

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Missing Children Policy &amp; Practice Guidance</b>	
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>10 March 2014</b>	
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Executive Director of Children's Services</b>	
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Richard Hakin,</b>	
	<b>Head of</b>	
	<b>Service,</b>	<b>Tel: 29-5375</b>
<b>Name:</b>	<b>Children in</b>	
	<b>Need</b>	
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<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>All</b>	

**FOR GENERAL RELEASE**

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the Missing Children Policy & Practice Guidance coming to Children & Young People's Committee is three-fold –
- To raise awareness of this high profile and high risk area of work in children's services, an area whose profile is being raised nationally at policy, inspection and national media level.
  - To allow members to have broad awareness of the processes which will be followed with young people, who may gain a high profile locally within different services and agencies due to repeated runaway/missing episodes.
  - To give this important strategic policy within children's services authority in terms of high level endorsement.
- 1.2 The policy has been formulated as a response for the City Council to the DFE national 'Statutory guidance on children who runaway or go missing from home or care' – published in final draft in June 2013 and finalised in January 2014. This guidance sets out some new requirements for Local Authorities which are contained within the policy document.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 That CYP Committee and members note the contents of the two new missing policy and guidance documents which seek to raise awareness of this high risk area of work.
- 2.2 That CYP Committee and members give this report endorsement in order that we can work with authority to hold services to account on delivering the best possible services and outcomes and living out the core principles set out in these documents.

### **3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The new Statutory Guidance encourages Local Authorities to both work closely with Police Authorities and also to work regionally to address the issues relating to missing children.
- 3.2 The direction of travel for the City Council is to work with our neighbouring Sussex authorities towards setting up a Sussex wide missing children policy. Such joint processes take time however and it has been felt within Children's Services leadership that we should have a local up to date policy to work to in order to help us address current issues in this area of work. This also gives the City Council something to take into discussions about an eventual joint policy.
- 3.3 We have consulted with key staff within Sussex Police, our principle partner organisation in this work, and incorporated their feedback into this Policy. It will be necessary, particularly with the introduction of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, (MASH), to have systems and processes which work well with police processes and are well understood by Police colleagues.
- 3.4 There are some limited areas of service development which will require new services to be provided, which haven't been required previously, (independent return visiting services for missing children – see Missing Children Policy section on this), but, excepting this, the policy is about new processes and systems rather than new teams or resources.
- 3.5 This policy goes further than a number of Missing Children Policies in other Local Authorities in it's scope. The Brighton & Hove policy also includes development of clear links in service pathways between those young people missing from home or care placement and those young people missing from education. These cohorts of young people are known to be significantly overlapping and it is appropriate to ensure that the pathways of help and support suitably overlap also. This also matches the ambition to have one Children's Service. In time it may also be appropriate to involve other commissioned or linked services for this group of young people more explicitly in the service pathways and to broaden the scope of the policy further.

### **4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 4.1 This policy is a response to new national policy guidance and so covers the requirements for local authorities set out in this guidance. Part of this guidance is to have both clear strategic priority to this area of work and clear processes in place for how services should identify levels of assessed risk and respond to them. There are choices perhaps about how we deliver the services set out in national guidance, but not about whether we deliver them.

### **5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 The Policy aims to look at improving service delivery to a small cohort of de-stabilised young people across the City, who face a range of difficulties and disadvantages. Part of the core principles within this policy are to engage with, listen to and involve these young people in the supports being provided to them and decisions being taken about them.

The Policy and Practice Guidance has been passed onto the Children's Advocacy Service in order that the views of young people can be received on this.

Beyond this it is not viewed as addressing issues which affect whole communities in the City.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 National media cases and policy initiatives have been raising the profile of the risks faced by missing children and, in particular, repeat runaway children and young people. In further response to this Children's Services Safeguarding and looked after inspections do now, under the new inspection framework, look closely at the work of local authorities in this area. Directors of Children's Services and Lead Members for Children have been asked in inspections about their knowledge of this area.
- 6.2 In saying this it is clear that the existence of this policy in itself is not sufficient for vulnerable young people. It will be the commitment and drive of key leaders to embed the principles within this policy and to deliver a priority service to these often multiply vulnerable young people which will then make a difference. The policy and practice guidance receiving approval and support through Committee and also the Local Safeguarding Children Board will provide a strong foundation and mandate for operational staff to put this into practice.

## **7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

### 7.1 Financial Implications:

There is not a budgetary request within this committee report. There will be a need to establish an independent visiting service, which doesn't currently exist for this group of young people. It is anticipated that this would be able to be done jointly with Sussex wide Authorities and also Sussex Police in order to both allow consistency of this service but also to try and share the burden of costs/achieve economies of scale. The scoping and commissioning for this is yet to take place, but all efforts will be made to deliver this service within existing budgets.

*Finance Officer Consulted:* David Ellis 13-02-14

### 7.2 Legal Implications

There are not felt to be any legally contentious issues within this Policy. As previously stated there is an expectation in national statutory guidance that Local Authorities do develop such policies and seek to improve practice in this area of work with some of the most vulnerable young people.

*Name: Hilary Priestley Senior Lawyer*

*Date:26.02.14*

### 7.3 Equalities Implications:

This Policy is designed to set out new service delivery priorities to a small cohort of young people at risk and to develop new systems and processes to deliver

them. There are no implications for the jobs of existing staff or for the service delivered to the wider community.

7.4 Sustainability Implications:

None.

7.5 Any Other Significant Implications:

See below.

7.6 Crime & Disorder Implications:

Vulnerable young people who go missing regularly and/or begin to dis-engage from education also are significantly more likely to both commit offences and to become the victims of crime and sexual exploitation. Case plans for this group of young people need to have close co-ordination with the Youth Offending Service, with RUOK, (the young peoples substance misuse service), with WISE, (What Is Sexual Exploitation?) and with education support services.

7.7 Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

Young people who repeatedly go missing are often facing multiple risks in their lives from crime, substance misuse, sexual exploitation, poor self-care, falling out of education and training. The importance of working pro-actively and effectively with this group of young people is to prevent increasingly significant or serious harm to them.

7.8 Public Health Implications:

There are connections in the policy with priorities about the emotional and physical well-being of teenagers including early mental health issues, physical and sexual health.

7.9 Corporate / Citywide Implications:

Some of the principles in the Policy & Practice Guidance link in closely with Community Safety priorities and also with the Violence Against Women & Girls agenda.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

### **Appendices:**

1. Brighton & Hove Missing Children Policy
2. Brighton & Hove Missing Children Practice Guidance

### **Documents in Members' Rooms**

There are none.

### **Background Documents**

There are none.