HERTFORDSHIRE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND RUNAWAY CHILDREN’S PANEL (SEARCH PANEL) Formerly MAMCAG

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Introduction

Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children’s Board agreed on 16 September 2010, within the Protocol for Children Missing from Home and Care, to develop arrangements to ensure that responses to individual children who run away are consistent and effective in preventing them running in future and ensuring their safety.

The Protocol for Children Missing from Care or Home sets out the operating arrangements for children and young people who go missing from Home and Care. (Link: http://www.hertsdirect.org/docs/pdf/c/cmeversion10.pdf)

Purpose and Aims

This guidance sets out the arrangements for a multi-agency Panel which will consider children and young people who have been subject of Multi-agency action within the protocol who:

- Repeatedly run away
- Remain missing
- Continue to present concerns to professionals
- Are identified as at risk of sexual exploitation while missing

It will afford professionals the opportunity to:

- Share information on children whose behaviour linked to running that causes professional concerns about their safety and welfare.
- Risk assess outstanding missing children, including the possibilities of trafficking.
- Considering actions in respect of children who repeatedly go missing.
- Determine whether the children/young persons pose a risk to themselves or the community
- Improve inter-agency accountability
- Improve support to professionals working with high risk cases.
- Reduce repeat missing episodes.
- Promote and safeguard the welfare of children and young people.

Chair

The Hertfordshire Sexual Exploitation and Runaway Children’s Panel is chaired by the Harm Reduction Unit Detective Inspector of Hertfordshire
Role of the Group

The key task of the Action Group is to ensure that there is an effective system for professionals with continuing concerns about runaways to share information and ensure multi-agency planning to locate them and prevent future running.

Membership of the Group

The following agencies will attend as standing members:

- The Panel Chair (who will be the Detective Inspector responsible for independently chairing the meeting)
- Herts Police Missing Persons Unit.
- Herts Children Services (Manager) (Deputy Chair)
- Voluntary Group Representatives
- Advocacy Service
- Looked After Children Nurse & Care Leaver Nurse / Safeguarding Children Nurse (as required)
- Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (as required)
- Education Missing Persons Officer
- Targeted Support for Young People (Team Manager)
- HCC Children’s Residential Services

Should the designated representative not be able to attend a meeting then a briefed deputy should be asked to attend in their place.

The responsibility to take appropriate action rests with individual agencies. It is not transferred to the SEARCH Panel. The role of the SEARCH Panel is to facilitate, monitor and evaluate effective information sharing to enable appropriate actions to be taken in responding to individual children and young people who continue to provide ongoing concerns for professionals.

Information Sharing

Information will be shared at the SEARCH Panel under the Hertfordshire SEARCH Panel Information Sharing Protocol (a confidential declaration shall be read out and signed at each meeting) and in line with any relevant agency policies. In particular, partner agencies should ensure that personal data is clearly marked and kept securely within a pass worded computer system or otherwise physically with appropriate levels of staff access.

- SEARCH Panel information should be marked RESTRICTED.
- All agencies will use a secure email for electronic communication.
- The SEARCH Panel Coordinator will act as the single point of contact.
• Where information is sent by another medium, this should be done in an appropriate manner, i.e. using 'Private & Confidential' where information is sent by post, 'To Be Opened By Addressee Only' to a named contact.
• If a case meets the threshold criteria and is being shared without consent, agencies must complete an “Information sharing without consent form”

SEARCH Panel Documentation

All forms can be obtained electronically from the SEARCH Panel Coordinator. These will include the SEARCH Panel referral form and information sharing protocol.

Threshold for referring to the SEARCH Panel

It is anticipated that cases that are referred to SEARCH Panel, will be those that have been subject of action under the Missing from Care and Home Protocol, and where the following exist a referral should be made:

• PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT - Where there are professional concerns for believing the child is in danger through their own vulnerability. If a professional has serious concerns about a runaways situation, they should refer the case to SEARCH Panel. Considerations should be given to potential trafficking, sexual exploitation, honour based violence and forced marriage.

• CURRENT CONCERNS- Child/young person currently missing and has been missing more than seven days.

• ESCALATION - Gone missing or has run away on three or more occasions in the last 90 days.

The SEARCH Panel Process

The Referral Process

The referral should be made on a referral form which can be obtained from the SEARCH Panel Coordinator. Practitioners should make a referral based on their professional judgements on the basis of harm, safety and risks to the child or young person.

Decisions made on those cases that do not meet the threshold for referral will be made by the Detective Inspector as the chair of the SEARCH Panel.

Any partner agency may make a referral using the referral form, providing the name, date of birth, address of the child/young person, school details, legal status and whether they were running from home or care, who holds
parental responsibility and whether consent has been given for the referral.

The referral form will include space for brief comments on the child’s circumstances, action taken and the risks the professional assesses the child is exposed to.

Agencies will need to identify the reason for the referral and include the reasons for their concerns and demonstrate the threshold is met for the referral.

Referrals should be made to the SEARCH Panel Coordinator electronically at search@hertfordshire.gov.uk

When the SEARCH Panel Coordinator receives the referral, this will be forwarded to the Chair.

SEARCH Panel Agendas

The list of cases will be circulated four working days before the SEARCH Panel date.

Once each agency receives the agenda with the list of cases they should determine what information is held by their organisation. Permanent attendees will be expected to attend the SEARCH Panel to provide their expertise in the delivery of an action plan regardless of their current involvement with an individual child or young person.

Timeframe

These time periods will be strictly adhered to, to allow all agencies to have sufficient time to carry out the necessary checks.

Parents/Carers and Consent

Parents and carers will not be invited to attend the SEARCH Panel. However consent should be sought to discuss the child if running from home or subject of S20 accommodation. It will be the responsibility of the social worker to feedback the outcome of the meeting and actions to be undertaken by the agencies in attendance.

The SEARCH Panel Meetings

The SEARCH Panel will be held monthly on the last Thursday in the month from 9.30a.m. and it is anticipated it will last for two hours, dependent upon the cases discussed. Meeting dates for the calendar year can be obtained from the SEARCH Panel coordinator. Meetings will be held at:

Room F3, Mundells, Welwyn Garden City, AL7 1FT.
The Chair

The role of the chair is to structure the meetings and prioritise cases to ensure the best use of the time of attending agencies. Should the chair be unable to attend, a deputy chair will run the meeting.

The chair will ensure that all attendees understand the risks and what actions are being agreed and how they relate to their agencies.

The chair will review actions at the previous meeting and make a record of any outstanding actions.

Minutes and Administration

The SEARCH Panel minutes including a summary of the actions will be circulated within five working days of the meetings.

Information shared at the SEARCH Panel

Only accurate information that is directly relevant to the safety of the child or young person should be shared at the SEARCH Panel. This includes;

- Basic demographic information and where there are adults involved pseudo names and their details.
- Information on key risks, including where appropriate professional opinion on the risks the child or young person faces.
- Any relevant history of running, and actions taken by individual agencies with the child or family.
- The voice of the child is provided by the relevant agency/professionals working with the child, to support the runaway and the risks they face.

Developing an Action Plan

The SEARCH Panel will identify specific risks to the victim before agreeing actions which will be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely)

Following a SEARCH Panel meeting, partner agencies should notify the co-ordinator on completion of actions and any additional information. At the following SEARCH Panel, any outstanding actions shall be noted and agencies asked to provide a verbal update as to the status of this action.

Information sharing outside the SEARCH Panel

Where certain persons not signed up to the SEARCH Panel Information Sharing Protocols may need to be informed of certain facts, the decision to share information in these circumstances will be referred back to the SEARCH Panel under the confidentiality declaration.
Emergencies

An emergency SEARCH Panel can be requested where a child is assessed as meeting the SEARCH Panel threshold and the risk to the harm is so imminent that statutory agencies have a duty of act at once, rather than waiting for the next SEARCH Panel.

The referral should be made to the SEARCH Panel coordinator. Statutory agencies will be contacted at once. Non–statutory agencies will not be expected to attend but will be contacted to check what information they have and where there are specific actions they can take to address the risks to the child.

The SEARCH Panel will be held as soon as practicable.

Emergency action should be completed as a priority.

SEARCH Panel Coordinator Contact Details

Jean Banks - 01992 555871

search@hertfordshire.gov.uk