

Subject: Missing Children

Report to:	Police and Crime Committee
Report of:	Executive Director of Assembly Secretariat
Date:	29 September 2022
Public Access:	This report will be considered in public

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report acts as a background paper to a discussion with invited guests on missing children in London.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 **That the Committee notes the report as background to putting questions to invited guests and notes the subsequent discussion.**
- 2.2 **That the Committee delegates authority to the Chairman, in consultation with party Group Lead Members, to agree any output arising from the discussion.**

3. Background

- 3.1 Every year, thousands of children and young people go missing in London. In 2021-22, of children and young people aged 1 to 17, those aged 17 were most likely to have been reported missing.¹ In the same year, there were more incidents² of girls going missing (11,272) than boys (9,841). Incidents of Black children going missing is also disproportionately higher (10,732) than Asian children (2,078) and white children (10,298).³

¹ GLA, [Missing Children](#), 24 May 2022

² Please note that this is the count of missing incidents. People can go missing multiple times; this count represents a count of times the person was reported missing.

³ GLA, [Missing Children](#), 24 May 2022

- 3.2 The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) is the lead agency for investigating and finding missing children in London. It categorises reports received into 'missing' or 'absent'. This determines the level of urgency of the response:
- 'Absent' denotes that the child is considered to be at 'no apparent risk'. This normally means that the force takes no immediate action, but should keep the case under review;
 - The 'missing' category receives an active police response, with the level of this response determined by a further assessment of whether there is a low, medium or high risk of immediate harm.
- 3.3 In September 2021, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) published its findings from its 2021 assessment of the progress made by the MPS against recommendations and findings from its 2016, 2017 and 2018 child protection inspections.⁴ It reported that the MPS's response to children reported missing "had improved". It said: "Children, specifically looked after children, who are reported missing are no longer classed as being absent with no apparent risk. Now all children get a police response, irrespective of their circumstances or background." It also found that "Staff are aware of potential links between children going missing and the risk of exploitation" and call handlers take time to "establish the circumstances of a child reported missing." However, it also reported that in most cases it reviewed, "the risk grading and rationale for each missing report was appropriate. But the investigative response doesn't always match the identified level of risk and history of the child." It also concluded that the MPS may be missing "early opportunities to quickly find a child and make sure they are safe."⁵
- 3.4 On 9 June 2022, the Assembly agreed on a motion that the Mayor and the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) should implement a vision zero strategy for missing children. Concerned about the 22,801 children that went missing in London in 2021/22, the Assembly called upon the Mayor and MOPAC to work with the Government to resolve this and to:⁶
- Implement a vision zero strategy for missing children;
 - Ensure that data relating to missing children is better recorded, including age, ethnicity, household situation and education status; and
 - Explore government funding opportunities to undertake missing children reduction work, such as the recently announced £23 million for early intervention programmes

⁴ HMICFRS, [National Child Protection Inspection – assessment of progress: Metropolitan Police Service 11 January–12 February 2021](#), September 2021

⁵ [Metropolitan Police Service – National child protection inspection assessment of progress - HMICFRS \(justiceinspectors.gov.uk\)](#)

⁶ London Assembly, [Implement a vision zero strategy for London's missing children](#), 9 June 2022

3.5 On 6 July 2022, the Mayor said that “we should have aspirations of zero children going missing, just like we have an aspiration for zero homicides as well and I am really keen to work with partners to make sure we can fulfil that aspiration.”⁷ The Mayor also said:

“Every child in London should be safe and feel safe, as should the communities around them. There has been a decline in the number of incidents of missing children in London, but we must strive to do more to reduce the number further and keep our children safe. My Police and Crime Plan clearly reflects the importance we place on keeping London’s children safe and free from exploitation and violence and on improving the response to missing people. It sends a clear signal to the partnership of organisations with a role in protecting those who go missing and addressing the circumstances behind them doing so.”⁸

4. Issues for Consideration

4.1 The Committee’s investigation aims to:

- Explore the issue of missing children in London;
- Examine the role of MOPAC, the Violence Reduction Unit and the MPS in preventing, protecting and responding to children who go missing in London; and
- Assess the performance of the MPS and MOPAC in keeping children and young people at risk of going missing safe.

4.2 The following guests have been invited to attend:

- Commander Kevin Southworth, MPS;
- Kenny Bowie, Director of Strategy and MPS Oversight, MOPAC;
- A representative from Local Safeguarding Children Partnership;
- Sherry Peck, Chief Executive, Safer London;
- Susannah Drury, Director of Policy and Development, Missing People;
- Sandra Baah, Regional Manager for London County Line Support and Rescue Service, Catch22; and
- Sarah Parker, Research and Development Officer, Catch22.

5. Legal Implications

5.1 The Committee has the power to do what is recommended in this report.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 There are no financial implications to the GLA arising from this report.

⁷ GLA, [Missing Children](#), 23 June 2022

⁸ [Missing Children | Mayor's Question Time \(london.gov.uk\)](#)

List of appendices to this report:

None

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

List of Background Papers:

None

Contact Information

Contact Officer:	Janette Roker, Senior Policy Adviser
Telephone:	07511 213748
E-mail:	janette.roker@london.gov.uk