

Missing children: who cares? - The police response to missing and absent children

March 2016

Background

The report 'Missing children: who cares? - The police response to missing and absent children' published in March 2016 draws together evidence from thematic inspections and from the effectiveness inspections of all 43 forces response to child sexual exploitation along with recent research evidence. Overall the report highlighted pockets of good practice and concerning inconsistencies in practice that could leave children exposed to risk of serious harm.

Each year thousands of children go missing from their homes. Although the majority of them return home or are found soon after, all children who go missing are potentially at risk of harm, and a significant number, because of their circumstances, will face the risk of sexual, criminal or economic exploitation.

Responding to missing incidents places a high demand on police time, but the consequences of not investigating cases can be extremely serious, leaving some children at risk of exploitation and/or significant harm.

Police & Crime Commissioners Response

I welcome the report describing the results of Her Majesty of Inspectorates national thematic review of the police response to missing children.

Concerns about the response to incidents of missing children and in particular children who regularly go missing from home were raised in the inspection of child protection arrangements in Devon & Cornwall in September 2015. Devon and Cornwall police continue to develop their response to these challenging and demanding incidents in collaboration with their partners. My office supports this effort through effective stakeholder engagement and commissioning support services for victims.

Safeguarding children is a clear priority in my Police and Crime Plan with the focus on understanding the drivers of missing episodes and the risk that children are exposed to. I am particularly concerned that missing children are exposed to serious risk of child sexual exploitation.

I regularly review performance in relation to safeguarding and have undertaken detailed reviews that have included specialists in the field. I will be asking the Chief Constable to provide a formal response to the report and the issues raised will be considered in a future deep dive meeting.