

To: Education and Children's Services Policy Board

On: 18 March 2021

Report by: Director of Children's Services

Heading: "Missing People" Project Renfrewshire

1. Summary

- 1.1 In late 2012 Police Scotland raised concerns at Renfrewshire Child Protection Committee (RCPC) in respect of young people under the age of 18 who were leaving their children's house or family home and going missing for a period of time ranging from a few hours to a number of days. RCPC asked Police Scotland and Children's Social Work to develop a proposal for improving the response to services to these incidents. A service model was developed and commissioned from Barnardo's Scotland and became operational in March 2013. The service is known as Safer Choices was initiated and focused on the safe return of children who were missing.
- 1.2 In 2017, the Scottish Government published the National Missing Persons Framework for Scotland. This is a good practice guidance for professionals who are working with and supporting missing people and their families.
- 1.3 There are more than 20,000 incidents of missing children and adults reported to Police Scotland every year, with many more incidents going unreported. Scottish Government and Police Scotland have committed to working together with other statutory and voluntary agencies to create a national response to protect vulnerable missing people from harm.
- 1.4 In order to ensure that The National Missing Persons Framework is implemented effectively across Scotland, "Missing People", a national charity, has been funded by the Scottish Government to deliver a programme of consultancy, training and good practice sharing to local areas. "Missing People" has over 25 years frontline experience in supporting missing people and their families. They are the only national charity that supports missing and returned children and adults as well as the families left behind.

- 1.5 In August 2019, Missing People began working with three policing divisions and their local statutory partners in Dundee City, Edinburgh and Fife. This was with a view to delivering a programme of consultancy, training and best practice sharing in line with the National Missing Persons Framework.
 - 1.6 In May 2020, Missing People extended the offer of free support to three additional areas in Scotland. The offer was for tailored support according to current practice and expertise, and specific local need in order to ensure that people at risk of going missing continue to be treated as a priority.
 - 1.7 Renfrewshire submitted an Expression of Interest to participate in the National Missing Persons Framework Implementation Project. The submission involved collaboration of a number of partners, including the Renfrewshire HSCP; Renfrewshire Communities, Housing and Planning (Public Protection); Renfrewshire Children's Services; the Community Safety Partnership; and K-Division of Police Scotland.
 - 1.8 Renfrewshire's application to Missing People was successful; we were selected to receive support tailored to current practice and specific local needs to develop good practice relating to people at risk of going missing. Due to Renfrewshire's existent, robust pathways around the prevention of children and young people going missing, it was agreed the support would largely focus on adults who go missing. However, opportunities to further develop the expertise relating to children and young people, have also been pursued and this report provides information on the work undertaken to date within Children's Services.
-

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Elected members are asked to note:
 - a) the work being undertaken by Children's Services in partnership with the Missing People Project in response to the National Missing Persons Framework for Scotland.
-

3. Background

- 3.1. When a child goes missing from a children's house or their family, even for a short time this raises concerns in relation to their vulnerability including the possibility that they could be subject to exploitation by others. In late 2012 Police Scotland raised concerns at Renfrewshire Child Protection Committee (RCPC) in respect of young people under the age of 18 who were leaving their children's house or family home and going missing for a period of time ranging from a few hours to a number of days. RCPC asked Police Scotland and Children's Social Work to develop a proposal for improving the response to services to these incidents. A service model was developed and commissioned from Barnardo's Scotland and became operational in March 2013. The service is known as Safer Choices was initiated and focused on the safe return of children who were missing.

- 3.2. The Barnardo's Safer Choices engages directly with young people who go missing from home, including children's houses to offer support and contribute to the overall assessment of risk with particular emphasis on the associated risk of a young person's involvement in child sexual exploitation when they are missing from their home. This model of service is seen as good practice and in terms of continuous improvement, RCPC continues to monitor the effectiveness of the service on a regular basis. When the service was initially established children going missing from children's houses were the main source of referrals, however in the past two years the balance has changed, and most referrals are now children going missing from home.
- 3.3. The Scottish Government launched The National Missing Persons Framework in May 2017. The framework aims to:
- prevent people from going missing in the first place; and
 - limit the harm associated with people going missing in Scotland.

The Safer Choices service reviewed its processes and response to ensure it was compliant with the aims and objectives of the national framework.

- 3.4 The National Missing Persons Framework Implementation Project was established to embed the aims and objectives of the National Framework and was initially delivered in three local authority areas – Dundee, Edinburgh and Fife, between July 2019 and March 2020. The project team works with local Police Scotland divisional missing persons leads; local authority missing persons champions, including those from education and public health; the Scottish Government's Missing Person's Team. Following an expression of interest process open to all local authority areas it is now being delivered in an additional three areas – North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire and Moray.
- 3.5 Founded in 1993 Missing People is a UK wide charity that provides specialist support to people who are or at risk of missing, and the families and friends left behind.
- 3.6 The project in Renfrewshire involves us working with Missing People on the following:
- Reviewing the response to missing through mapping and understanding current policies, guidance and practice relating to missing persons.
 - Consulting on and developing policies and protocols around Return Discussions, information sharing, and more.
 - Delivering free, tailored training sessions to local professionals working in this field.
 - Sharing best practice and learning related to the implementation of The National Missing Persons Framework for Scotland.
 - Building awareness of support services available from Missing People which can allow our partners to focus resources on the operational response to missing persons.
 - The launch of a Good Practice Toolkit for professionals to use day-to-day.

- 3.7 As part of this project in Renfrewshire, Missing People have mapped and reviewed current policies, guidance, and practice in Renfrewshire to gain an understanding of the excellent work already being delivered to support missing persons and their families and areas for improvement. Missing People presented findings and recommendations from this review process to key partner agencies in Renfrewshire in November 2020 and following this agreement was reached regarding key areas of support to be delivered by Missing People.
- 3.8 The key areas of support which were identified include:
- 2 Journey Mapping Workshops for adults and children, respectively.
 - Return Discussion training for 30 local professionals (who takes this up will be determined by the journey mapping workshops).
 - Missing people to support Renfrewshire to complete a cost benefit analysis regarding the cost of an individual missing episode.
- 3.9 Missing People have recognised the good practice in Renfrewshire but Police Scotland have asked for their assistance with young people and children who go missing from Care placements which are not provided by the Local Authority and Children's Services in Renfrewshire have agreed to assist with this workstream. Renfrewshire has a high number of independent care homes for children located within its boundaries with children placed from not only Scotland but all over the UK including the Republic of Ireland. It is a significant issue for local Police when children and young people go missing from these resources.
- 3.10 Missing People facilitated a liaison meeting with Children's Services, representatives from five local private residential care providers and Police Scotland in January. During this meeting discussion focussed on shared priorities for improving response to missing young people locally. All care home providers indicated a willingness to be involved with the project and to attend a journey mapping workshop on missing children and young people. A Journey Mapping Workshop for children and young people is planned involving all statutory agencies as well as private providers of residential child care in Renfrewshire.
- 3.11 Next steps include the development of Online Return Discussion training for 30 local professionals and the launch of a Good Practice Toolkit for use by professionals locally.

Implications of this report

- 1. Financial**
None.
- 2. HR and Organisational Development**
None.

3. Community/Council Planning

Our Renfrewshire is safe

This work will ensure that Renfrewshire is fully engaged with the National Missing Person's Framework

Building strong, safe and resilient communities

The work undertaken locally by the Missing People Charity will strengthen community supports for vulnerable people

4. Legal None.

5. Property/Assets None.

6. Information Technology None.

7. Equality and Human Rights

- (a) The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because for example it is for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website. (Report author to arrange this).

8. Health and Safety None.

9. Procurement None.

10. Risk None.

11. Privacy Impact None.

12. Cosla Policy Position None.

13. Climate Risk None.

List of Background Papers

(a) Background Paper 1: none.

The foregoing background papers will be retained within children's services for inspection by the public for the prescribed period of four years from the date of the meeting. The contact officer within the service is Michelle McCargo

Children's Services
MMcC/KO 15/02/21

Author: Michelle McCargo Children's Services Manager
michelle.mccargo@renfrewshire.gov.uk