procedure, the following definitions are used:
- Missing: a child or young person who is away from their home or placement and their whereabouts are unknown.

- Unauthorised Absence: a child or young person who is not where they are expected or required to be and their whereabouts are known or could be established.

4.2 In summary, the audit confirmed Ofsted's findings with discrepancies and inconsistencies in compliance with the procedures. A range of practice improvements were identified. These areas are summarised below:

- The missing procedure is not comprehensive in detail to support good practice and assist understanding of the actions required.
- There is a lack of understanding of the missing procedures (missing vs unauthorised absences) by the social workers, Unit Managers, Child Protection (CP) Chairs and Independent Reviewing Officers.
- The Children's Record System (CRS) process needs to be revised.
- Supervision and management oversight is not evident on CRS.

Summary of Findings

4.3 Recording and Compliance - The quality of recording remained inconsistent as is the application of procedure. For example: Missing episodes were recorded but additional missing events were identified in case notes and not captured in the missing workflow. NSPCC completed RHIs were not consistently uploaded into CRS despite being sent to social workers.

4.4 Missing/High Risk Panel - While there was evidence noted on case records that a child was presented to missing panel none of the children's files contained panel minutes. The missing policy does not outline the purpose and referral process of the panels and does not include Missing Mondays (meetings to discuss CME) and the role of the high risk panel.

4.5 Return Home Interviews (RHI) - Although interviews are occurring only 2 children had RHIs within the required timescale of 72 hours. Some children went missing again shortly after returning making it impossible to meet the required timescale, while others by definition were not missing but had repeated unauthorised absences, where they returned within 24 hours. Subsequently there is inconsistency in the completion of interviews which are not completed for every missing episode. There is also inconsistency in who is completing interviews; sometimes it is the social worker other times it is an independent worker from NSPCC. Clarity is needed about when NSPCC should complete an RHI (the revised Missing policy addresses this).

4.6 Strategy meetings - 9 children had strategy meetings and 4 were within timescale. There was inconsistency in timing of strategy meetings without a recorded rationale, IROs were chairing many strategy meetings rather than the unit manager and there was a lack of multi-agency involvement in strategy / missing meetings and risk reduction planning was not robust (the revised policies will clarify that chairing strategy meetings is the line managers' responsibility).

4.7 Risk understood - In 66% of cases the risks to the young person, when going missing, as well as those risks the young person presents to the public, were well understood.

- 4.8 Risk assessment completed - Just under half of the cases had a missing risk assessment completed. There was a lack of seriousness/importance associated with completion of the missing risk assessment with staff reporting this as a tick box exercise with social workers not using the form to inform their thinking. From a systems perspective it is noted that the risk assessment is not mandatory in CRS for every missing episode and is not linked to the workflow (however no other Local Authority has a missing workflow).
- 4.9 Clear plan to reduce risk - Findings from risk assessments featured in four care plans to reduce missing. Findings from RHIs are not consistently included in the child's plan to reduce the risk to them while they were missing. These plans were not always noted in the care plan. These were found in the LAC review case notes, strategy meetings, and case notes.
- 4.10 Partnership working - Six children's records had evidence that there was partnership working however not all strategy meetings included key (police/gangs/YOS) agencies.
- 4.11 Plan shared - Four children's records provided clear evidence that the "plan" was shared - the plan being any kind of intention they want to achieve.
- 4.12 Progress toward positive outcomes - Six children's records evidenced progress toward positive outcomes - progress being missing episodes ceasing, reducing or better management by professionals.
- 4.13 Direct Work - three young people's records evidenced direct work from NSPCC or Safer London.
- 4.14 Reflective group supervision - 2 children's records showed evidence of reflective supervision.
- 4.15 Supervision - As with previous audit findings no records showed consistent 4 weekly supervision. There were months without supervision which contributed to risk when considering the age and vulnerabilities of who the children who went missing regularly. When supervision occurred it was inconsistent, task oriented and not reflective with no discussion of risk/safety planning.

Audit Recommendations

- 4.16 The audit report made a number of recommendations all of which have been accepted and actioned.
- i. Missing policy and procedures to be updated. The protocol requires further clarification about the role, purpose, and function for the Missing panels.
 - ii. Minutes from the Missing Panels need to be uploaded on CRS
 - iii. Training for all staff on updated missing policy and procedures.
 - iv. Social workers / administrators to upload reports and information from external service providers and partner agencies (i.e. Safer London/NSPCC)
 - v. Photographs of children to be uploaded on CRS
 - vi. Supervision Audit to ascertain the scope of the compliance with the supervision policy
 - vii. CRS missing workflow to link episodes, Risk Assessment, Strategy Meeting with an outcome safety plan and the use of alerts needs to be added.

- viii. Social workers to clearly identify the risks within each missing episodes by completing the Risk section consistently.

5. A SUMMARY OF PRACTICE DEVELOPMENTS TO THE MISSING PROCESS IN CROYDON

5.1 Croydon is strengthening how services respond to children who go missing and this report summaries current and planned developments:

- i. Croydon has reviewed its processes, researched best practice models from other Local Authorities and identified additional resource adopting a similar model to Kent County Council to manage their missing children, (an authority which was rated 'good' in their most recent OFSTED inspection March 17).
- ii. Croydon has developed a single dataset (15.9.17) which has been developed into a 'live' 'Missing and RHI' dash-board reported from CRS which is refreshed three times per day. (Example available upon request). This dataset pulls together data from Croydon police for children residing in Croydon and information for children placed away from Croydon. This dataset will be developed further in relation to how we report repeat missing episodes by the end of October. A weekly monitoring report (commencing 25.9.17) will be reviewed by the Children's Senior Management Team (CSMT) each Monday analysing completion, compliance and timescales. (Example available upon request).
- iii. Children Social Care are currently establishing a Missing Team. This will consist of five roles: a missing coordinator, two administrators and two return home interview officers which will increase the Council's capacity to complete RHIs, and provide capacity to deploy resources quickly to meet the child. The two return home officer posts will be managed by the Missing coordinator whose role it will be to allocate RHIs and manage the NSPCC contract.
- iv. This new resource will also provide Croydon with the capacity to input and track all missing episodes, record when children return and coordinate and track the progress of Return Home Interviews (RHIs) to inform children's plans. This administration function, overseen by a Missing Coordinator, will act as the 'powerhouse' to drive performance and practice improvements as well as improve the quality of information. This approach, adopted from good practice in other boroughs, will ensure a robust and reliable dataset to assist and challenge social workers and managers alike develop an overview of all missing children, our responses and impact of our interventions on children's' outcomes as well as better inform partners and the Croydon Safeguarding Children Board. The Missing Team will further support and drive procedural compliance.
- v. The Return Home Interview officers will provide RHIs to any child that goes missing from home.
- vi. Return Home Interviews for Croydon Looked after Children will be offered and completed by their allocated Social Worker who should have an

existing relationship with the child. The Missing Coordinator will monitor compliance and support social workers and managers ensure RHIs are completed. The Return Home Interview officers will provide additional training and support to social workers and role modelling how an RHI should be completed for LAC.

- vii. The Missing Coordinator will hold daily co-ordination and monitoring meetings between the RHI interviewers and administrative staff and the NSPCC to track outstanding RHIs (in offer, in completion, in recording), if risk assessments have been completed (missing and CSE) and to plan the work for the day. The Missing coordinator will escalate delays in services to children (procedural compliance) to Service Leaders in line with the escalation protocol. The RHI officers will ensure that the RHI is uploaded into the child's file and that the findings of the RHI are fed-back to the social worker and other relevant professionals as it is the social workers' responsibility to ensure the risk assessments and safety plans are completed and learning from RHIs are integrated into children's care plan.
- viii. The Missing Coordinator will also follow up on RHIs to ensure actions have been completed especially where there are repeat missing episodes.
- ix. The Missing Coordinator will also allocate RHIs to the NSPCC for the life of that commissioned contract (March 18). An interim arrangement has been agreed (20.9.17) to better manage allocation and monitor progress. Over the course of the next 12 weeks we will develop an options appraisal with commissioning and improvement team, with consideration to re-commissioning the RHI contract.
- x. As part of service improvement the functioning of Croydon's Missing Panel has been reviewed and changed. Fortnightly multi-agency Missing meetings will now be held and chaired by the Missing Coordinator. The function of this meeting; to review every child that has been reported missing in that two week period. This review will include identification of risk issues, patterns, impact of interventions and outcomes for children as well as review all RHIs. Data from this meeting will be added to Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) intelligence. All actions will be tracked by the administrators to enable the service to escalate concerns as well as identify outcomes for children.
- xi. For children who go missing in Croydon but are the responsibility of Other Local Authorities (OLA) the Missing Coordinator will contact all 'OLAs' (Other Local Authorities LAC) to request that RHIs be completed for their children to enable Croydon to better understand need and risk as well as reduce repeat missing episodes of the OLA population thereby increasing local capability.
- xii. A mandatory half day training has been devised and is being deployed across Children Social Care commencing on the 2nd October. The Learning and Development team will coordinate this ensuring all social workers and managers attend. This includes procedure, best practice as well as recording in CRS and the importance of integrating the findings of RHIs into updated planning for children. A wider CSCB training plan needs to be confirmed. The CSCB have commissioned Missing People to deliver

Missing Children training to the wider partnership. CSC will contribute to ensure congruence with local protocols and the Croydon context. There are five sessions planned, first starts late October.

- xiii. Croydon's Missing Protocol has been revised and will be relaunched in October 2017.
- xiv. The CRS Pathway for Missing and RHI has been tested and refined to ensure it is in line with the new Missing Procedure.
- xv. Copies of RHIs will continue to be provided to the public protection desk but we need to develop a system to circulate to other partners.
- xvi. As identified, co-location of police with Children Social Care is under consideration and a decision is due.
- xvii. In relation to quality assurance of RHIs the lead for Missing and CSE will undertake a dip sample of RHIs every month. All RHIs for each quarter will be read and a report written for staff and partners to inform them of the key reasons why children go missing. This will inform strategic and operational planning and further resource allocation. The CSCB are due to complete a multi-agency audit of missing children in March 2018.
- xviii. Performance reports and findings from audits will be presented to the newly formed Vulnerable Adolescent sub-group of the CSCB for analysis and challenge.

6. RECENT STAFF ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY ON MISSING CHILDREN

6.1 As part of our programme of 'sprint sessions' to engage staff in the design and development of the improvement plan we ran two sessions on CSE and missing which were the second most popular, attended 45 staff (see picture inset).



- 6.2 Staff said that CSE and Missing practice works well when all stakeholders are fully informed, involved and have a clear understanding of thresholds. Good means having a co-ordinated approach between the local authority, the police and schools in addition to intelligence on why children go missing would inform future actions, such as identifying hotspots.
- 6.3 Staff told us that a lack of time for RHIs, different priorities between agencies and a lack of monitoring and sharing of information get in the way of good practice to support young people who go missing.

6.4 Staff provided lots of suggestions for improvements and quick wins, including developing best practice guidance for all agencies and making more use of technology such as apps and Skype.

7. RISKS AND ISSUES (INCLUDING BARRIERS TO DELIVERY)

7.1 In staff engagement exercises, social workers and managers have reported a number of barriers to good practice in Croydon in relation to responding to missing children. The most significant factor that has impeded previous progress has been the increasing level of need in the borough (i.e. numbers of missing episodes) and social work compliance with procedure.

7.2 Despite regular trainings and email communication and visits to team meetings some staff remain confused as to who completes the RHI. Staff turnover, the transfer of cases within teams, social workers lack capacity especially where children go missing from a distant placement which 'throws workers' dairies out of kilter' coupled with a lack of capacity in relation to the speed of turnaround in relation to RHIs. Social workers also reported not feeling competent and confident. Managers stated they lacked capacity to maintain oversight of so many missing children.

7.3 Whilst IROs stated it should not be their responsibility to chair strategy meetings in relation to missing children as this contributed to delay and contributed to a lack of managerial oversight from the responsibility team towards the missing child. Social workers have also reported not seeing the benefit of RHIs believing this to be a tick box exercise. Other risks and barriers to success include ensuring we have the resources required in the medium to long term to sustain improvement and the capacity of the social work force to improve and maintain that improvement with risk such as staff turnover of staff and so many areas of priority and improvement.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS MADE TO THE IMPROVEMENT BOARD

8.1 The Improvement Board considered the following recommendations and actions:

- i. We now deliver a live Missing Dash Board which provides a wide range of performance data in relation to missing children and return home interviews. This data set will also be provided to the Croydon Safeguarding Children Board (CSCB).
- ii. We now produce a weekly Missing and RHI compliance report for Children's Senior Management Team. This includes a list of top 10 missing children.
- iii. Strategically this plan needs to align and be integrated with the wider CSCB's Vulnerable Adolescent Plan especially interventions in relation to CSE, Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) and the High Risk Panel.
- iv. A number of the points identified in this plan relate to wider challenges within Children Social Care and need to be related, cross-referenced and considered in the wider Improvement Plan e.g. recording, compliance, administrative support, staff turnover, learning and development, supervision, fostering and plans in relation to the CSCB.
- v. As a Multi-Agency partnership we need to agree a strategic and operational plan to support partners such as schools, complete RHIs.

- vi. The Missing Procedure will be reviewed and re-launched by the end of October 2017. This procedure clarifies definition, (e.g. missing versus absent and repeat missing), the role and function of the missing panel and process about distance placements and RHIs and aligns with Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) and the High Risk Panels.
- vii. The Children's Record System (CRS) Missing pathway will be reviewed and revised by the end of October 2017.
- viii. We will clarify and confirm our approach to the recording of Other Local Authority (OLA) missing notification and the arrangements for notifying those Local Authorities.
- ix. We will work with the Police to explore further co-location options in relation to working with missing.
- x. We will implement the Missing Team Model by the end of October 2017 to improve recording of missing episodes, tracking, monitoring missing and RHIs and challenging and escalating non-compliance with procedure as well as increasing the conversion of offered and accepted RHIs and supporting improved integration of the learning from RHIs into risk assessments and safety and care plans.
- xi. We will implement a training programme from the 9th October 2017.
- xii. In relation to Children Missing Education (CME), reduce average number of days a CME is open before being tracked to 25 days, improve liaison with schools where young people who have been identified return home and greater involvement from schools/education in missing strategy meetings.
- xiii. Agree lead officers for missing in permanence and care planning teams.
- xiv. Undertake audits of missing and RHIs every other month as part of the quality assurance framework and case file audit cycle to ensure change is embedded.

8.2 The Board also considered the following implications and considerations for partners:

- i. We will work with the Police to explore further opportunities for co-location.
- ii. In relation to other multi-agency initiatives and implications for partners;
- iii. We will agree to provide, as a partnership, a relevant multi-agency dataset to the CSCB in relation to missing children.
- iv. In terms of other partners' involvement, more work needs to be undertaken to clarify partners' positions and commitment. For example, we need to clarify how health assessments for looked after children can better consider issues and impact of missing episodes.
- v. As a partnership we will improve our joint working in relation to missing children. So far we have identified the following opportunities:
 - a. Confirm joint working arrangements with substance misuse services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health services and other health service (e.g. sexual health services) to ensure RHI data is better fed into partners' individual planning.
 - b. Joint working with education colleagues in relation to CME is strong however we will improve liaison with schools and work harder to return children who go missing to mainstream full time education when they are in alternative provision. We will secure the commitment of schools to complete RHIs where appropriate.
 - c. We will clarify with partners, especially those committed to the Early Help approach, whether we can develop a system that supports RHIs completed by partners.

- d. We will consider how CPIS (Child Protection Information System) could be used to better protect missing children especially when they presents at A&E. Technological barriers current impede progress here.

Appendices

None

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: This report relies on no previously unpublished documents.