



# **APPG on Runaway and Missing Children and Adults**

Briefing note on the roundtable on  
vulnerable 16-17 year olds who go missing

**July 2015**

## Introduction

Older teenagers are more likely to go missing from home or care than any other age group. There is, however, particular concern that when 16-17 year olds go missing they do not have the same protections as younger children and are less able to look after themselves than adults.

New guidance introduced by the Government in January 2014<sup>1</sup> has improved how agencies respond to missing and runaway children. But concerns have been raised, particularly through the passage of the Serious Crime Act 2015, that vulnerable 16-17 year olds are not receiving adequate responses from services because of legal inconsistencies not recognising them as vulnerable children.

The All Party Parliamentary Group on Missing and Runaway Children and Adults therefore decided to bring together experts in the field to discuss how these vulnerable children can be better protected.

The aim of the round table was to develop better understanding of the responses to 16-17 year olds who go missing and to develop a number of recommendations for changes needed to improve protection of this group of young people.

The roundtable took place on 3 March 2015 and was attended by:

- Ann Coffey MP – Chair of the APPG
- Sue Berelowitz – the then Deputy Children’s Commissioner
- Andy McCullough – Railway Children
- Inspector Roger Bull – Wiltshire Police Force
- Phil Shakesheff – West Mercia Police Force
- Debbie Jones – the then Social Care Director at Ofsted
- Matthew Brazier - Ofsted
- Bina Parmar – NWG Network
- Charlie Hedges - Consultant
- Jo Youle – Missing People
- Louise Rutherford – Home Office
- Michael Drew – Home Office
- Ryan Mahan – Ecpat UK
- Susannah Drury – Missing People
- Sam Royston – The Children’s Society
- Lorna Jacques - The Children’s Society’s London Missing Services

This note presents the key issues that were highlighted by the participants of the round table and outlines possible responses to address these issues and make sure older teenagers get the help they need.

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<sup>1</sup> Department for Education (2014): [Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care](#)

# 1. Understanding the risks to 16-17 year olds who go missing

## Escalation of vulnerability in older adolescents

There was an absolute agreement among the participants of the round table that many young people aged 16-17 are very vulnerable to exploitation and involvement in risky or even criminal behaviours as a result of going missing.

*“They seem to get a different service that isn’t safeguarding them properly and too many cases are responses based on the age of the child rather than actually the child’s needs. From practice we know that this age group can be really difficult to engage in services and that can be for a number of different reasons.*

*“It might be if they have had lots of different circumstances and placement changes in their lives, things that have got them to a point where things are spiralling out of control and also they’ve been exposed to more and more risk like sexual exploitation and drugs and alcohol.” (Lorna Jacques, The Children’s Society)*

*“Because of their lack of role models and their experiences in life, these children are ripe for being groomed, they are ripe for being targeted by urban street gangs who are moving their activities from the major conurbations and coming into the leafy counties. (Inspector Roger Bull, Wiltshire Police)*

There was also an agreement that going missing is as much of an indicator of vulnerability for this age group as it is for younger children. The Missing Persons Bureau report that 15-17 year olds are reported as missing more often than any other age group.

More than a third (36%) of all missing persons cases reported to the police relate to 15-17 year olds. In 2012/2013 alone, around 43,000 of the 122,000 incidents recorded by 36 police forces in the UK related to this age group.<sup>2</sup> Given that evidence presented at the roundtable suggesting that this age group may in fact be underreported as missing (see below), this could represent just the tip of the ice-berg.

Many of the participants expressed concerns that professionals often do not perceive older teenagers as vulnerable. Research into professional attitudes also confirms that some professionals mistakenly believe that adolescents, particularly older adolescents, are capable of dealing with problems on their own, are resilient to the impact of neglect and do not require the same protection as younger children.<sup>3</sup>

Participants of the round table also observed these attitudes in their professional practice.

*“We need to stop using age as an indication of the level of risk.” (Lorna Jacques, The Children’s Society)*

*“It is that longer term care that’s missing, especially for the 16, 17, 18 year olds. So there isn’t any response, that specialist response, before or after, so it is something I think is a real issue.” (Bina Parmar, NWG Network)*

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<sup>2</sup> Missing Persons Bureau (2014) [Missing Persons: Data and Analysis 2012/2013](#)

<sup>3</sup> Rees, G. et al. (2010) [Safeguarding young people: Responding to young people aged 11 to 17 who are maltreated](#). The Children’s Society, London

*“Something else, which is the normalisation around missing; how it’s just become so normalised for some young people. The more missing episodes there are the more normal it becomes. Attitudes and the desensitisation and the normalisation amongst professionals is allowing for a lack of professional curiosity around [young] people.” (Bina Parmar, NWG Network)*

*“...the more often some of those young people are missing, the more it is seen as something not to be concerned about. Especially if they went missing for short periods of time, [but] it doesn’t take long to rape a child.” (Sue Berelowitz, Deputy Children’s Commissioner)*

*“...whether legislation or guidance is always the right thing, the most important thing is changing people’s attitudes and consequently their behaviours and that’s not an easy thing to do.” (Inspector Roger Bull, Wiltshire Police)*

### **Absent and missing cases**

Since April 2013, police forces have been rolling out new definitions of ‘absent’ and ‘missing’ persons, which allow them to prioritise responses to high risk cases and not to respond to cases classified as ‘absent’ where they believe there is no risk. Concerns were expressed that, in relation to 16-17 year olds, such classification may lead to children falling through the net.

*“Young people that are running away from home, you see, they’re not always reported as missing by the families. And when they are reported as missing they’re not seen as a risk because of their age. Sometimes children aren’t assessed as being missing, so after the [new] definitions [were introduced] they are assessed as being family absent, which means they don’t get access to safe and well checks or returning interviews so they go under the radar. They’re not given that opportunity to be listened to.*

*“So for example, just last week we were notified that a young person who’s regularly going absent to her boyfriends, but she’s at clear risk of indicators of sexual exploitation, it’s not being escalated to missing so she’s not getting that chance to talk about what’s going on for her.” (Lorna Jacques, The Children’s Society)*

*“I think the issues about absent and missing are perhaps something that we should think very carefully about in terms of 16 and 17 year olds... because of the underlying attitudes out there, probably a more laissez-faire attitude to missing episodes among 16 and 17 year olds.” (Ann Coffey, MP, Chair of the APPG)*

*“...I accept that there are concerns across the country and there are concerns within our portfolio around absent. What we’re finding is that the definition is being blamed for poor decision-making. It’s rather like blaming shoplifting on the Theft Act, I’m afraid. What we’re finding is that it’s smart people making dumb decisions. When you have somebody making a decision that a teenage girl with warnings about CSE should be marked as absent, that’s nothing to do with the definition, that’s a smart person making a dumb decision and it applies to adults as well.” (Inspector Roger Bull, Wiltshire Police)*

There was agreement that in missing cases risk assessments play a very important role and that for such assessments to be effective, training must be provided to staff making the assessments.

*“If you don’t put the training in place smart people will make dumb decisions. I think there continues to be an issue about how [the absent] category is being used. Behind that, I think the question we need to ask is: in what way is the current assessment of risk going on? And for children going absent and missing, what is the basis of the information on which the assessment is being made? Because people have picked on the fact that if information, if you haven’t got a good information sharing system, particularly in terms of information from return interviews, you’re never ever going to be able to assess risk.*

*“The best assessment of risk is made on the basis of the information that is given to you by the child or the young person and if you’re not getting that information, there’s a problem and if you’re not getting information around the child that’s not talking, you’ve got a problem.” (Ann Coffey, MP, Chair of APPG)*

## **Age and consent**

Concerns were raised that the vulnerability of 16-17 year olds is not addressed because professionals do not consider that young people who can legally consent to sexual relationships could be exploited. Concerns were raised that, for some professionals, the distinctions around meaningful consent and age of consent is not clear enough. In cases of young people with learning disabilities, it is often not addressed at all.

*“There is a tremendous confusion between the issue of age and the issue of consent. You can’t make a proper choice, regardless of age, if you are living in fear.” (Sue Berelowitz, Deputy Children’s Commissioner)*

*“Other issues are mostly how learning disabilities aren’t really being acknowledged for 16 to 17 year olds. Their age is seen as the dividing factor, not necessarily how they’re coping developmentally and that’s often ignored.” (Lorna Jacques, The Children’s Society)*

*“I echo the plea around PSHE [Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education]. Like so many others we’ve been making the same recommendation; it’s still not there, it does need to be happening. We hear over and over and over again of schools that are simply not doing any work in this area at all. The issues around understanding consent, respect and so on, need to start at the earliest possible ages. But it needs to be mandated and it is just time that happened actually, it’s too important to leave to happen stance whether a school does it or not.” (Sue Berelowitz, Deputy Children’s Commissioner)*

## **2. Lack of data and understanding of running away among 16-17 year olds**

Although police data on missing children shows that young people aged 15 to 17 make up the largest group of missing persons, the experience of the police is that many of the young people who were frequently reported as going missing in their early teens stop being reported at all on turning 16.

*“If you look at the analysis of children who go missing during their early years, they get to the age of about 16 and suddenly they stop going missing. It is remarkable: they have a success. No, [actually] they have just stopped being reported.” (Inspector Roger Bull, Wiltshire Police).*

There is no reliable national data on missing children. Local data is of a very variable quality and often does not allow anyone to analyse patterns of running away, such as who children are running away to.

*“I think there are issues there, which again, are quite acute in terms of vulnerability of 16-17 year olds. I do think the issues about the IT equipment are important because, as I keep saying, the impact of the digital age is huge on how information is shared by abusers and perpetrators and often we do not collect real time information.*

*“MASHs are looking at information that happened a week ago, trying to put together the meaning of episodes that happened four or five months ago and already something in that child’s life or young person’s life has changed because of a message that they’ve received on their ever-present mobile phone.*

*“I think that we underestimate the impact of the digital age on how we collect information. So often we have to be very conscious of that in terms of not just seeing IT as an add-on, but seeing IT as completely central to understanding and sharing information.” (Ann Coffey, MP, Chair of APPG)*

### **Sharing data**

One particular challenge around the collection and sharing of data that was referred to several times during the discussion was the lack of information sharing about young people who are not local to the area. This includes looked-after children in out of area placements, either in children’s homes, foster care or even supported accommodation. This issue is also very pertinent for those young people who go missing and are trafficked across police area borders for the purposes of exploitation.

*“If a child or young person is stop checked in a home force then that information is available on their own intelligence systems but we know that children are trafficked across force boundaries. That’s a major challenge for the police service that the criminals don’t always stay in their own force area and they cross those boundaries. They’re very clever like that and that confuses us, frankly. Using a national system like the PNC [Police National Computer] will help.” (Inspector Roger Bull, Wiltshire Police)*

On the same day as the roundtable, the Government announced that they are working with the police to 'consider options for a national register of missing person's data'<sup>4</sup>. At the time of publication of this briefing note, there have been no further updates from Government.

*"It's only been talked about since 1953. We don't like to rush things in this country, as you'll appreciate, but we are, at last, making some headway on that." (Inspector Roger Bull, Wiltshire Police)*

Concerns were not limited to the issue of how data is collected and how vulnerable young people are identified. It was pointed out that there is a need to share information between different agencies, particularly useful information found through return interviews.

*"In terms of challenges for West Mercia and a lot of other forces... my own local authority's been doing return interviews for a number of years now but I've never seen a single return interview form. I'm not sure where they're going to, but it's not coming to me. It should come to me and our [missing persons] coordinators. I look forward to seeing our local authorities sharing that key crucial information." (Phil Shakesheff, West Mercia Police)*

### **Work in progress**

There are a number of areas related to data collection and sharing where progressed is being made:

- The police are looking at using the Police National Computer to record the details of victims and potential victims. This will make important information available to police officers when they stop someone and undertake a name check. The Police National Computer is designed as a criminal records database that allows police identify those who have criminal records. Unless they happen to have a criminal record, there is currently no national system in place which allows police officer to identify vulnerable individuals.
- Some police forces already have in place good systems for information collection, which allow forces to collect and share essential information about children who are reported as missing or absent. The COMPACT system was cited as an example, which is used in 22 forces. The system automatically emails the relevant local authority with information about children reported missing, as well as found reports.

However, systems used in different police forces currently do not talk to each other. Work is in progress to address this. The system is also going to be improved with the introduction of CSE markers so when a child known to be at risk of CSE runs away, it automatically notifies the CSE team and automatically notifies the missing person coordinator.

*"There are 16 questions in our found report, going from where they [were] found to where they've been, to what risks has that raised or the person presented. The local authorities have been on a journey with us for several years from initially thinking that there were 30 children missing in Shropshire to understanding that there are actually about 600 and their email baskets was getting very full."*

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<sup>4</sup> Home Office (2015): [Tackling child sexual exploitation](#)

*“They had some conversations with me about turning the email off, but thankfully they worked with us and actually used...all the information we were sending them to actually inform their return interview practice. “(Phil Shakesheff, West Mercia Police)*

### 3. Different treatment under the legislation

One of the shared concerns among participants of the round table was that legislation does not always afford the same protection to children who are aged 16-17 as to younger children. Even though 16 and 17 year-olds are recognised as children under the Children Act 1989, very often they are treated as adults under other legislative acts. This sends a misleading signal to those involved in safeguarding of older adolescents that they do not require the same safeguarding response as younger children.

One particular example highlighted at the round table was the problem caused by the police not being able to use Child Abduction Warning Notices to protect 16 and 17 year olds, unless they are in care of the local authority under Section 31 of the Children Act 1989 (and subject to a care order). Child Abduction Warning Notices are recognised as an effective tool at the disposal of the police to disrupt contact between a vulnerable child and an adult posing risk to children.

*“There are challenges around 16-17 year olds with legislation. The Child Abduction Act goes out of the window once a child reaches 16.” (Inspector Roger Bull, Wiltshire Police)*

*“I watched all the debate with regards to safeguarding 16 and 17 year olds last week [during the passage of the Serious Crime Bill] and I think everyone really missed a trick with regards to who will treat these children as adults and that there’s enough out there to protect them. And that’s rubbish, absolute rubbish. I think we need to look at some changes there.” (Andy McCullough, Railway Children)*

The majority of children aged 16-17 who are looked after are accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act and not subject to a care order, and therefore cannot be protected using Child Abduction Warning Notices, even though they may be running away from the same children’s home and face the same dangers on the street. Last year, only 190 children aged 16-17 were subject to a care order by their local authorities out of 4,510 young people of that age who became looked after by their local authorities.

While introduction of Sexual Harm Prevention Orders and Sexual Risk Orders will help disrupt some cases where there is a risk of sexual abuse or exploitation, the participants at the round table raised concerns that there are no disruption mechanisms in place for other risks, including involvement in crime, as in the case below.

*“We had a boy last week, 17, went missing. He came from an area known for its gangs, moved completely out of the city into another area and [he] didn’t seem to really acknowledge that this was around gang involvement and gang activity and the exploitation linked to that. He quickly went missing and had been trafficked to sell drugs.” (Lorna Jacques, The Children’s Society)*

#### **Work in progress**

- The new Sexual Harm Prevention Orders and Sexual Risk Orders introduced under the Anti-social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014 commenced on 8 March 2015. They will cover some of the gaps where risk of sexual abuse is concerned. Their implementation will need to be monitored to ensure that they become an effective tool to disrupt contact between vulnerable 16-17 year olds and adults posing a risk of sexual abuse or exploitation.
- Police forces, the National Crime Agency and the Home Office’s youth violence and gangs teams are working together to address the issues of gangs sending young

people to sell drugs in other areas. Child sexual exploitation, trafficking, gangs, firearms and drug portfolios are all being brought together to work on a project called, within the Home Office, 'County Lines' which reflects the activities of urban gangs moving out to the shire counties.

## 4. Accommodation issues

There were strong concerns expressed around the table about the quality of support and responses to 16-17 year olds who do not live with their families but are placed by local authorities into supported accommodation, hostels and bed and breakfast accommodation in particular.

Concerns were expressed that the accommodation provided puts them at risk of grooming and exploitation, yet there are very few safeguards in place and the vulnerabilities of these young people are not assessed when they go missing.

22% of looked-after 16-17 year olds live in neither residential children's homes nor foster care, but in what is collectively termed 'other arrangements'. Unlike foster and residential care, these placements are not regulated under the Care Standards Act 2000 and as a result will not be inspected by Ofsted. Accommodation provided under this category is often of poor quality and not safe for young people.

Young people who seek help because of homelessness also often find themselves in similar types of accommodation. The Southwark judgement<sup>5</sup> requires local authorities to accommodate these children under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 but often - mostly in cases where children have experienced years of ineffective interventions from services - these young people refuse to become looked-after and subsequently are accommodated under the Housing Act or Section 17 of the Children Act, with no or minimal support from services.

The Children's Society's report on vulnerable 16-17 who seek help because of homelessness – *Getting the house in order*<sup>6</sup> - showed that two thirds of these children are accommodated under provisions other than Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, meaning that they do not become looked-after children and live away from home with very limited or no entitlements to support from children's services.

Where vulnerable children are placed in supported accommodation, they are often not reported missing and not offered the return home interviews that all missing children are entitled to.

### Bed and breakfast accommodation

Although statutory guidance specifically states that "bed and breakfast accommodation is not considered suitable for 16 and 17 year-olds even on an emergency accommodation basis"<sup>7</sup>, there are many cases where young people, including care leavers aged 16-17, end up in this type of accommodation.

Some local authorities routinely place 16-17 year old children in bed and breakfast or other inappropriate accommodation where they are at risk of going missing or being subjected to abuse and exploitation. 16-17 year olds are often placed in B&Bs as no other emergency

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<sup>5</sup> See Community Care (2010) The Southwark Judgement: [www.communitycare.co.uk/2010/12/20/southwark-judgement/](http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2010/12/20/southwark-judgement/)

<sup>6</sup> The Children's Society (2015) Getting the house in order [www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/resources-and-publications/getting-the-house-in-order-keeping-older-teenagers-safe](http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/resources-and-publications/getting-the-house-in-order-keeping-older-teenagers-safe)

<sup>7</sup> Guidance to children's services authorities and local housing authorities about their duties under Part 3 of the Children Act 1989 and Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 to secure or provide accommodation for homeless 16 and 17 year old young people. April 2010: [www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/Provision%20of%20accommodation.pdf](http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/Provision%20of%20accommodation.pdf)

accommodation is available when they go missing or because they have been evicted from other types of accommodation.

*"I was with a local authority not so long back who were very upfront in saying 'yes, people use them [B&Bs] and we don't monitor them and we have nowhere else to go'. But there certainly is, for me, a need to really look at the portfolio of emergency accommodation across the country, which is quite inconsistent, and to inspect those accommodations as rigorously as you would anywhere a child is being housed."* (Andy McCullough, Railway Children)

*"Certainly, it's one of our findings in our enquiry and we continue to make the point that...it's completely unacceptable to place vulnerable children in bed and breakfasts. We found the same kind of problems with hostels, quite frankly: really appalling situations with children placed in hostels and then being abused when they were in the hostels. Sometimes very actively by what was going on around the hostels. Even supported accommodation was not always that good quite frankly. So we're talking about very vulnerable youngsters who need to be placed in proper environments in which they are well cared for and will be properly protected."* (Sue Berelowitz, Deputy Children's Commissioner)

*"Our new report on safeguarding 16 and 17 year olds who seek help because of homelessness found the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless youths is reducing, significantly reducing, and has over a period of several years.*

*"But there's a question outstanding as to whether is it genuinely reducing; we're finding examples of where, anecdotally, bed and breakfast accommodation appears to be being reclassified as other forms of accommodation and young people are still effectively being housed in bed and breakfast accommodation, it's just not being called bed and breakfast accommodation anymore."* (Sam Royston, The Children's Society)

### **Information on the location of supported accommodation**

Police forces are not always aware of the existence of supported accommodation units in their area and cannot flag it as a risk factor on their system if a child goes missing from a unit. A similar situation was highlighted in the APPG's 2012 inquiry on children missing from care<sup>8</sup>, which highlighted that police forces often did not know the location of all children's homes in their area. On the recommendation of the inquiry, this has now been changed and Ofsted now shares information about the location of children's homes with the police and local authorities.

*"In my own force, we've got 140 children's care homes. We know where they are now thankfully, not that we didn't know where the majority were before. But we've got no clue as to where [the supported] accommodation is. I just want to contextualise what problems that causes us. The first time we know that a vulnerable high-risk missing child is living with us, he's been moved from London to Shropshire, is when they become a victim of crime gangs.*

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<sup>8</sup> APPG for Runways and Missing Children and Adults and APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers (2012) Report from the joint inquiry into children who go missing from care [www.childrensociety.org.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-lobbying/parliamentary-work/appg-inquiry-children-who-go-missing-or-run-away-c](http://www.childrensociety.org.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-lobbying/parliamentary-work/appg-inquiry-children-who-go-missing-or-run-away-c)

*“We could be spending hours and sometimes days trying to find out what the risks are around the child and then when we ask the organisation who’s providing the accommodation what they’ve done to trace the child, they’ll tell us that’s not their responsibility and they’re not going out looking for them because they may be putting their staff at risk. That’s just the context of the problems at our force.” (Phil Shakesheff, West Mercia Police)*

## **Children missing from care placements**

Children in care are three times more likely to run away than other young people, with an estimated 10,000 going missing every year.<sup>9</sup> Children in care often experience an accelerated transition into adulthood. Last year 3,430 children aged 16-17-years-old left care and many of these children get accommodated in supported accommodation units, hostels and even bed and breakfasts.

The APPG report on children missing from care showed how children in care are vulnerable to exploitation and are targeted by perpetrators because of their care status. This vulnerability remains when they become care leavers at the age of 16-17.

Participants of the roundtable expressed particular concerns about children who are in ‘out of area placements’ – placements outside the boundaries outside their home local authority. As a result of unsuccessful placements, many young people of this age live in placements that are outside their local area, often in isolation from their regular support networks. Even when they are moved to these new areas for their own safety, they easily become victims of new abuse in the area because of the lack of support that young people of this age receive.

The Children’s Society provided a case study from their practice:

*“A young woman was placed in another local authority’s area to help her move away from a gang. She was placed in area known for its own gangs. Little support was provided to help her move away from gang culture and soon she started going missing and getting involved with the gang in the new location.*

*“But as things progress, obviously, and they feel like they haven’t been listened to and they’ve been let down by professionals, it is much harder to engage with them. Many young people this age live out of borough and particularly if they’ve been in a number of failed placements. So with us delivering returning interviews, we found that actually we don’t even know if they’ve gone missing, sometimes we find that with different local authorities are not getting notified that they’re missing out of borough and they’ve been placed in areas that are actually really risky for them.” (Lorna Jacques, The Children’s Society)*

## **Training for staff in supported accommodation**

The main reason that young people who go missing from accommodation provided by local authorities are not reported to the police is that those employed to provide young people with support do not have relevant training. They are often not aware of the vulnerabilities of these young people or do not know what help these young people are entitled to. The unsuitability of accommodation itself can also be a cause of a young person going missing.

Staff in those types of accommodation are not required to have any training around sexual exploitation, general safeguarding issues or on what to do when a child goes missing. Therefore, their missing episodes become known not as a result of these young people

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<sup>9</sup> UK Missing Persons Bureau (2012) *Children Missing from Care* NPJA p.2

being reported to the police, but because they are sexually exploited or come to the attention of police for other reasons.

*“Staff in accommodation units, hostels, residential units; just their kind of understanding about the risks for young people, they’re not required to have any training on safeguarding or sexual exploitation and what we find is that actually when we do go to residential units and we train staff on what those vulnerability factors are and the risk of going missing, we get more reports of missing episodes from those places where we’ve delivered training.” (Lorna Jacques, The Children’s Society)*

## **Solutions and work in progress**

Some of the issues around safety of accommodation are already addressed at the local level through Ofsted inspections.

*“Certainly, we believe for care leavers that the existing regulations and guidance provide a firm legal foundation for effective services and our experience in the single inspections - and hopefully when we introduce the new shorter inspections where we’re worried – is that we find precisely that; that there’s enough regulation around.” (Debbie Jones, Ofsted)*

*“Certainly, we’ve strengthened the new inspection framework of children’s homes. Now I know you’re not necessarily concerned in this round table about children that are looked after, but we believe that the strengthened framework there will make a difference particularly because of the focus it has on young people and the work that we do with colleagues, particularly our colleagues in the police and the issue of sharing information and being able to share information, that’s extremely important.” (Debbie Jones, Ofsted)*

*“So for example, very specifically, we will always look at what happens to children aged between 16 and 17 who are at risk of homelessness, so it’s the legal response and we’ve commented on that in a lot of reports. But underpinning it, we’ll be looking constantly about the quality of assessment and planning and I think that’s one of the things that we’ve covered before, is that we are worried about the quality of assessment and planning. Through that, we’ll see a lot of, we’ll just learn a lot about experiences of children and young people including this particular age group and whether people are responding and authorities are responding in the right way.” (Mathew Brazier, Ofsted)*

*“That’s one example of how we’re working with our local authorities to send out information. We’ve been on a journey in West Mercia. I’d like to place on record the fact that I actually think Ofsted have changed in terms of their inspection process.*

*“You’ll know the statutory guidance came out in 2009 and from 2009 to end of last year, being the [police] missing lead, as I was then in West Mercia, we never received a single question from Ofsted about providing information about any children’s care home, about the numbers of missing persons reports from that care home, about the numbers of crimes in that care home, about the number crimes committed in the community.*

*“I’m pleased to say that in the last six months that has turned full circle and I have extremely good relationships with my Ofsted inspectors now. They’re asking me for information on a regular basis and being very searching with it, so thanks very much for that.” (Phil Shakesheff, West Mercia Police)*

But despite this progress, the round table participants agreed that there is a need to look for solutions to issues of the safety of accommodation provided to older teenagers. The idea of introducing regulations to monitor the quality of accommodation was debated, with some views strongly in favour of such solutions and others striking a more cautious note.

*“The issue of supported accommodation....it covers a multitude, really. In the best performing local authorities, particularly for care leavers, you will see a whole network of provision and I think that issue of choice is actually very important.” (Debbie Jones, Ofsted)*

*“The thorny issue of regulation... we in Ofsted do not believe that regulation is the answer to supported accommodation and that’s for a myriad of reasons, not least of all that the kind of supported accommodation that we’re talking about is used for a range of needs, a range of needs not all of which are about provision for vulnerable young people and there is an issue about market development.*

*“We need to ensure that there is a range of provision available and I think it’s probably simplistic to think that having a regulatory system will provide all the answers, and you will know we’ve already written to you and that we think it might create more complexity and actually reduce provision, it might not create the protections that we’re all after.” (Debbie Jones, Ofsted)*

*“I happen to disagree with you around legislation or regulation in that I can’t see leaving it to chance, asking the odd questions every three years, is going to make a real difference. Actually, by going in with a bit more, by going and taking this bull by the horns, it could change things.*

*“I don’t think it could be built around just one group of young people, but I think there are some basic needs that all young people need no matter what situation they’re in: to feel safe, to not have somebody have access to their room without their permission. All those sorts of things, that’s not exclusive to run away, that’s all young people; [but] there may be additional need for certain young people who have to deal with trauma.” (Andy McCullough, Railway Children)*

## 1. Recommendations

1. In its Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation paper, published in March 2015, the Government made a commitment to consider a national register for missing person's data. This must be taken forward without any further delays and a national register should be created to ensure that there exists reliable national data on children who go missing. The register should allow information to be analysed by age groups to enable identification of children who drop off the radar of services due to their age.
2. There is a need for better recognition by the police, children's services and legislators of the fact that older teenagers can be at risk of being exploited for criminal or sexual purposes. The application of Child Abduction Warning Notices should be extended to cover all 16-17 year olds, not only those who are in care of local authority under Section 31 of the Children Act 1989. The Children Act 1989 should be amended to reflect the need to protect vulnerable 16-17 from all forms of exploitation.
3. The government must consider how supported accommodation, hostels, foyers and B&Bs where 16-17 year olds are placed should be monitored in relation to the quality of support and safeguarding they provide.
4. The use of B&Bs to accommodate vulnerable 16-17 year olds should be banned.
5. The location of supported accommodation units which are used to house 16-17 year olds should be shared with police forces in the same way as the location of children's homes is shared. This will ensure that the police can always adequately risk assess cases of children aged 16-17 going missing from these addresses.
6. The Government should require staff in all supported accommodation units housing vulnerable 16-17 year olds to receive training on how to safeguard young people who go missing.
7. All types of accommodation units providing accommodation to 16-17 year olds should be required to have policies in place on how to respond to children who go missing, mirroring the requirement already in place for children's homes.
8. Ofsted should undertake a thematic inspection of how 16-17 year olds are safeguarded in supported accommodation, including when they go missing, and make recommendations for strengthening the regulatory and inspection framework.
9. Police staff who undertake risk assessments when children are reported missing should receive training on vulnerable 16-17-year-olds. All assessments must be supported by appropriate information sharing between the police and other agencies.
10. The PSHE education curriculum should be reviewed to ensure young people are aware of the dangers that can put them at risk when they go missing.
11. Local authorities should ensure that all 16-17 year olds who go missing (both those classified as absent and as missing) are offered a return interview and have access to intensive support to overcome the issues that caused them go missing.
12. The implementation of the new Sexual Harm Prevention Orders and Sexual Risk Orders should be monitored to ensure that they become an effective tool for disrupting contact between vulnerable 16-17 year olds and an adults posing risk of sexual abuse or exploitation.