

Evidence from West Midlands Police

INFORMATION TO ASSIST THE SHORT INQUIRY: CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME AND CARE.

The below is a summary of the key points from the recently updated West Midlands Police policy regarding the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing and Absent Persons which is intended to provide information to assist the short Inquiry: Children Missing from Home and Care. A full copy of the policy is available should further detail be required.

Each of the 10 LPU's has a Crime and Vulnerability Officer (CVO) who collate data and signpost risk in absent cases in line with policy as summarised below.

Safeguarding of repeat missing/absent adults sits with the CVO and the adult safeguarding team who will share information to determine relevant action to reduce episodes and risk. For children this role will sit with CSE coordinators where this risk is identified and with Child Abuse teams if other risks are apparent.

Each Local Neighbourhood Police team has a responsibility to deliver demand reduction activities which often centre around Children's Care Homes.

Referral to Local Authorities is done through the primary investigators in cases of missing episodes recorded on Compact and through CVO's in absent cases. Children debriefs are managed by each of the seven local authorities.

WMP has established effective engagement with both statutory and non-statutory partners including the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), local care homes and key third sector agencies who are commissioned to debrief returned missing children. A summary of Safeguarding structure and protocols can be seen in the West Midlands Metropolitan CSE Regional Framework (Updated July 2015) which is attached

KEY MISSING & ABSENT POLICY CONSIDERATIONS:

DEFINITION OF A MISSING PERSON

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

DEFINITION OF ABSENT

'A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be and there is no apparent risk'.

The absent category is for those cases where the person is not where they are supposed be and there is no apparent risk.

PROCEDURES FOR ABSENT CASES.

INITIAL REPORT

At the point of the initial report, the call handler will obtain information from the caller that will be used to determine whether the person is missing or absent. An OASIS incident log should be created to record the information given by the caller.

When creating the brief incident details in the incident log, the details field must start with the name, age and date of birth of the person subject to the report. This is to ensure that repeat absent incidents can be accurately monitored by the missing persons coordinators.

RISK BASED QUESTIONS AND INTELLIGENCE CHECKS

To establish whether the person should be classified as absent or missing, the call taker will ask a series of questions. The questions to be asked are:

- Is this significantly out of character; have they done this before? If yes, when was the last time?
- Have you been in contact with this person, do you know their whereabouts and is there a time you expect them to return?
- Do you know their intended actions when last seen and have you done anything to locate them?
- Do you know who are they with?
- Is this person a danger to themselves or others?
- Does this person have any specific medical needs; do you have a list of their medication? Is there a care plan in place?
- Is this person likely to self-harm or attempt suicide?
- Is this person likely to be subjected to harm or a crime?
- Is this person a victim of abuse and/or at risk of sexual exploitation?
- Is this person being looked after or supported by any Children's or Adult Services?
- Prior to this report was the person displaying any behaviours or actions you consider out of the ordinary or cause for concern? E.g. Increased use of technology, unexplained gifts/money.
- Are there any other specific concerns or can you offer any other significant information at all?

The response to these questions will be recorded on the Oasis incident log taking time to enable a proper risk assessment to be completed so that the absence can be categorised appropriately.

A simple yes or no should not suffice and the call taker should adopt an investigative mind-set to establish risk.

The questions are a guide to determine the level of risk posed to an individual. Where it is clearly evident that the person is in danger, the call taker should not delay the immediate deployment of a resource in order to fully complete the questions i.e. a missing 2yr old child.

Incidents where call takers are in a position where they are unable to answer the questions or obtain sufficient information are to be treated as a missing person investigation. Lack of available information should be treated as a risk in itself. Any known CSE risk around an individual reported to Police will be classified as a missing person

Intelligence checks will be conducted on the individual to ensure that a fully informed decision can be made. Significant information should be recorded on the Police Oasis log.

GRADING OF INCIDENT

All logs that are missing will be graded as early response as a minimum. This includes cases where the missing person is upgraded from absent.

All logs that are absent will be graded as early response as a minimum until the Inspector (or other person as detailed below) has completed the risk assessment and agreed a contact plan with the caller. This ensures that a decision around the risk posed to individuals is made in a timely manner.

INITIAL REVIEW OF ABSENT INCIDENT LOG – DUTY INSPECTOR

The Duty Inspector will review the Oasis incident log containing the information given by the caller in response to the risk based questions described above and then decide whether the person should be classified as absent or missing.

The Duty Inspector will agree the review period and the call back timescales with the informant.

The Duty Inspector should record on the Oasis incident log the decision together with a full rationale.

REVIEW PERIOD AND CALL BACK PROCESS

Incidents classified as absent will not require an officer to be deployed or enquiries to be carried out, but must have regular defined review periods relevant to the circumstances of each case.

Agreement may be reached about enquiries that the informant can make during the interim period, and any such agreed actions should be recorded on the incident log.

If any further enquiries are required other than initial intelligence checks and risk based questions then this should be appropriately resourced and considered a missing person investigation.

The call back procedure will continue until either the person returns and the log is closed, or until they are re-classified as missing and an officer deployed to commence a missing persons investigation.

When an absent incident log is closed because the person is found, the closure code to be used is, 'Missing – Unauthorised absence'. In order to ensure that the absent incidents can be effectively monitored by the missing persons' coordinators, it is essential that the correct closure category is used. This closure code should only be used for absent logs, where a person is classified as missing, the log should be closed as 'Missing Person'.

There is no defined age limit or time period that an enquiry can remain as absent before becoming missing. All decisions are to be based on risk, taking into account all of the circumstances at the time. All rationale is to be recorded on the Oasis log.

ESCALATION POLICY

In the event that the informant and Duty Inspector cannot resolve any disagreement about whether the person should be classified as missing or absent, the decision will be referred to the duty Force Incident Manager (Chief Inspector). Having reviewed the information and made a decision, the duty FIM should record the decision and rationale on the Oasis incident log.

SAFEGUARDING ISSUES IN ABSENT CASES

Absent incidents will be robustly monitored by designated coordinators, who will identify trends and patterns within reports of absent cases. The co-ordinator will then work in a multi-agency environment to tackle and reduce the incidents of repeat absent cases.

Triggers for safeguarding interventions in repeat absent cases will be:

A vulnerability assessment will be made on a case by case basis with appropriate intervention and rationale documented by the designated coordinator.

All children will be referred to Children's Services for considerations of safeguarding interventions.

In the absence of any other risk or concern for adult absent cases, the following will generate an automatic referral to Adult Social Services and Police Safeguarding Teams for consideration:

- Three absent reports for an individual in a 90 day period, and
- Five absent reports from a location in a 30 day period.

When the dedicated co-ordinator identifies a case that has met the trigger for an intervention, the coordinator will generate a non-crime reference number that will contain details of the absent incidents. This non crime number will then be allocated to the relevant safeguarding or child abuse team supervisor. If the supervisor reviews the report and decides that there are actions to be completed, the supervisor will allocate the report to a relevant officer to complete the actions.

RISK ASSESSMENTS FOR MISSING PERSONS

Where an adult or child is categorised as missing, an investigation will be commenced that is appropriate to the level of risk.

When a person is classified as missing a secondary risk assessment is conducted as a result of an officer being deployed to take a missing person report. Using all the information available, the officer will determine the level of risk of danger to the missing person, which in turn informs the extent and urgency of the enquiries to be made. Before deciding on the risk category, police systems should be checked, as they may provide vital background information and bearing on the risk assessment decision.

The level of risk must be reviewed by a Supervisor and revisited regularly to ensure that it is still appropriate in light of information received during the investigation.

MEDIA

Prior to using publicity as part of the investigation the missing person's family must be consulted and authority obtained for publicity. Although always preferable, their consent is not needed provided that the decision is made with consideration to the Human Rights Act, and the action is carried out proportionately in the best interest and welfare of the missing person.

Automatic referrals to Missing People Charity will be made in each missing person case. This will act as an additional media opportunity and provide family and victim support where necessary.

RECORDING THE INVESTIGATION

COMPACT is used to record and track all missing person investigations. The following guidance applies to all COMPACT users:

As soon as possible after the initial investigating officer has taken the missing person report, the Oasis log should be closed and all relevant information from it should be transferred onto COMPACT. If an Oasis log and COMPACT are allowed to run concurrently, vital information may be missed which could hamper the investigation and put the missing person at greater risk

All actions taken and decisions made during an investigation should be recorded on COMPACT

All updates to COMPACT must be completed within the Tour of Duty.

Sensitive issues apparent during the course of an investigation – e.g. HBV or , forced marriage – the Duty Inspector should instruct restricted access to the record

Photographs should be scanned onto COMPACT within the same Tour of Duty that they are obtained

Where the missing person returns prior to a COMPACT record being created, a full debrief will take place and a COMPACT record created and fully updated. This will prevent vital information from being missed and allow for appropriate notifications, providing an accurate missing history.

MANAGEMENT AND SUPERVISION OF A MISSING INVESTIGATION

Missing persons represent a real risk and it is vital that they receive the correct level of resourcing and priority to investigate them and ensure all safeguarding issues are addressed. To achieve this, the investigation and review process must be adequately supervised. The purpose of the supervision and review process is as follows:

All cases should be reviewed at the LPU daily management meeting. It is the duty Inspector who has responsibility for bringing details of each missing person enquiry to the DMM. High risk and exceptional cases will, where appropriate, also be discussed at Force DMM.

The Duty Inspector, based on information received can, at any time, upgrade a case to high risk or reduce the risk from medium to low.

Only a Superintendent can authorise a reduction from high risk. The one exception to this is where an initial investigating officer has incorrectly classified the first risk assessment as high. In these circumstances, the Duty Inspector can downgrade the risk from high.

The LPU Operations Superintendent will, in most cases be carrying out the review procedures for missing investigations. The investigation should be reviewed at daily management meeting.

The Public Protection department should be actively involved in the review process and made aware of any safeguarding issues that come to light as soon as possible.

RECORDING AND OWNERSHIP OF A MISSING PERSON INVESTIGATION

The following principles are equally applicable to cross border issues between different forces and between different LPUs within the WMP Force area.

The police area that receives a report of a missing person must record the missing person and must still take responsibility for ensuring an officer is despatched to take a missing person report.

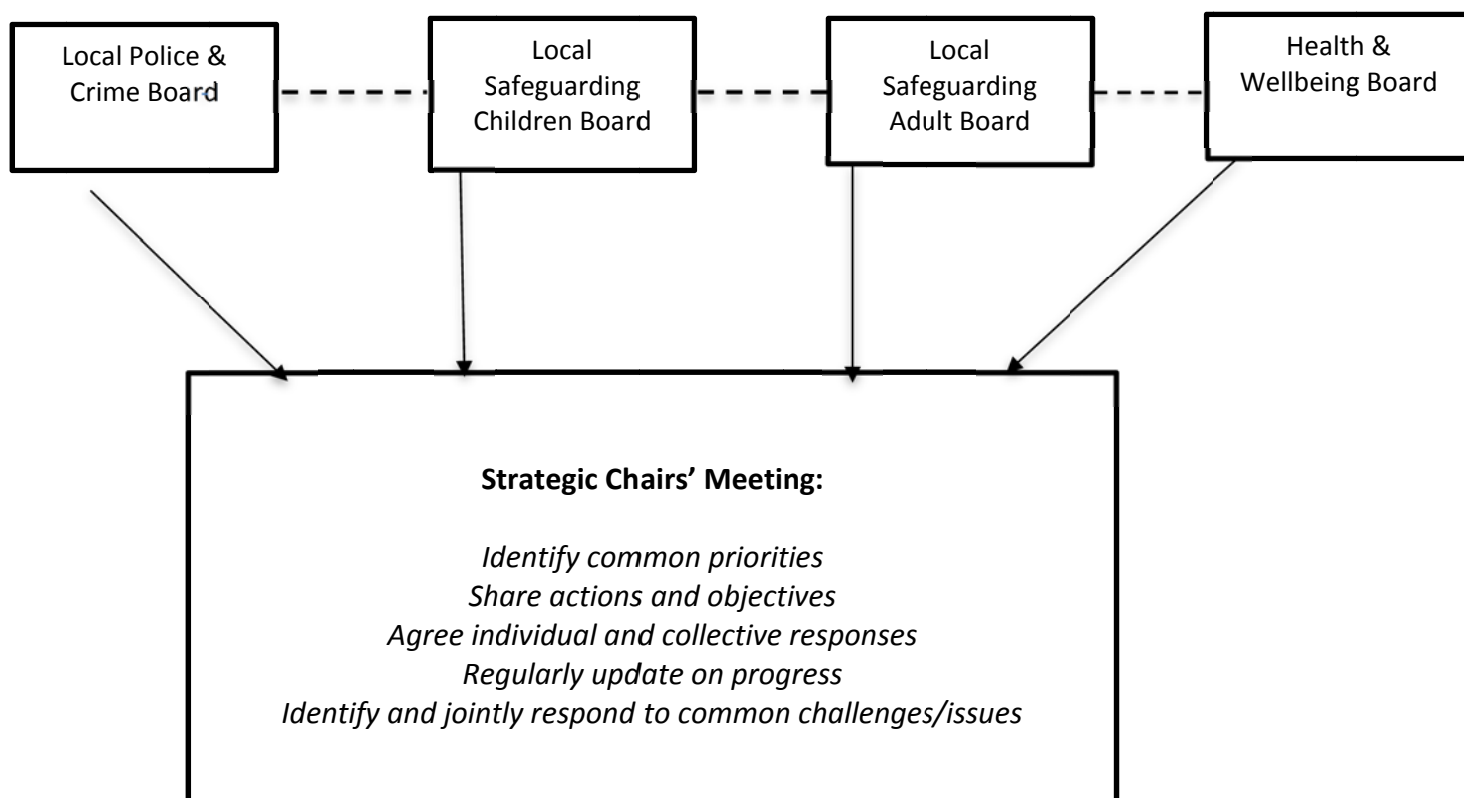
The reporting person should not have any uncertainty over who has responsibility.

The police area that took the report then has responsibility for managing and supervising the investigation unless responsibility is passed to another police area as described below.

The bulk of enquiries are normally conducted in the police area where the missing person is most likely to be located. Therefore, the police area where the bulk of valid, identified enquiries are to be conducted must accept responsibility for managing and supervising the investigation.

The purpose of transferring an investigation is to improve the management and supervision of the investigation in order to maximise the chances of finding the missing person

Relevant statutory agencies have individual and collective responsibility to ensure that children, young people and adults at risk are properly safeguarded. As such all key strategic plans, whether formulated by individual organisations or partnerships, should have consideration of any safeguarding implications. It is important that a mechanism is in place to clarify the role and responsibilities of each of the strategic boards and that there is a clear understanding how they inter-relate. One recommended way of doing this is having a regular meeting which brings together the Chairs of key strategic partnerships with a view to improving the way the Boards work together on common priorities; avoiding duplication; clarifying lead roles and responsibilities and having clear lines of communication.



PROTECTION: THE ROLE OF MULTI-AGENCY PARTNERS

Providing an appropriate response to CSE requires the combined efforts and skills of a protective network for children and young people and depends heavily on a multi-agency response. Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 places a duty on key persons and bodies to make arrangements to ensure that in discharging their functions, they have regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The same principle applies to educational institutions with duties under Section 157 or 175 of the Education Act 2002 regarding safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Meetings Structure

The type and format of meetings described below will enable agencies to keep a clear overview of child sexual exploitation issues within their area as per 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015' and other statutory guidance.

Local areas will have different arrangements but it is important that there is an identified individual and/or team who will:

- provide a lead officer role for the Local Authority;
- be based within Children's Social Care (or working very closely with them) ensuring CSE is addressed as a core part of the local child protection system;
- co-ordinate and analyse all information relating to children and young people at risk of or being exploited, locations and perpetrators;
- provide advice and support to professionals who have identified or are managing cases;
- ensure local policies and procedures are in place to prevent, identify and respond to CSE, in line with this regional framework;
- ensure there is challenge and quality assurance in the system.

In order to respond effectively to CSE there should be a number of layers in place that strategically lead and co-ordinate and operationally support individual victims and manage offenders and locations:

LSCB Strategic CSE and Missing Sub-Group - This strategic multi-agency group is responsible directly to the LSCB for ensuring that local child protection systems to prevent, identify and respond to CSE and missing are co-ordinated and effective. They should ensure that specific local procedures (within the context of this wider regional framework) are in place covering the sexual exploitation of children and young people. These procedures should be a subset of the LSCB procedures for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and be consistent with local youth offending protocols. This group will provide strategic oversight for CSE and missing work across the local area. They will receive regular reports from the CSE and Missing Operational Group and ensure that there are sufficient multi-agency resources available to respond effectively. They will produce a local strategy and delivery plan and regularly monitor performance and delivery. In some local areas, a separate group will be established to manage and monitor missing in order to ensure sufficient time and focus is given to children and young people who go missing. Strong links and information sharing between the two groups is essential. Local areas will have different arrangements but there should always be an overarching CSE Sub-Group established as part of the LSCB working arrangements.

CSE & Missing Operational Group – This senior Operational Group will receive regular updates from the CSE Lead Officer and Police Intel on victims, offenders and locations. This is the key mechanism for providing assurance and challenge that collective work in tackling CSE is having a real impact on the ground. They will direct medium and long term actions to safeguard, disrupt, pursue and reduce opportunity for children to be harmed through sexual exploitation and missing episodes. They will consider the strong associations that have been identified between different forms of sexual exploitation, running away from home, child trafficking and substance misuse and act accordingly. They will use the multi-agency problem profile to drive local commissioning and tasking of resources and provide regular reports to the LSCB Strategic Sub-Group on progress, impact and outcomes. They will also identify gaps in services or forms of response to inform the commissioning of services. Minimum standards for the local Operational Group include:

- The local authority will be aware of all children at risk of CSE that are known to have moved into the local area and evidence of this process will be available and regularly reviewed by the appropriate sub-group of the LSCB.
- Police trigger plans will follow a child if moved out of area.
- All children that are reported as missing will be debriefed and offered support – all of the debrief information will be fed into police intelligence systems, recorded on the child's record and shared with other professionals as needed so that services offered to support the children can be improved according to the learning from the feedback.
- Action to identify, visit and then monitor children who are identified as living unregistered with universal services will be agreed.
- Children that are reaching the age of 18 will still be discussed at CMOG if they are a victim of CSE. The local area will have a robust pathway in place that can support victims into adult services.
- Membership will include key professionals from police, education, health, social care teams, local authority regulation/enforcement teams and representatives from specialist voluntary sector services.

- The groups will monitor the impact of work to combat CSE as well as the actions undertaken.

In some areas, a separate group to manage 'Missing' has been established and in addition, more than one CMOG is in place. In order for this to work effectively, there needs to be robust links, communication and planning between the different groups.

Operational Group meetings will be chaired by an appropriately ranked Police Officer from the local Public Protection Unit and will meet at least monthly.

Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation MASE – (VICTIMS) – Each local authority should establish at least one MASE meeting to review and manage individual cases of children and young people at risk of or being sexually exploited. Where a child/young person is referred to the MASH/known to Social Care, their needs in relation to CSE should be considered as part of the statutory processes. The aim is to ensure only one set of processes is followed rather than parallel processes. Where appropriate, the MASE can be combined with the TAF or Think Family planning meeting/care planning meeting or initial or child protection case conference. Where the child/young person is looked after CSE should be part of the child/young person's care planning process/reviews. Critically there should only ever be one plan for the child/young person, which encompasses all of the relevant requirements/actions/interventions and desired outcomes and which is then regularly reviewed by the MASE/relevant multi-agency review meetings working closely together.

The MASE meeting should conduct focused discussions for each case concentrating on:

- Whether the child is a child in need of early help (when a CAF or TAF process is required), is a child in need (Section 17) and/or is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm (Section 47).
- Ensuring that a multi-agency assessment of need (ie. CAF, a child in need assessment or child/young person in need single assessment) has been or will be carried out, involving the young person and their family to inform the plans for working with the child/young person, their family or primary carers. These plans can be a TA/YOS Plan, a Think Family or Family Support Plan, a Children in Need Plan or Child Protection Plan going forward.
- Ensuring that the child/young person has been spoken to alone and their views and desired outcomes are recorded.
- Ensuring the child/young person has been offered support from an Independent Sexual Violence Advisor.
- Ensuring that the child/young person's family have been engaged and their views, strengths and support needs taken into account.
- Sharing and clarifying information in order to complete the CSE risk assessment.
- Analysing their needs and/or the nature and level of any risk and harm being suffered.
- Understanding risk for any other children, including siblings.
- Sharing information pertaining to a suspected perpetrator(s).
- Considering all possible powers and options to protect the victim and disrupt the offenders.
- Consider a referral using the National Referral Mechanism in cases where a child/young person may have been trafficked.
- Ensuring a multi-agency plan is in place which provides support to address the child/young person's needs to improve the child's outcomes to make them safe.
- Co-ordinating actions, where appropriate, with other processes such as MARAC and MAPPA.

The outcome of the meeting may be that:

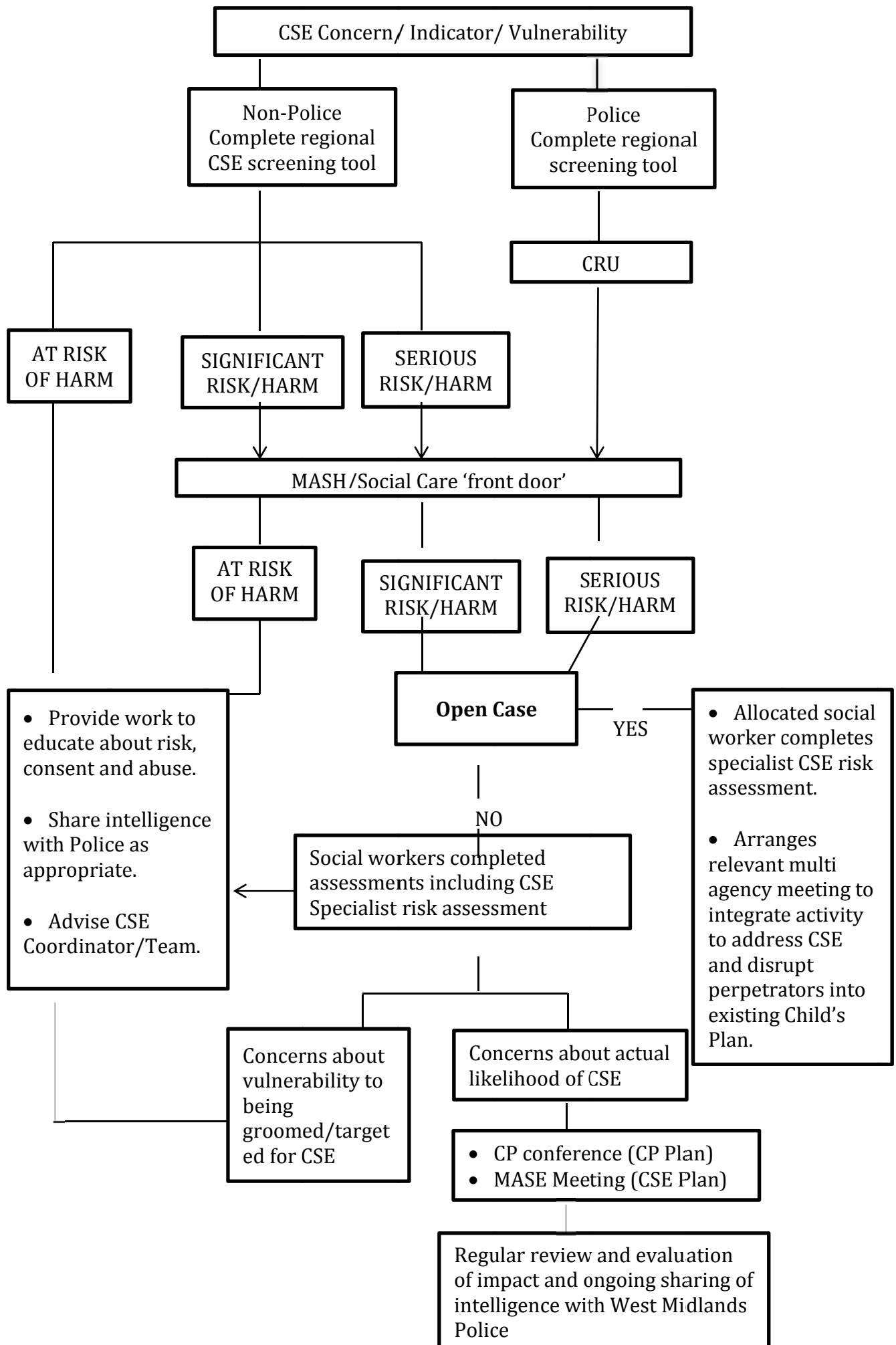
- The young person and family can be supported through Early Help services.
- The young person will be supported through a Child in Need Plan.
- There is a need to invoke Child Protection procedures or review the existing Child Protection Plan.
- There is a need to review and change the existing Care Plan.
- Support is provided by an Independent Sexual Violence Advisor.
- There is a possibility of criminal action against an adult.

- Co-ordinated multi-agency support is required to support and divert the child from involvement in sexual exploitation, this will be outlined in a plan/or added to existing plans with clear lead officers and timescales.
- There is insufficient information at this stage, but concerns remain, interim action needs to be taken and further assessment is required.

The Child's Plan must set out which agencies will provide which services, including specialist sexual violence services, to the child and family, what direct work or interventions will be used, how and with whom and should set clear measurable outcomes for the child and their parents/carers and for those professionals involved. The aim should always be to give children/young people, their parents and carers, the skills knowledge and ability to manage on their own or to cope with support. The plan should reflect the positive aspects of the family situation as well as any weaknesses.

A well established process exists when placing looked after children outside the Local Authority area and when receiving children from another Local Authority into the area. Whilst this is consistently used and notification is received, where CSE is a concern, *more consideration and emphasis needs to be given to the preparation and consultation process* that should take place before the child is placed. It is important that children/young people are not put at more risk by being put into an area where there are high risks re. CSE. Every residential setting is now required to undertake an annual locality assessment to assess whether there are such wider risks in their locality and to act to mitigate this as necessary. LSCBs should be receiving copies of these assessments and they should be shared with the CSE and Missing Group when CSE risks are identified.

CSE & Missing Regional Pathway



Missing children and young people may be at increased risk of CSE and should be reported as missing to the Police at the earliest opportunity. Once a missing child is located, it is important that they are properly debriefed to identify any risks the child has been exposed to. There are two stages to the process - the Police Safe and Well Check and the Return Interview. Where possible, the Return Interview must be completed within 72 hours by an independent person. The information/intelligence from these interviews must be reported into the **Police Intelligence Systems and recorded on the child/young person's record**. Where external agencies are commissioned to conduct Return Interviews, this responsibility to share all information from interviews should be clear in the commissioning and contracting process.

All missing children will be screened for CSE and local pathways will be in place to ensure that they receive the appropriate single or multi-agency response. It is recommended that children who have gone missing 3 times within a 3 month period, are automatically discussed at a MASE meetings. Children placed out of area should consistently receive return interviews following missing episodes and local protocols should clearly identify who is responsible for doing this.

Local areas should have a good understanding of the links between children missing from home, care and education and CSE and use this to identify themes and patterns and to inform planning.

LSCB Strategic CSE & Missing Sub-Group Terms of Reference

Purpose:

The group provides strategic oversight for CSE and missing work across the local area on behalf of the LSCB. They will receive regular reports from the CSE & Missing Operational Group and ensure that there are sufficient multi-agency resources available to respond effectively to CSE. They will produce a local strategy and delivery plan and regularly monitor performance and delivery.

Scope:

The scope of the group is to:

- Share best practice and ensure local action is underpinned by available evidence to ensure an effective response to child sexual exploitation/missing.
- Ensure that specific local procedures are in place covering the sexual exploitation of children and young people. These procedures should be a subset of the LSCB procedures for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and be consistent with local youth offending protocols.
- Ensure that a local strategy/delivery plan is in place, in line with the West Midlands Metropolitan Area CSE Framework.
- Promote good working relationships with peers in neighbouring local authorities, police forces and health services.
- Receive regular reports from the Operational Group which provide a clear understanding of the scale and scope of CSE and Missing in the area and action that has been taken to respond to it.
- Identify gaps in service provision to ensure safe, responsive and effective services are provided to children and young people at risk of child sexual exploitation/being abused via child sexual exploitation and those that are missing/absent and use this intelligence to influence local commissioning activity.
- Ensure the views of children and young people and parents/carers are reflected in on going service developments.
- Ensure that an awareness raising and training programme is in place for professionals.

- Ensure there is an engagement strategy in place which raises awareness of CSE; how to identify it; what type of information to record; and where to report it.
- Ensure that preventative programmes are in place to raise awareness with children and young people of the risks of CSE and going missing.

Accountability

The Group is accountable and reports directly to the Local Safeguarding Children Board and works closely with all sub-groups of the board. The meeting will be minuted and a record of the work of the group will be available to the LSCB.

Effective working relationships will be forged with the Health and Wellbeing Board, Adult Safeguarding Board and the Local Police and Crime Board.

Membership (senior strategic representatives from):

West Midlands Police PPU

West Midlands Police LPU

Community Safety Team/Partnership

Health & Wellbeing Board

Safeguarding Adults Board

Local Authority – (Public Health; Social Care; Early Help; CSE Team; Regulatory Services; Youth Services; Youth Offending Services; Education; Housing)

Primary, Secondary and Special Schools

Clinical Commissioning Group

Health Providers (community and acute)

Voluntary Sector Specialist Service Providers

LSCB Lay Member

Probation

Chair of the CSE and Missing Operational Group

CSE & Missing Operational Group Terms of Reference

Purpose:

The CSE Missing & Operational Group is a multi-agency forum which directs medium and long term actions to safeguard, disrupt and reduce opportunity for children to be harmed through sexual exploitation and missing episodes.

Scope:

Direct intelligence collection and/or disruptive actions with regard to individuals who are believed to be harming children through sexual exploitation activities.

Direct safeguarding and disruption activities in locations considered vulnerable to sexual exploitation activities.

Provide oversight of ongoing criminal investigations to ensure interventions reflect the risk of harm.

Share information and intelligence with regard to children whose behaviour and activities indicate they are at risk through missing episodes or sexual exploitation.

Understand trends, networks and connections between victims, perpetrators and locations.

Consider the strong associations that have been identified between different forms of sexual exploitation, running away from home, child trafficking and substance misuse.

Share information and intelligence with regard to individuals involved in perpetrating abusive and criminal behaviour.

Understand and respond to key locations that are being used to exploit children and young people.

Develop multi-agency plans to protect children and young people; manage key locations; and to prosecute/disrupt perpetrators.

Accountability

The Group will report to each meeting of the LSCB CSE Strategic Sub-Group.

Membership

The listed agencies are considered to be the minimum full members and require routine attendance at the meeting.

Core members - Senior Operational Officers from:

West Midlands Police:

DI - Public Protection Unit (Chair)

CSE and Missing Lead(s)

Lead Officer from the Local Policing Unit

Intelligence Officer

Children's Social Care, including as appropriate, Lead for CAF/Early Help

CSE Co-ordinator

Relevant Health Professionals

Education (Missing or absent from Education including links with PRU's)

Representative from the Community Safety Team/Partnership

Local Authority Regulatory & Enforcement Services (taxis and licensing)

Housing

outh Service

Youth Offending Service

Probation

LA Commissioning team (LAC placements)

Specialist Voluntary Sector Providers