

**Ann Coffey MP**

*Member of Parliament for Stockport*



House of Commons

London, SW1A 0AA

Chief Constable Andy Cooke  
Merseyside Police  
Canning Place  
Liverpool  
Merseyside  
L1 8JX

Via: email

**1<sup>st</sup> March 2019**

Dear Chief Constable Cooke,

As you will be aware from your workload, there have been a rising number of incidents of children going missing from care which has soared to 70,250 nationally. Nearly half of the incidents involve children in children's homes.

The All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults, which I chair, is particularly interested in the risks faced by children who go missing from out of area placements and how these children are being safeguarded.

Because of the dangers faced by these vulnerable children the APPG has now decided to launch an inquiry into how children missing from out of area placements are protected and safeguarded.

Being placed a long way from family and friends is often a factor in causing children to run away and there is concern that these children are less well supported because social workers live miles away from them and they become targets for criminal and sexual exploitation.

Emerging evidence suggests that as well as being targeted for sexual exploitation those in out of area placements are also targeted by gangs for criminal exploitation, including running county lines' selling heroin and crack cocaine.

Despite a pledge to clampdown on the number of out of borough placements there has been a 77 per cent increase nationally since 2012 in the number of children being sent to live miles away from home.

I released figures earlier this year that showed that children placed out of borough are running away at a faster rate than those placed locally.

Often the reason given for placing children out of borough is that it is for their own safety as they may have been exploited in their home area. However there is concern that those children are being placed at risk because of the distance from the local authorities who are supposed to support them.

I am writing to all police forces to try and build up a picture of the risks faced by children in each area going missing from out of borough placements.

I would be very grateful for your observations in the following areas:

1. Any observations you have on the particular difficulties experienced in safeguarding children who are placed out of borough from other local authorities
2. Do you think being placed out of borough, miles from home, increases a child's vulnerability to being targeted by those who wish to sexually exploit them or by gangs who want to criminally exploit them, for example in running County Lines. Can you provide any examples?
3. What are the particular problems faced by young people aged 16 plus placed out of borough in accommodation not regulated by Ofsted. Do you have evidence that they are being targeted for criminal and/or sexually exploitation?
4. What observations do you have on "The national protocol on reducing unnecessary criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers" released in November 2018.
5. Please outline any other issues or concerns you have about out of borough placements and other risks.

Yours sincerely,

**DPA**

Ann Coffey MP

Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults

**DPA**