

Brighton and Hove Policy on Missing Children

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART 1 - Context and integrated response:

1. [Aims](#)
2. [National Policy & Guidance](#)
3. [Statement of Intent](#)
4. [Core principals of working with vulnerable missing young people](#)
5. [Understanding why young people go missing](#)
6. [Assessing Risk: Summary](#)
7. [Classifications of Missing Children & Young people](#)
8. [Return Interviews](#)
9. [Information Sharing](#)
10. [Single Point of Contact](#)

This should be read in conjunction with the Missing Children Practice Guidance documents which sets out guidance staff working in the 3 key areas below

1. Children Missing from Home
2. Children Missing from Care
3. Children Missing from Education

January 2014

Part 1 – Corporate joint policy on missing children & young people

1. Aims

The integrated policy on Missing Children has 4 main aims:

- To set out and communicate clearly the Brighton and Hove **multi-agency response** to and the priority given to addressing the risks posed by children & young people who go missing;
- To **raise the profile** and priority of missing children across the Council and partner agencies;
- To define the routes by which **all responsible agencies** in the council and outside **share information and work together** to respond effectively when children go missing;
- To establish 2 linked key documents – firstly this document, to set out the core principles and understanding of work in this area & second to create clear a single practice guidance document which brings together the individual council policies for responding to **Children Missing From Education, Children Missing from Home, Children Missing from Care**, recognising the connections between these 3 groups and to further develop the links between practice in these areas.

In addition to these aims it is also the intention to use this policy as a platform in our discussions with East & West Sussex County Councils around setting up a Sussex wide missing children policy.

By **responsible agencies**, we mean:

- Police;
- Social Care staff and carers;
- Health;
- Education;
- Youth Services and the Youth Employability Team (YES);
- Voluntary and Independent Sector Organisations;
- Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB);
- Youth Offending Service;

2. Key relevant national policy and guidance

Guidance:

**Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care
June 2013:**

<https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/Statutory%20guidance%20on%20children%20who%20run%20away%20or%20go%20missing%20from%20home%20or%20care%20consultation%20-%20final.docx>

Working Together 2013

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/w/working%20together.pdf>

Statutory guidance for local authorities in England to identify children not receiving a suitable education 2009

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/r/statutorylaguide09.pdf>

Young Runaways – Report by the social exclusion unit (November 2002)

<http://www.bristol-cyps.org.uk/socialcare/procedures/childprotection/pdf/young-runaways-report.pdf>

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

<http://inclusion.uwe.ac.uk/csie/unrights.htm>

3. Statement of Intent

Brighton & Hove City Council recognises that young people missing from home, care or education face potentially multiple significant risk factors. As a Council and particularly co-ordinated by Children's services we wish to make the safety and well-being of missing children and young people our top priority for all responsible agencies and the City Council recognising the very serious risks posed to them.

Risks can include physical harm, sexual exploitation, substance misuse, poor impacts on health and well being and involvement in criminal activities. Such a wide range of risk factors rarely coalesce around a specific group of children as much as they do around missing children.

The following points represent the expectations we wish to set for this area of work

- All agencies are therefore directed to work together to prevent, solve and follow-up on the problems behind children going missing from education, care and home.
- All relevant agencies, organisations and carers are required to use their professional judgement to take any action they feel is necessary to protect the safety of the child, based on an assessment of risk and to report concerns to the responsible agency. They are also required to share data and intelligence where doing so is likely to promote the safety of the child and children more widely.
- Staff in contact with the young person must actively seek to understand their circumstances and experiences which are triggering missing episodes.

These core expectations for all staff should be read alongside the missing children practice document.

4. Key practice principles for Brighton & Hove staff of working with vulnerable missing young people.

- The Children's Society Runaways Charter set out standards for Local Authorities to sign up to in working with this very vulnerable group. There are six standards set out in their section on "How runaways should be treated". These are as follows:
 - ***Be understanding, calm and relaxed with us***
 - ***Help us trust you and don't judge us***
 - ***Be straightforward and honest with us***
 - ***Listen to us and take us seriously***
 - ***Explain things to us. Give us choices and don't force us into making decisions we don't understand***
 - ***Show us respect.***

Brighton & Hove City Council accepts these standards .and will also work to the following :

- For young people who runaway regularly this is rarely, if ever, an irrational act. For those young people this makes sense in terms of the way they are viewing and understanding their lives and the people around them. Even if we have different views we should seek to understand the young person's feelings and motivations in what they are doing.

- This group of young people can also be the young people who feel most estranged from their family life and those around them, including professionals and services will be provided in a way that seeks to build rapport and trust with them.
- We will involve children in the plan as much as possible to address the problems they are facing.
- We will acknowledge in our approach that the young person we are dealing with could be involved in criminal offences or the victim of such offences or both. We will need to understand that it is difficult for them to open up about this without engagement, empathy and trust.
- We cannot know the risks a young person is facing by going missing unless the key agencies involved are actively seeking to find out. Assumptions about regularly missing young people being safe based on previous behaviour can turn out to be wrong. Brighton & Hove will aim to avoid such assumptions in their practice
- As a rule the longer a young person is missing, particularly if this is out of character or if no-one has spoken to or seen them whilst missing, then the more our concern and response should escalate. The traffic light risk grading system for young people missing from home or care in Brighton & Hove should be operated in such a way that the grading and response can be escalated during a missing episode.
- Brighton & Hove will not view repeat runaway incidents from a young person as low risk and will work to the principle that repeat running away need assessment of the issues followed by intervention/help.
- There are clear crossovers with the runaway from home group and the missing from education group of young people. Information will be shared at each stage between schools/education staff and children's services in Brighton & Hove regarding the tier of concern in each of areas. This policy overall brings together the missing from home, education and care threads of the Council's missing policy with an over-arching policy. The processes will be linked and joined at key points to reflect this.
- This is an LSCB and a Sussex Police priority area. In view of this there should be high expectations of both ourselves and one another of how we respond across the teams and services to this group of children and young people.
- Trying to locate missing children & young people is the responsibility not just of the police but also of parents, carers, care workers, social workers and other lead

professionals depending on where the young person lives. Such staff should assist in phoning known numbers and visiting known addresses.

- To work closely with our current contracted partner WISE around all issues of sexual exploitation.

5. Understanding why young people go missing

Children may go missing from home or care for a number of reasons, such as:

- Trying to protect themselves from abuse, including domestic violence.
- Trying to protect themselves from bullying.
- As a result of peer group pressures. Peer group pressures can re-enforce the risk-taking decisions being made by young people and also can create group based norms and expectations around what others might view as risky being viewed by the group as fun and 'a buzz'.
- Being scared and/or afraid, feeling unable to cope or dis-connected from the adults around them; they may feel they are failures or not valued with regard to some aspect of their lives that has not been apparent to adults who otherwise seem close to them.
- They may have been enticed or persuaded to go missing; been abducted by an adult who is acting inappropriately and who is using the child to meet their needs; or been "thrown out" by the parents/carers.
- There are particular 'push' or 'pull factors pushing or pulling away from the home. Young people may run from home due to negative factors there or to a peer group of young people/adults to whom they feel a sense of belonging or loyalty

6. Assessing Risk: Summary

In assessing the significance of a child's absence, the above definitions and any guidance already agreed in the child's care planning, should be taken into consideration including:

- The age of the child;
- The legal status of the child;
- Previous behaviour and history;

- The emotional needs of the child, e.g. whether there has been any variation in their mood or whether they have expressed any intention to harm themselves or others;
- Behaviour of the child as influenced by peer groups or others;
- Mental and physical health needs;
- Whether the child or young person has been the victim or perpetrator of violent, homophobic and/or racist incidents prior to disappearance;
- Whether the child or young person been subjected to bullying;
- Is the child or young person suspected to be a subject to crime in progress, e.g. abduction?
- Whether the child is perceived as running to/running from someone/something;
- The risk of offending;
- The risk that the child may be targeted for sexual exploitation.

7. Classifications of Missing Children and Young People

Guidance on The Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons Association of Chief Police Officers 2005 states that children are deemed 'missing' if:

- The reason for their absence is unknown
- They are vulnerable
- Other risk factors are present

The term 'missing' is also used to describe a child or young person who has run away. Therefore the terms 'missing' and 'run away' or 'go missing' are used interchangeably. This is because key documents use a variety of words to describe these children. The definition of Children Missing Education in this document refers to all children and young people of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll, nor being educated otherwise (e.g. privately or in alternative provision) and who have been out of any educational provision for a substantial period of time (usually agreed as four weeks or more).

The following definitions are taken from section 8.21 of the Sussex Child Protection Procedures. Where the policy refers to 'child' or 'children' these terms include young people under the age of 18 years

Missing Person

Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character, or the context suggests the person may be the subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.

Missing Child

Where the child's location or reason for absence is unknown and/or there is cause for concern for the child because of their vulnerability or there is a potential danger to the public. A child in this category must be reported to the police.

Children who go missing from home

Children within this group are composed of:

- Those who are 'not known' in the sense that although they will be known to a universal service such as school or a GP there has not been previous contact with a targeted service;
- Children who are receiving additional support from a targeted service because they are assessed to be a Child in Need. Having been missing in the past may be one factor which results in them becoming a Child in Need;
- Children who are subject of a Child Protection Plan either due to their increased vulnerability because they have been missing in the past or because there are other concerns relating to child protection.

Looked After Children

The term "looked after children" has a specific legal meaning deriving from Children Act 1989. Under the Children Act 1989 a child is "looked after" if he or she is:

1. Provided with accommodation for a continuous period of more than 24 hours (Children Act 1989, Section 20 and 21); or:
2. Is subject to a Care Order (Children Act 1989, Part 1V)

Children who become lost

Children who because of their age or due to a degree of intellectual impairment become separated from their carers, become temporarily disorientated and become missing as a result and would wish to be found. This is clearly very frightening and upsetting for all involved

Families who go missing- Not subject of this policy:

This Policy is **not** intended to respond to families who go missing to evade contact with professionals. If a child is missing in this context professionals should consult Children and Families who Go Missing Procedure

Absent

A person not at the place where they are expected to be. Clearly some children absent themselves for a short period and then return and their whereabouts are known. Sometimes children stay out longer than agreed, either on purpose or accidentally, and may be testing boundaries

Children who make telephone contact and agree a time to return, but subsequently fail to do could also fall within this definition.

This kind of boundary testing is within the range of normal teenage behaviour and not necessarily considered a risk, although a more general response such as additional parenting support and advice may be helpful as behaviour of this nature may fall within the wider safeguarding remit for services

Children Remanded to Local Authority Accommodation

A small number of young people enter care after they have been remanded to local authority accommodation (RLAA) by a Youth Court. A child who absconds from local authority accommodation when RLAA is unlawfully at large and has, in legal terms, escaped from custody. If a child who has been RLAA goes missing from a children's home or a foster placement, then the established procedures relating to escape from custody should be followed. The investigating officer will need to liaise with an appropriate officer in the areas' Youth Offending Team

Children Placed in Secure Accommodation on Welfare Grounds

In some cases young people are placed in secure accommodation on welfare grounds under Section 25 of the Children Act 1989. Once in a secure setting these young people are unlikely to abscond. Should they do so, the usual missing persons procedures would apply. When a child subject to a Secure Accommodation Order absconds this is considered a 'significant event' that should be reported to Ofsted.

8. Arrangements for Return Interviews and who offers them

Return interviews are a key way of seeking to actively find out the risks young people have been exposed to when missing as well as to listen to their concerns and difficulties and demonstrate concern for their welfare. If the young person is able to engage with this it can lead into discussions about how to prevent these situations arising in future, what help the young person may need and whether this help can make them feel less the need to run away/go missing. All runaway behaviour is a reaction to something which troubles young people and/or a seeking of attention and excitement which they may feel is lacking for them. It is this unmet need which can make runaway young people so vulnerable to exploitation.

The new national Statutory Guidance makes clear, however, that there is evidence that young people may not feel able to open up fully to their statutory key worker, to the police or to other authority figures. Once young people are beginning to get into trouble and behave in ways they know that responsible adults would disapprove of, they may be less likely to have an honest and open conversation due their fear of the consequences for themselves or others whom they seek to protect. The Guidance is based on the

results from pilot projects and authorities which have used independent return interview, (IRI), schemes provided by private sector or community & voluntary sector groups. Young people can then speak with staff who have no role in decision making in their lives and importantly no role in having to appear to make judgements about their behaviour.

The Council will decide in 2014 whether to join with a pan Sussex agreement with regards missing children and whether to join a joint commissioning process for return interviews. Brighton & Hove would wish to offer the independent return interview service, when established, to young people repeatedly missing from home or care.

Currently social workers, care workers or other key professionals will continue to do the RIs. The missing from care policy good practice guidance for return interviews will be adopted by all staff, (including care providers), and incorporated into return interview practice.

It will continue to be the case that some young people will give full details of their missing episode to their key worker or care worker. Experience in East Sussex is that not all young people need the level of independence the IRI scheme offers and the best position seems to be being able to offer a choice to young people which fits their needs. Some providers are able to offer repeat runaways a targeted key work support service to support and augment work the social worker will be doing with them and this will be considered in the specifications once decisions on providing an IRI service are made. It would also be crucial to clarify with independent IRI providers and with the young people themselves the details which need to be shared with social workers, where allocated, and any details which don't.

In relation to young people being missing from home it is the expectation in Brighton & Hove **that return interview feedback, where the interview is not carried out by the key worker, should be given promptly to social workers if the young person is subject to a CIN Plan or CP Plan.** CIN or CP Plans relate to medium or high levels of assessed risk and the return interview may be important to influence the ongoing analysis of risk. The extent of feedback from a return interview to social workers would need to be dictated by the young person's safety first and foremost and also by good practice guidance in this area.

9. Information Sharing and Notification

Information sharing regarding vulnerable missing children is critical if we are to identify their potential whereabouts and keep them safe.

The Statutory Guidance for runaway and missing children – January 2014 – states that

“Early & Effective sharing of information between professionals and local agencies is essential for the identification of patterns of behaviour. Relevant data may include times & duration of missing episodes, information from return interviews, absence data from schools etc.”

The Home Office “Safeguarding Foreign National Children Who Go Missing” guidelines states that for extended missing episodes from care of children and young people who are seeking asylum in the UK and have a pending application for this should be notified to the Home Office

The Brighton & Hove City Council Children’s Services guidance for information sharing encourages the following in order that information is shared appropriately and proportionately.

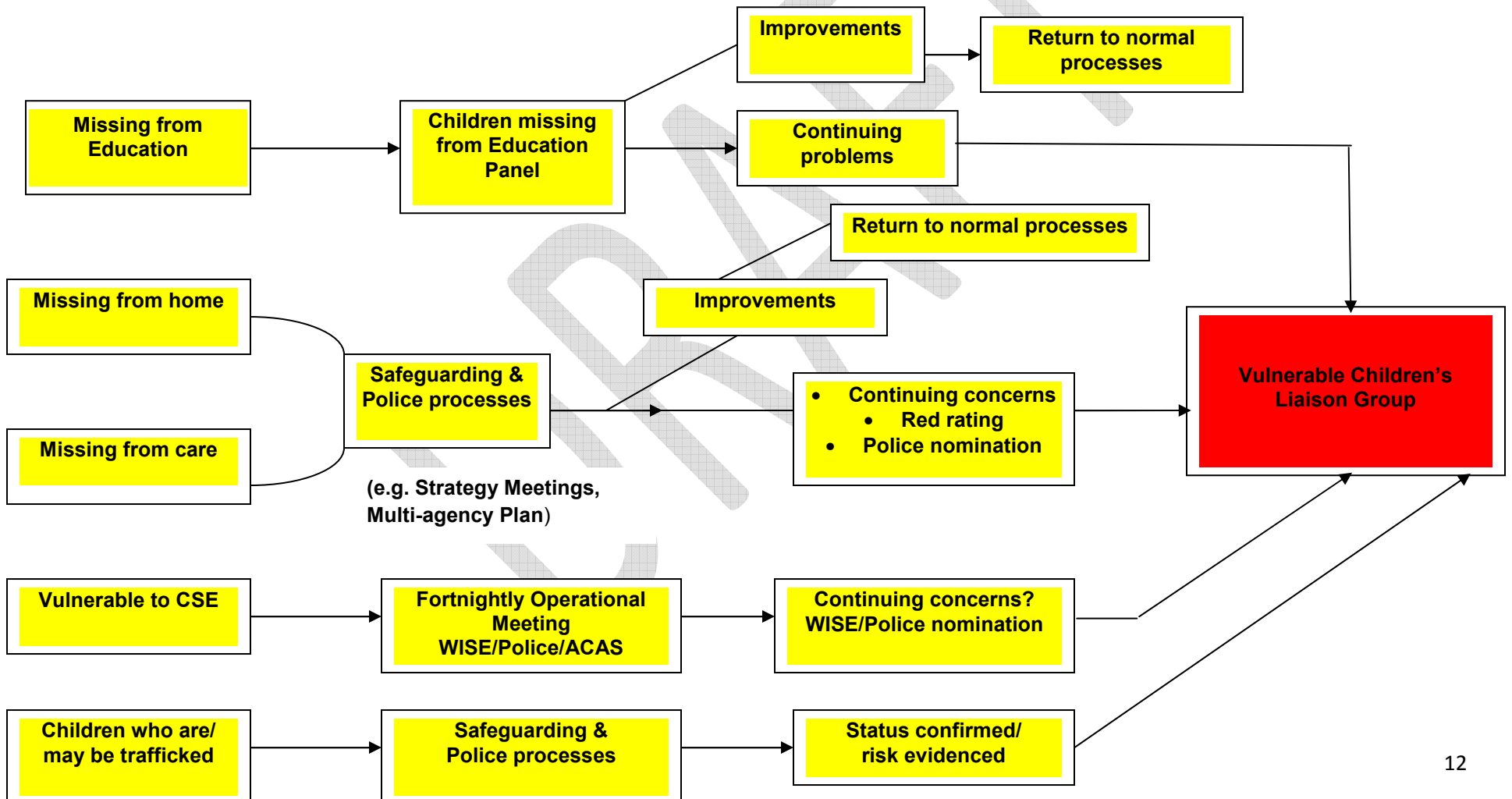
- Consider first what objective is being sought by seeking or sharing information and whether this corresponds to the overall objectives in the plan for the child.
- Discussion should be had with parents and carers about who we are sharing information with and why, unless to do so would create an unacceptable risk and/or is part of a current police investigation. We should seek their informed consent. This may also apply to older adolescents in their own right.
- If parental consent is not given then a practitioner with their manager should consider whether and argument about potential significant harm and/or a current police investigation could be reasons for over-riding the parents’ views
- We should share what is necessary, only to people who need to know it and we should ensure that records being shared are factually accurate and fair before doing so. We should record these decisions to share information and reasons for this and discuss this in meetings with parents/carers.

These parameters for information sharing should not be read as a discouragement about sharing information – these are just checks and balances. Information must still be shared where missing children episodes occur and where there are likely to be safeguarding issues/risks of significant harm to young people. The key is to try and be transparent with families about this.

Implementation of Operational Systems to Secure Information Exchange between Policy Areas

The flow chart attached shows the robust referral routes Brighton and Hove Children's Services have in place for the sharing of information.

Information Sharing between agencies



10. Single Points of Contact in the City Council relating to Missing Children

The 2013 Statutory Guidance confirms that each Local Authority should have a **Single Point of Contact, (SPOC)**, who shapes policy and ensures staff guidance is clear in this high risk area of practice.

It is crucial of course that the scope of this role is clearly defined and limited to co-ordinating and leading rather than being understood to have a responsibility for day to day practice on each individual missing case.

The SPOC for Brighton & Hove will be the Head of Safeguarding. The Head of Safeguarding is now assisted by 3 practice leads –

- Missing from Home – Head of Service – Children in Need
- Missing from Education – Manager for Behaviour & Attendance
- Missing from Care – Head of Service, Children in Care

This arrangement also ensures cover for this role during periods of annual leave. A manager with a social work qualification and experience of child protection policy and looked after children regulations is necessary to advise with authority on the most concerning child protection and child in care cases. This role will be taken by the Head of Service for Safeguarding.

The priority roles of the Brighton & Hove SPOC and the 3 Practice Leads are to:

- Provide a reporting process on key numbers and trends with the Local Information Officers regarding missing young people within the social work teams and with the C&F Performance Team;
- Provide when requested for social work teams an overview of the data, trends and issues raised for missing young people and to advise on specific issues and cases;
- For the Practice Leads to gather and share feedback from young people who have run away or are running away on what has helped or will help them;
- For the SPOC and the 3 missing Practice Leads to meet as a group bi-monthly to ensure that trends and emerging issues can be defined and tackled;
- SPOC and practice leads to ensure that there is admin staffing to support the above roles;
- To keep briefed and informed of regional and national practice on missing and vulnerable young people and to disseminate;
- To play a lead role in co-ordinating with our neighbouring authorities on developing a Pan-Sussex approach;
- To be copied into names and plans for young people missing from home graded into red band and to advise where needed on planning for them;

- Practice Leads to be appraised of the most concerning missing from education cases and whether they are also missing from home or care;
- Practice Lead of missing from home children to chair the Vulnerable Children's Liaison Group.

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Appendix 1

Vulnerable Children & Young People's Liaison Group – Terms of Reference

1) Objectives of this group

- To provide a formal multi-agency forum for discussion of some of the most vulnerable young people in the City in which the added value of good information sharing and pooling of our varied resources is recognised.
- To ensure that there is a shared approach and sign up to the safeguarding of the young people discussed.
- Due to the known overlap between those young people missing from home or care and missing from education the group will aim to prioritise discussion of young people in all 3 categories.
- To ensure that those discussed all have a multi-agency action plan.
- (Within this we may sometimes consider that some young people engage only selectively if at all with services and that it can be counter-productive to overload them with too many services).
- To seek updates on the progress of these action plans.
- To have key worker attendance, (social worker or lead professional) which allows for more informed and detailed case discussion.
- To consider the links between certain peer groups of vulnerable young people and also adults who may be targeting them and to consider from this whether wider actions are necessary.
- To provide bi-annual updates & reports on issues and trends arising from the group and also evaluating the effectiveness of this approach for the young people considered and to consider whether group members require update briefings and training.
- Measures of success would include demonstrable reductions in CSE vulnerability and repeat missing episodes.
- To liaise where it is felt necessary with other Local Authorities and agencies based outside of the City in order to ensure cross-boundary safeguarding issues are addressed.

2) Criteria for discussion

- Concern of child sexual exploitation in relation to an individual, group, area or address whether repeat missing young persons or not and initial remedies are not reducing concerns.
- Regular missing/absent child/young person and evidence of risk-taking behaviour/vulnerability and initial remedies are not reducing concerns.
- Concern that young people have arrived in the country and may have been involved in human trafficking.

- From December 2013 it will be the intention to introduce discussion regarding those children & young people who are deemed missing from education and who normal remedies are not assisting.

3) Age limits

- Under 18s are core group for most children's services who are group members.
- Care leavers up to the age of 21.
- Over 18's will be discussed normally at the fortnightly Police & WISE operational meeting. However where they are part of a peer group involving other under 18's may be discussed as associated with that under 18.

4) Membership

Permanent members

Richard Hakin, Head of Service, Children in Need Team, (Chair person)

PC Vicky Morris, Missing Children's & CSE Co-ordinator, Sussex Police

Lee Horner, CPT, Sussex Police

DS Richard Harris, Sussex Police, (AVU & CPT)

Sarah Barker, Education for Children Missing School

Cath Cottingham, ru-ok/YOS

Emma Cockerell/Dan Jones, Practice Manager, ACAS

Rachel Metcalfe, Anti Social Behaviour Housing Officer

Justine Orme, Health Adviser, Claude Nichol Clinic

Representative, Agency Placements Team

Tracie James, Practice Manager, Youth Services, East Area

Gemma Doughty, WISE

Mat Thomas, Intensive Placement Team

Steve Springett, Operational Manager, ITF

Occasional Members

Clare Smith – Team Manager, Fostering Team

(where child in care being discussed & in an in- house placement)

CAMHS member – to be confirmed

Adult Social Care, (where adults known to ASC linked with under 18 young people)

Peter Wileman, Community Safety Team

John O'Connor, YOS

5) Referral process

- Case to be nominated to Liaison Group administrator and copied to Vicky Morris, Sussex Police for checking.
- Nominations must be made 2 weeks before liaison group due unless by agreement of Chair and Police. This will allow agreed agenda to be sent out and key worker information forms collected a week before group due to meet.
- A maximum of five young people could be discussed at each meeting.
- Key workers are asked to complete the referral form and also attend the meeting or send a rep who knows of this young person – e.g. Practice Manager.

6) Case update process

Case update forms will be sent around 3 weeks after a young person is discussed at the liaison group and can form part of the agenda of the subsequent meeting. They will be sent both to the key worker and also where appropriate to nominating agencies who have key actions to follow. This is to ensure that we can track some progress on the action plans.

7) Admin support

- This will be provided by David Young. David is contactable by Council email and also on 291407.
- Admin tasks will be to co-ordinate nominations, seek key worker information and confirm key worker or delegated rep to attend, finalise agenda with Chair and Police, take minutes and circulate and also pursue updates on cases discussed. This may end up being shared between two people.

Richard Hakin
Head of Service – Children in Need
September 13