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m/r Direct Dial [REDACTED]
y/r 01554/2012 Date 23 October 2014

[REDACTED]
The person dealing with this matter is Will Tuckley

Ms Lorna Tagliavini
Coroner for Inner South District Greater London
Southwark Coroners Court
1 Tennis Street
Southwark
London SE1 1YD

Dear Ms Tagliavini

Re: Inquest concluded on 1st August 2014, into the death of Lauren Barfoot (aged 14)

Bexley's Children's Services take its responsibility to looked after children very seriously and have ensured that lessons have been learnt and implemented in social work practice following this case. Bexley children's social care services were inspected by the external regulator Ofsted, under the Single Inspection Framework, during March 2014. The Inspection independently reviewed practice regarding looked after children who went missing and the following is an extract from the Ofsted report published in May 2014:

'When looked after children go missing an established triage system is used to determine the action to be taken including whether a child protection enquiry is necessary. Robust systems are in place to track and identify individual looked after children who go missing and those who are at risk of sexual exploitation. These children are regularly considered at multi-agency meetings and suitable contingency plans are agreed. Sensitive interviews are undertaken with looked after children when they return to their placements.'

In response to the regulation 28 report to prevent future deaths and the recommended actions to be taken:

- (i) **A full and regularly updated list of persons by both the London Borough of Bexley Social Services and Ethelbert's Children's Services with whom a "looked after" child is connected in order to be able to make meaningful searches after absconding/missing. This list to be kept centrally or is readily accessible, whether electronically or in another format**

Bexley Children's Social Care sends a letter and proforma document recording the associations of young people to all residential providers. Previously, Bexley relied on the residential providers own protocols in respect of missing children. It was identified that these varied across the country. The letter and proforma also sets out expectations regarding having an up to date list available. By Bexley giving providers the process and pro-forma documents, we can be confident that when a child goes missing they are aware of our expectations in collecting information on



persons the young person is connected to. All information will now be returned to, and held centrally by, Bexley's Placements Service.

- (ii) **The sharing of details of any relevant risk assessment carried out in respect of the missing child should be passed to the police in order they can make a properly and fully informed decision as to the level of resources needed in order to carry out an effective search**

A risk assessment report is required in preparation for any strategy meetings for missing looked after children. A strategy meeting is held within three days of a child going missing. The social worker will provide a risk assessment report to the meeting in accordance with the Bexley Practice Guidance pro-forma for assessing risk. The meeting is chaired by the Independent Reviewing Officer for the child. The risk assessment report requires comprehensive information about all possible contacts and locations where the child may be found, including any information known about risks presenting to the young person. The risk assessment report will be passed to the police at the strategy meeting in order that they can assess the level of risk and resources required so that they can carry out an effective search for the missing young person. Subsequent strategy meetings are held at 5 days and weekly thereafter.

- (iii) **The holding of a timely strategy meeting at which information can be pooled and resources allocated and utilised effectively**

Strategy meetings for missing looked after children are held within the timescales set out in the "Children who go missing from Home or Care Practice Guidance" implemented in May 2013. The holding of the strategy meetings are overseen by the manager for the "looked after" Independent Reviewing Officer service. The timeliness of 'missing' strategy meetings is tracked in monthly performance reports and meetings, to ensure good practice is maintained.

- (iv) Relates to the Greenwich Police Missing Person's Unit

I hope the information contained in this letter assures the Coroner that Bexley's Children's Services has responded appropriately to the concerns raised in the Inquest.

Yours sincerely



Will Tuckley
Chief Executive