

Members are reminded that they must declare all relevant pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests relating to any items of business to be discussed at this meeting

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

EDUCATION AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 21 OCTOBER 2015 AT 09:30 HOURS
IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 3 & 4, COUNCIL HOUSE, VICTORIA
SQUARE, BIRMINGHAM, B1 1BB

A G E N D A

1 NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

The Chairman to advise the meeting to note that this meeting will be webcast for live and subsequent broadcast via the Council's Internet site (www.birminghamnewsroom.com) and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs. The whole of the meeting will be filmed except where there are confidential or exempt items.

2 APOLOGIES

To receive any apologies.

3 SHORT INQUIRY: CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME AND CARE

Evidence gathering for the Inquiry.

3 - 104

Education and Vulnerable Children O&S Committee

Short Inquiry: Children Missing from Home and Care

Session Plan

21st October 2015 at 9.30am in Committee Rooms 3 & 4

Key question: What safeguards does the City Council, working with partners, need to implement to effectively and comprehensively reduce the number of children who are missing from home and care and minimise the risks they are exposed to?

Time (approx)	Witness / Speaker	Organisation / Department
9.30 – 9.40 (10 mins)	Cllr Susan Barnett, Chair	Introductions and purpose of the meeting
9.40 – 10.20 (40 mins)	Christine Wellington, Head of Service	Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)
10.20 – 11.00 (40 mins)	Rob Willoughby, Area Director and Bali Hothi, Programme Manager for Birmingham	Children Society
11.50 – 11.40 (40 mins)	DCI Dean Young	West Midlands Police
11.40 – 12.20 (40 mins)	Michelle Gardiner, Assistant Head of Service, Internal Fostering and Val Thompson, Service Manager, Internal Residential Homes	Children in Care, Birmingham City Council
12.20 – 1.00 (40 mins)	Sivay Heer, Head of Service, Integrated Services and Care - East	Children in Care, Birmingham City Council
1.00 – 1.05 (5 mins)	Cllr Susan Barnett, Chair	Summing up and next steps

The above are indicative timings and attendees/witnesses may find it beneficial to stay for the whole meeting.

Missing from Care – Internal Fostering and Residential Services

October 2015

As of 12/10/2015 Birmingham Fostering Service has:

485 = Short Term & Long Term Mainstream Carers -

10 = Emergency Duty Team Foster Carers Carers -

50 = Connected Persons Foster Carers [family and Friends approved Foster Carers]

Children Missing from Foster Placements from April 2014 to May 2015 = 27

In the first six months of 2015, 3 episodes of children/young people missing from internal foster care have been notified.

There are 10 registered children's homes in BCC, 5 of which provide care for children with disabilities and 5 provide mainstream care. In the first six months of 2015, 140 episodes of children/young people missing from internal residential children's homes have been notified.

In line with National Minimum Standards and Fostering Regulations, foster carers for Birmingham City Council (BCC) are provided with pre and post approval training which covers safeguarding matters, including children missing from care and their responsibilities as foster carers to prevent this.

The fostering support social workers regularly visit the foster carers and offer additional guidance and support to ensure that children in the care of BCC are provided with good safe care to minimise the risk of children going missing.

A copy of the Statutory Guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care (January 2014) forms part of the Foster Carers Handbook for continued reference. A copy of this guidance is accessible by all staff in the children's homes.

Foster Carers and staff in the Children's homes are also made aware of their role alongside other agencies in reporting children who go missing as set out in the Local Safeguarding Procedures and legislative and government guidance. Every time a child goes missing from internal foster care a Schedule 7 report is completed by the Fostering Service and signed off by the Assistant Head of Service for Fostering. Within the Children's homes a Regulation 40 report is completed which is signed off by the Service Manager and Assistant Director. Social workers for the child/young person are also notified of the missing from care episode. This ensures a local and strategic oversight is kept of those children/young people missing from care and any emerging themes or patterns are noted and acted upon.

Staff in the fostering support service and in the Residential homes all have Child Protection training as part of their ongoing learning and development. This includes areas in relation to children/young people missing from care. In residential homes, staff meetings issues relating to missing from care are discussed. Previously the fostering service were not regularly monitoring and reviewing missing from care. As part of the service improvements however this data is now being considered on a monthly basis.

When a young person goes missing from residential care, staff follow the local guidance as set out in "Reporting of Missing persons from (name of) home" dated March 2014 which is due for review shortly.

Particular note is made of those young people who are placing themselves at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation. To date the Radicalization of children/young people who are missing from care has not been fully recognised as a potential risk when missing. In future this will be considered routinely in the way that CSE is now considered.

Those cases would be highlighted to colleagues in safeguarding and relevant agencies for strategy discussions.

Currently the Fostering Service are often not included in those strategy discussions/meetings for children/young people who go missing from care and this is an area for improvement as they have relevant and key information that would contribute to the risk assessment and subsequent plan.

At a strategic level key personnel from Fostering and Residential Services sit on the bi-monthly Multi Agency - Missing Operations Group [Leads are ADs for Safeguarding and Development and Integrated Services]. Members of this group include police, education, health, area services, Children's Society, Carefirst and systems representatives. The Terms of Reference of this working group is to emphasise the need to consolidate thresholds, working practices, joint ownership and working together, data collation and interrogation, alongside systems to review and improve the services and practices delivered to safeguard children missing from care and at risk of exploitation.

The statutory guidance is clear that Local Authorities must provide the children missing from care with the opportunity to speak to an independent person of their choice within 72 hours of returning who will complete a Return Interview with them.

This process is triggered by the MASH who receive a police referral and subsequently the provider, The Children's Society, are informed of the need to complete the Return Interview. The fostering service and internal Residential services are not involved in this process however the interview is likely to take place in the foster placement or at the Residential home. The Fostering Service is informed after the interview has taken place.

Practice in this area could be improved in BCC by implementing a more "joined up" approach between the Fostering Service and the MASH service.

Foster carers have access to specific out of hours telephone support service (365 days a year) which is provided by qualified social workers and team managers working in the Service as well as BCC Emergency Duty Team and BFCA [Birmingham Foster Carer Association] out of hours support.

Residential Childrens Homes have access to social workers or a duty worker in working hours, out of hours they have access to the EDT and a Service Manager/Registered Manager is on call to support the home when needed.

This ensures that all foster carers/residential staff are supported and provided with guidance wherever required about their roles and responsibilities.

All children placed in Residential homes have an up to date risk assessment. As part of their placement plan a child/young person in foster care should have a risk assessment completed by their social worker. These risk assessments are updated for young people in residential care every time they go missing.

Recommendations:

- BCC/LSCB to produce clear guidance for Residential Children's Homes and Foster Carer in relation to the Prevent Agenda, to include recognising the signs of risk and their responsibilities in terms of addressing that risk.
- The Fostering Service to be fully included in strategy discussions/meetings with colleagues in other Service areas by a more "joined up" process being developed.
- All children/young people in the care of BCC to have an up to date risk assessment as part of their ongoing care plan which is reviewed by the IRO at each CLA review.
- An integrated electronic system is required to ensure that all data in relation to children/young people who go missing from care is collated effectively with the purpose of safeguarding and supporting those children/young people.

Children Missing from Home and Care

Background Papers

Item No.	Paper	Pages
1	Terms of Reference	1
2	Definitions currently used by West Midlands Police. As at September 2015 (from Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board's website)	4
3	The interagency child protection procedures, Chapter on Children who go Missing from Care, Home and Education (Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board website) http://www.proceduresonline.com/birmingham/scb/chapters/p_ch_miss_home_care.html	5
4	The procedures for children's social care, Chapter on children who go missing from care http://birminghamcs.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_ch_miss_care.html	21
5	DFE: Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care - Flowchart showing roles and responsibilities when a child goes missing from care	27
6	DFE: Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care, January 2014	31



Work Outline / Terms of Reference (TOR)

Short Inquiry: Children Missing from Home and Care

Education and Vulnerable Children Overview and Scrutiny Committee (O&S)

Lead Member:	Cllr Susan Barnett
Inquiry Members:	<p>All Members of the Education and Vulnerable Children O&S Committee:</p> <p>Cllrs: Uzma Ahmed, Sue Anderson, Matt Bennett, Barry Bowles, Debbie Clancy, Barbara Dring, Chauhdry Rashid, Valerie Seabright, Mike Sharpe, Martin Straker Welds and Alex Yip</p> <p>Other Reps: Samera Ali, Richard Potter and Sarah Smith</p>
Lead Officer:	Benita Wishart & Amanda Simcox, Scrutiny Office
Our key question:	What safeguards does the City Council, working with partners, need to implement to effectively and comprehensively reduce the number of children who are missing from home and care and minimise the risks they are exposed to?
1. How is O&S adding value through this work?	<p>Improving safeguarding is a priority for the City Council.</p> <p>This complements the work undertaken as part of the Committee's previous Inquiry, We Need to Get it Right: A Health Check into the Council's Role in Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE).</p>
2. What needs to be done?	<p>Key issues to explore will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What role should and does the City Council play?• What roles can we expect from partners, such as the Police etc to play?• Is there effective collaboration to keep children safe, including data sharing; and policy and practice?• Are sufficient steps taken to reduce numbers of missing children / episodes?• Does the City Council manage the risks to children appropriately? <p>Possible issues, concerns and risks to be explored:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Costs to the Council and other partners when a child is missing, possible savings through different ways of working• Collaborative working• Joined up working between education and social care• Return interviews – resources and priorities



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young person's voice, Children in Care Council <p>Issues which may make children more at risk or impact on missing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSE and exploitation • Unmet mental ill-health • Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) • Familial / other abuse / neglect • Domestic violence / Homelessness / Emergency accommodation • Criminal activity, youth justice • Unaccompanied asylum seekers, trafficked children • Children not registered at Border control • Abduction / residency disputes <p>Evidence Gathering includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call for evidence and written evidence • Evidence gathering session on the 21st October 2015 • Witnesses / Written evidence to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ West Midlands Police ○ Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board ○ Children's Society
3. What timescale do we propose to do this in?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • September 2015: Terms of Reference Agreed • October 2015: Call for evidence • 21 October 2015: Evidence gathering Session • Additional evidence gathering and visits to be arranged • 25 November 2015: Committee agree draft report • Before 7 December 2015: report to Executive (8 day rule) • 17 December 2015: Committee agree final report • 22 Dec: Print & 23 Dec 2015: Report to be sent out • 12 January 2016: Report is presented to City Council
4. What outcomes are we looking to achieve?	To ensure that partners are working together to prevent and support children missing from home and care and make recommendations where this can be improved.
5. Relevant Background Information / Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ofsted, Missing Children, February 2013 • DFE, Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care, January 2014



Definitions

Missing from care: a looked after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (eg, school) and their whereabouts is not known.

Away from placement without authorisation: a looked after child whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be and the carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the police.

Police Definitions

Since April 2013 police forces have been rolling out new definitions of 'missing' and 'absent' in relation to children and adults reported as missing to the police. These are:

- *Missing:* 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; and
- *absent:* a person not at a place where they are expected or required to be.

The police classification of a person as 'missing' or 'absent' will be based on on-going risk assessment. Note that 'absent' within this definition would not include those defined as "away from placement without authorisation" above: a child whose whereabouts are known would not be treated as either 'missing' or 'absent' under the police definitions. Guidance on how police forces will apply these definitions to children was issued by ACPO in April 2013. Paragraph 20 makes a requirement that 'Local authorities should agree with local police and other partners a protocol for dealing with children who run away or go missing in their area. Where appropriate, they should also have agreed protocols with neighbouring authorities or administrations'.¹

¹ DFE, Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care, January 2014

Definitions currently used by West Midlands Police:-

As at September 2015

Missing: - 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 others.

Absent: - A person who is not at a place where they are expected or required to be.

The decision as to whether a person is missing or absent is made by West Midlands Police (usually by the duty inspector). In order to assist in their decision making process 16 questions are asked as a prompt.

The 16 Questions

1. Is this event significantly out of character?
2. Is the person likely to be subjected to harm or a crime?
3. Is the person a danger to themselves or others?
4. Is the person likely to attempt suicide?
5. Is the person a victim of abuse?
6. Does the person have any specific medical needs?
7. Is there a specific concern?
8. Do you know the person's whereabouts?

9. Have they done this before?
10. Have you been in contact with this person?
11. Who are they with?
12. Do you believe them to be involved in crime?
13. What were their intended actions when last seen?
14. What have you done to locate this person?
15. Is there a time you expect them to return?
16. Is there any other significant information you can give?

The first 8 questions are the risk-based questions. The remaining questions are the fact-finding questions.

Children Missing from Care, Home and Education



Quick Links:

[Introduction and Definitions](#)

[Agency Roles and Responsibilities](#)

[Specific Risks](#)

[Children Missing from Care and Care Leavers](#)

[Children Missing from Home](#)

[Children Missing from Education \(CME\)](#)

[Children who are Foreign Nationals and go Missing](#)

Links to Further Information

[Flowchart: Statutory Guidance on Children who Run Away or go Missing from Home or Care](#)

[Relevant Legislation and Statutory Guidance](#)

[Amendments to this Chapter](#)

Introduction and Definitions

Introduction

Children running away and going missing from care, home and education is a central issue for Birmingham safeguarding children board. Current research findings estimate that 25 per cent of children and young people, who go missing are likely to suffer significant harm. There are specific concerns about the links between children running away and the risks of sexual exploitation. Many looked after children (LAC) missing from their placements are vulnerable to sexual and other exploitation, especially children in residential care.

This chapter is based on guidance issued under Section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 which requires local authorities in exercising their social services functions, to act under the general guidance of the Secretary of State. Local authorities must comply with this guidance when exercising these functions, unless local circumstances indicate exceptional reasons that justify a variation.

This guidance complements Working Together to Safeguard Children and related statutory guidance (2015) and the Children Act 1989 guidance and regulation volumes in respect of Care planning and review.

Acknowledgement: This guidance has taken account of the DfE Statutory Guidance on 'Children who run away or go missing from home or care', January 2014.

Definitions

Based on the 'Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care' (DfE 2014) the definitions which should be used when working with children, young people and their families are set out as follows:

- **Child:** anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. 'Children' and 'young people' are used throughout this guidance to refer to anyone under the age of 18;
- **Young runaway:** a child who has run away from their home or care placement, or feels they have been forced or lured to leave;
- **Missing child:** a child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers;
- **Looked after child:** a child who is looked after by a local authority by reason of a care order, or being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989;
- **Responsible local authority:** the local authority that is responsible for a looked after child's care and care planning;
- **Host local authority:** the local authority in which a looked after child is placed when placed out of the responsible local authority's area;
- **Care leaver:** an eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989;

- **Missing from care:** a looked after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (e.g., school) and their whereabouts is not known;
- **Away from placement without authorisation:** a looked after child whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be and the carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the police;
- Care leavers cover young people from aged 16-24;
- For Police definitions of missing and absent, and responses, see below.

Agency Roles and Responsibilities

- [The West Midlands Police Force](#)
- [Legal Powers: the Birmingham City Council and the West Midlands Police](#)
- [Birmingham City Council](#)
- [Ofsted: Disclosure to Police](#)
- [Healthcare Professionals](#)

The West Midlands Police Force

The West Midlands Police Force, as the lead agency for investigating and finding missing children, will respond to children and young people going **missing** or being **absent** based on on-going risk assessments in line with current guidance. The police will prioritise all incidents of missing children as medium or high risk.

The police definitions of 'missing' and 'absent' are:

Missing

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'.

and

Absent

A person is not at a place where they are expected or required to be'.

The police classification of a person as 'missing' or 'absent' will be based on on-going risk assessment. A child whose whereabouts are known would not be treated as either 'missing' or 'absent' under the police definitions.

It is important to note that professionals or others reporting a child missing to the police, should not make the judgement themselves as to whether a child is missing or absent – this decision will be made by the police on the basis of the information provided.

Where a child is recorded by police as being absent, they will agree review times and any on-going actions with the person reporting the absence. All persons recorded by police as absent are monitored on the police system. Monitoring is ongoing and subject to regular reviews to ensure risk levels do not change. Where information comes to light which introduces any risk to that person, then the case may be re-categorised as 'missing' and a police investigation started.

One of the overriding principles of 'Absent' is that police are able to focus resources more effectively, in accordance with the police risk assessments of 'absent' and 'missing' incidents.

The Police will carry out a 'Safe and Well' check with a 'missing' child who returns and will also carry out an independent "Return Review" interview in exceptional circumstances.

Risk Assessment

The police will prioritise all incidents of missing children as medium or high risk. Where a child is recorded as being absent, the details will be recorded by the police, who will also agree review times and any on-going actions with the person reporting.

A missing child incident would be prioritised as 'high risk' where:

- The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the child is in danger through their own vulnerability; or
- The child may have been the victim of a serious crime; or
- The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger.

management team or similar command level must be involved in the examination of initial enquiry lines and approval of appropriate staffing levels. Such cases should lead to the appointment of an Investigating Officer and possibly a Senior Investigating Officer and a Police Search Advisor. There should be a media strategy and / or close contact with outside agencies. Family support should be put in place. The UK Missing Persons Bureau should be notified of the case immediately. **CEOP (National Crime Agency)** and local authority children's services should also be notified.

A missing child incident would be prioritised as '*medium risk*' where the risk posed is likely to place the subject in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others. This category requires an active and measured response by police and other agencies in order to trace the missing person and support the person reporting. This will involve a proactive investigation and search in accordance with the circumstances to locate the missing child as soon as possible.

Legal Powers: Birmingham City Council and the West Midlands Police

The police can use the powers under Section 46(1) of the Children Act 1989 to remove a child into police protection if they are likely to suffer significant harm. Police Protection lasts up to 72 hours.

Section 17 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 provides police with powers to enter and search a premises in certain circumstances, notably, with regard to this guidance, for the purposes of saving life and limb or to arrest without warrant a person who has committed an indictable offence or certain other listed offences under the section.

Section 24 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 provides police the power of summary arrest for any offence subject to certain provisions notably, for the purposes of this guidance, under S.24(5)(d) to protect a child or other vulnerable person from the person in question.

Should it be necessary to take the child into police protection, the child must be moved as soon as possible into local authority accommodation. The local authority should consider what type of accommodation is appropriate in each individual case. It is important that young people are not placed in accommodation that leaves them vulnerable to exploitation or trafficking.

Children's Social Care may need to obtain an Emergency Protection Order under Section 44 of the Children Act 1989, before expiration of the Police Protection.

The Local Authority may apply to the Court for a Recovery Order under Section 50 of the Children Act 1989. A Recovery Order can only be sought when the child is subject to an Interim or Full Care Order and it is clear that the child is in no immediate danger of significant harm.

Birmingham City Council

Section 13 of the Children Act 2004 requires local authorities and other named statutory partners to make arrangements to ensure that their functions are discharged with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. This includes planning to prevent children from going missing and to do everything possible to ensure their safe return when they do go missing. Through their inspections of local authority children's services, Ofsted will include an assessment of measures with regard to missing children as part of their key judgement on the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection.

Birmingham City Council should name a senior children's service manager as responsible for monitoring policies and performance relating to children who go missing from home or care. The responsible manager should look beyond this guidance to understand the risks and issues facing children missing from home or care and to review best practice in dealing with the issue.

Birmingham City Council must ensure that all incidents where children go missing are appropriately risk assessed, and should record all incidents of looked after children who are missing or away from placement without authorisation.

Even with strong systems and services that minimise the likelihood of young people running away, some young people will still feel that they have to run away. In all circumstances local safeguarding procedures should be followed. If there is concern that the child may be at risk if returned home, the child should be referred to children's social care to assess their needs and make appropriate arrangements for their accommodation.

Children, who are looked after should have information about, and easy access to, help lines and support services including emergency accommodation. Support should also be made available to families to help them understand why the child has run away and how they can support them on their return.

It is important that emergency accommodation can be accessed directly at any time of the day or night. Bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation is not an appropriate place for any child or young person under the age of 18 and should only be used in exceptional circumstances.

Sharing information to locate a child who is looked after, subject to a child protection plan or a child in need.

The local authority should consult with the police regarding what action should be taken to share information about a missing child who is looked after, subject to a child protection plan or a child in need. This should include an assessment of whether to release information to the media. The local authority should also notify other local authorities according to degree of concern. Consideration should also be given to whether the child or their family has links to other areas in the United Kingdom.

On receipt of a notification from another local authority, a flag should be added to the electronic record system for children's social care and consideration should be given to notifying health and other relevant partners.

Data on looked after children who go missing or are away from placement without authorisation.

The Department of Education Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care (January 2014) states the following:

"Looked after children who go missing, or who are away from placement without authorisation, can be at increased risk of sexual or other forms of exploitation or of involvement in drugs, gangs, criminal activity or in the care of the criminal justice system. Attention should be paid to repeat episodes. Data on these episodes should be analysed regularly in order to map problems and patterns. Regular reports on this data should be provided to council members and the LSCB."

Data for children missing or away from placement without authorisation should be reported to the Department for Education by the responsible authority (through their annual data returns on looked after children as part of the annual SSDA903 data collection)."

Local authorities collect information about children missing from education and educational establishments and about children who access other local authority services, such as youth services and children who are looked after.

As the guidance says, early and effective sharing of information between professionals and local agencies is essential for the identification of patterns of risky behaviour. This may be used to identify areas of concern for an individual child, or to identify 'hotspots' of activity in a local area.

Local authorities should collect data on children reported missing from care including repeat episodes of missing from care, unauthorised absences from care placements, and other relevant data and should regularly analyse this in order to map problems and patterns. This should include identifying patterns of sexual and other exploitation.

Good practice suggests that the following data should be collected and analysed by a multi professional group:

- Demographics of all children who are missing, absent or away from placement without authorisation;
- Associates of the above;
- The legal status of the children;
- Episodes, and length of episode by child;
- Numbers and themes from safe and well checks;
- Numbers and themes from return interviews;
- Cross match data with local information about gangs, CSE lists, home educated and missing from education lists, including information about children who go missing for part of the school day;
- Consideration should be given to analysing where the child is found as this information could help identify links between missing children and criminal groups.
- Analyse data by establishment and geographical area.

Data about children and young people who go missing from home, education or care should be included in regular reports to Council members, especially to the Lead Member for Children's Services and in regular reports by the local authority to Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board.

Ofsted: Disclosure to Police

On 1 April 2013 regulations came into force requiring Ofsted to disclose details of the locations of children's homes to local police services to support the police in taking a strategic and operational approach to safeguarding children particularly in relation to sexual exploitation and trafficking.

It should be noted that disclosure of this information to police services does not happen automatically and police services will need to request to receive this information on an on-going basis.

This duty is in addition to the existing obligation for Ofsted to disclose this information to local authorities. A protocol published alongside the regulations sets out the responsibilities of the public authorities to use information about the location of children's homes only for the purposes for which it was disclosed; and to share it onward only where this is compatible with safeguarding children and promoting their welfare.

Department for Education: Joint protocol: children's homes - procedure for disclosing names and addresses (2013).

Healthcare Professionals

Healthcare professionals have a key role in identifying and reporting children who may be missing from care, home and school.

- Missing children access a number of services provided by a range of health providers, for example:
- Urgent Care Units;
- Accident and Emergency Departments;
- Genito-Urinary Medicine Clinics (GaUM);
- Community Sexual Health Services; and
- Pharmacy Services.

Health professionals should have an understanding of the vulnerabilities and risks associated with children that go missing. Staff working in health settings should be aware of their professional responsibilities and the responses undertaken by the multi-agency partnership. Risks include sexual exploitation, trafficking, forced marriage and female genital mutilation. Radicalisation, also a risk factor for vulnerable young people, is managed via the national 'Prevent' strategy.

All health providers should provide a comprehensive service for Looked after Children (LAC). A Designated Nurse and Doctor for Looked after Children are located in each Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). They are available for appointments and are responsible for the commissioning and delivery of appropriate healthcare, assessments and services. Designated health professionals for LAC should share relevant information and intelligence relating to high risk individuals or emerging themes and patterns indicative of organised and targeted abuse, to the NHS Patch

Safeguarding Children Forum. They should also ensure that all health staff within their locality know how to identify, report and respond to a child who is missing from care.

Specific Risks

- [Homeless 16 / 17 year olds](#)
- [Trafficking](#)
- [Grooming](#)
- [Radicalisation](#)
- [Sexual Exploitation](#)
- [Criminal Behaviour](#)

Homeless 16 / 17 year olds

When a 16 or 17 year old runs away or goes missing they are no less vulnerable than younger children and are equally at risk, particularly of sexual exploitation or involvement with gangs.

When a 16 -17 year old presents as homeless, local authority children's services must assess their needs as for any other child. Where this assessment indicates that the young person is in need and requires accommodation under [Section 20 of the Children Act 1989](#), they will usually become looked after.

The accommodation provided must be suitable, risk assessed and meet the full range of the young person's needs. The sustainability of the placement must be considered. Young people who have run away and are at risk of homelessness may be placed in supported accommodation, with the provision of specialist support. For example, a specialist service might be provided for those who have been sexually exploited, or at risk of sexual exploitation.

Local authorities should have regard to statutory guidance issued in April 2010 to children's services authorities and local housing authorities about their duties under Part 3 of the Children Act 1989 and Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 to secure or provide accommodation for homeless 16 and 17 year olds.

Trafficking

Some of the children who local authorities look after may be unaccompanied asylum seeking children or other migrant children. Some children in this group may have been trafficked into the UK and may remain under the influence of their traffickers even while they are looked after. Trafficked children are at high risk of going missing, with most going missing within one week of becoming looked after and many within 48 hours. Unaccompanied migrant or asylum seeking children, who go missing immediately after becoming looked after, should be treated as children who may be victims of trafficking. Children who have been trafficked may be exploited for sexual purposes and the link to sexual exploitation should be addressed in conjunction with [Trafficked Children](#) and [Child Sexual Exploitation](#).

The assessment of need to inform the care plan will be particularly critical in these circumstances and should be done immediately as the window for intervention is very narrow. The assessment must seek to establish:

- Relevant details about the child's background before they came to the UK;
- An understanding of the reasons why the child came to the UK; and
- An analysis of the child's vulnerability to remaining under the influence of traffickers.

In conducting this assessment it will be necessary for the local authority to work in close co-operation with the [UK Human Trafficking Centre \(UKHTC\)](#) and immigration staff who will be familiar with patterns of trafficking into the UK. Immigration staff should be able to advise on whether information about the individual child suggests that they fit the profile of a potentially trafficked child.

Provision may need to be made for the child to be in a safe place before any assessment takes place and for the possibility that they may not be able to disclose full information about their circumstances immediately. The location of the child should not be divulged to any enquirers until their identity and relationship with the child has been established, if necessary with the help of police and immigration services. In these situations the roles and responsibilities of care providers must be fully understood and recorded in the placement plan. Proportionate safety measures that keep the child safe and take into account their best interests should also be put in place to safeguard the child from going missing from care or from being re-trafficked.

It will be essential that the local authority continues to share information with the police and immigration staff, concerning potential crimes against the child, the risk to other children, or other relevant immigration matters.

'Safeguarding Children Who May Have Been Trafficked: Practice Guidance (2011) contains practical guidance for agencies which are likely to encounter, or have referred to them, children and young people who may have been trafficked. Where it is suspected that a child has been trafficked, they should be referred by the local authority into the UK's victim identification framework, the [National Referral Mechanism \(NRM\)](#).

The Trafficked Children Toolkit, developed by the London Safeguarding Children Board, has been made available to all local authorities to help professionals assess the needs of these children and to refer them to the NRM.

The NSPCC Child Trafficking Advice Centre (CTAC) provides specialist advice and information to professionals who have concerns that a child or young person may have been trafficked. CTAC can be contacted at free phone number: 0808 800 5000, Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm or email help@nspcc.org.uk

Grooming

Grooming is when someone builds an emotional connection with a child to gain their trust for the purposes of abuse or exploitation. Children and young people can be groomed online or in the real world, by a stranger or by someone they know - for example a family member, friend or professional. Groomers may be male or female. They could be any age. Many children and young people don't understand that they have been groomed, or that what has happened is abuse.

Children can be groomed for the purpose of sexual abuse as well as other forms of exploitation including involvement in criminal and extremist activity. Children who are missing are more vulnerable to being groomed and may also go missing as a result of being groomed.

Protecting Children at Risk of Radicalisation

Children and young people can suffer harm when exposed to extremist ideology. This harm can range from a child adopting or complying with extreme views which limit their social interaction and full engagement with their education, to children being groomed for involvement in violent attacks.

Children can be exposed to harmful, extremist ideology in the immediate or extended family, or relatives/family friends who live outside the family home but have influence over the child's life. Older children or young people might self-radicalise over the internet or through the influence of their peer network – in this instance their parents might not know about this or feel powerless to stop their child's radicalisation.

Going missing is a risk factor in relation to radicalisation:

- A child may go missing because they have already been radicalised;
- A child's risk of being radicalised might increase because they are missing and are spending time with people who may seek to involve them in radical/extreme activities. The risk is heightened whilst they are missing, because the protective factors of family or care are not available to them.

Professionals should always assess whether a child who has gone missing is at risk of radicalisation.

Children at Risk of Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

The sexual exploitation of children involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where the young person (or third person/s) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common.

Involvement in exploitative relationships is characterised by the child's or young person's limited availability of choice as a result of their social, economic or emotional vulnerability.

A common feature of CSE is that the child or young person does not recognise the coercive nature of the relationship and does not see themselves as a victim of exploitation.

Going missing is a significant risk factor in relation to sexual exploitation:

- A child may go missing because they are being sexually exploited;
- A child's risk of being sexually exploited might increase because they are missing and are spending time with people who may seek to involve them in sexual exploitation. The risk is heightened whilst they are missing because the protective factors of family or care are not available to them.

Because there is such a strong link between children going missing and risk of sexual exploitation, professionals should always assess whether a child who has gone missing is being sexually exploited or at risk of being sexually exploited.

Children at Risk of being Drawn into Offending Behaviour

Children and young people who go missing from care, home and education also need safeguarding against the risk of being drawn into offending behaviour by gangs or criminal groups.

Children Missing from Care and Care Leavers

- [Care Leavers](#)
- [Out of Area Placements](#)
- [Looked after Children who are away from Placement without Authorisation](#)
- [Prevention and Planning – Risk Assessment](#)
- [Actions when the whereabouts of a Looked after Child is not known](#)

- [Actions when a Child has been found](#)
- [Repeat Running Away](#)

Care Leavers

From the age of 16 young people in care are referred to as care leavers, however, it is important to note that local authorities have very similar duties and responsibilities towards 16 and 17 year old care leavers as they do to children in care and for the purposes of this guidance, the response to a missing care leaver age 16 and 17 year old should be the same.

Local authorities continue to have a range of responsibilities towards children leaving care until the young person's 21st and in some instances their 25th birthday. It is good practice to follow the guidance set out below whilst a young person remains 'leaving care'.

Care leavers, particularly 16 and 17 year olds, are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and may go missing from their home or accommodation. Local authorities must ensure that care leavers under the age of 18 live in "suitable accommodation" as defined in Section 23B (10) of the Children Act 1989 and Regulations 9(2) of the Care Leavers Regulations, [The Care Leavers \(England\) Regulations 2010](#).

In particular young people should feel safe in their accommodation and the areas where it is located. Local authorities should ensure that pathway plans set out where a young person may be vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking or going missing, and put in place support services to minimise this risk.

Out of Area Placements

When a child is placed out of their local authority area, the responsible authority must make sure that the child has access to the services they need in advance of placement. Notification of the placement must be made to the host authority and other specified services.

If children placed out of their local authority run away, this protocol should be followed, in addition to complying with other processes that are specified in the policy of the host local authority. It is possible that the child will return to the area of the responsible authority so it is essential that liaison between the police and professionals in both authorities is well managed and coordinated. A notification process for missing/ absent episodes should be agreed between responsible and host local authorities as a part of the care plan and the placement plan.

Looked after Children who are away from Placement without Authorisation

Sometimes a looked after child may be away from their placement without authorisation. While they are not missing, they may still be placing themselves at risk (e.g. they may be at the house of friends where there are concerns about risks of sexual exploitation). The carer or social worker should take reasonable steps to ascertain the wellbeing of the child including, when appropriate, visiting the location. However, if there is a concern the child may be at significant risk of harm to themselves or to others then police should also be notified in order that appropriate safeguarding measures can be taken. This should not be confused with reporting a child missing.

Prevention and Planning – Risk Assessment

Local authorities have a duty to place a looked after child in the most appropriate placement to safeguard the child and minimise the risk of the child running away. The care plan and the placement plan should include details of the arrangements that will need to be in place to keep the child safe and minimise the risk of the child going missing from their placement.

Remember:

- The **Care Plan** – should include strategies to avoid unauthorised absences and/or a child going missing. It should also include strategies to reduce the duration and risks associated if the child does have unauthorised absences/go missing;
- The **Placement Plan** – should include strategies for preventing the child from taking unauthorised absences/going missing;
- A risk assessment should be completed for all children for whom there is concern that they may run away. Distance from home, family and friends should be considered as a risk factor;
- Provide the child with advice about an independent advocate and take the child's views into account;
- Statutory reviews should consider any absences and revise strategies to prevent repeat absences and/or missing incidents and the care plan should be revised accordingly.

Where a child already has an established pattern of running away, the Care Plan should include a strategy to keep the child safe and minimising the likelihood of the child running away in the future. This should be discussed and agreed as far as possible with the child and with the child's carers and should include detailed information about the responsibilities of all services, the child's parents and other adults involved in the family network.

Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) should be informed about missing/ absent episodes and they should address these in statutory reviews. The pre incident risk assessment should be updated after missing incident and should be regularly reviewed.

Designated health professionals for **Looked After Children (LAC)** should be informed of children missing from care who are deemed to be 'high risk'. They should be included in any multiagency strategy meetings or activity to manage the child's retrieval and any subsequent health needs.

Designated education professionals should be informed and included in the review process.

Whenever the whereabouts of a looked after child is not known, the foster carer or the manager on duty in the children's home is responsible for carrying out preliminary checks to see if the child can be located. For example, if a child was supposed to have returned home from school but has not arrived within the normal journey time, checks could include finding out if there are transport delays, phone calls to the child, phone calls to the school to see if the child has been delayed etc. If these initial checks do not succeed in locating the child or there are still concerns that, despite contact being made with the child they are at risk, the individuals and agencies listed below should be informed.

It is clearly important that a deadline is set at the outset of these initial checks so that they don't continue beyond a reasonable timeframe. What timeframe is reasonable should be based on an assessment of the risks relating to the individual child. In some cases, there might be particular reasons to be worried for the child's safety immediately and the individuals agencies detailed below should be contacted straight away – this in conjunction with on-going attempts to contact the child and find out why they aren't where they are supposed to be.

The individuals and agencies who should be contacted when a child is missing or they are away from placement without authorisation:

- The local police;
- The authority responsible for the child's placement – if they have not already been notified prior to the police being informed;
- The parents and any other person with parental responsibility, unless it is not reasonably practicable to do so, or would be inconsistent with the child's welfare; and
- The **Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)**.

The local Vulnerable Person's Pen Picture should be used when reporting the child missing to the police. As a minimum requirement, all reports should include the following information:

- The child's name/s; date of birth; status; responsible authority;
- Where and when they went missing;
- Who, if anyone, they went missing with;
- What was the child wearing plus any belongings such as bags, phone etc.;
- Description and recent photo;
- Medical history, if relevant;
- Time and location last seen;
- Circumstances or events around going missing;
- Details of family, friends and associates;
- Updated risk assessment.

The carer/s should take all reasonable steps, which a good parent would take, to secure the safe and speedy return of the child based on their own knowledge of the child and the information in the child's placement plan. If there is suspected risk of harm to the child the carer/s should liaise immediately with the police.

Following initial discussions between the allocated children's social care worker and the police, they should agree an **immediate strategy** for locating the child and an action plan. This to include a range of actions to locate and ensure the safe return of the child, including:

- Arrangements for attempts to be made to contact the child on a daily basis by, for example, calling their mobile phone or the phones of friends or relatives that they may be with;
- The **Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)** should also try and contact the child;
- Visiting their parents' address/es and of any friends or relatives with whom they may be staying;
- Police should consider requesting a trace on the child's mobile phone and/or oyster card.

If the child remains missing from more than 72 hours the social worker will arrange a missing person's strategy meeting to share information and coordinate action to locate the child.

- Any publicity will be led by the Police, the use of harbouring notices etc. will be agreed at the missing person's strategy meeting. Recovery Orders may be used where the child is Looked After;
- During the investigation to find the missing/run away child, regular liaison and communication should take place between the police, Birmingham City Council children's social care services and the host authority (if an out of area placement) and any other agencies involved;
- Birmingham City Council should ensure that plans are in place to respond promptly once the child is found and for determining if the placement remains appropriate.

that the child has returned. Arrangements should have been made for Safe and Well checks and Independent Return Review interviews:

Safe and Well Checks

Safe and well checks are carried out by the police as soon as possible after the child has returned. Their purpose is to check for any indications that the child has suffered harm, where and with whom they have been, and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them.

Where a child goes missing frequently, it may not be practicable for the police to see them every time they return. In these cases a reasonable decision should be taken in agreement between the police and the child's parent or carer with regard to the frequency of such checks bearing in mind the established link between frequent missing episodes and serious harm, which could include gang involvement, forced marriage, maltreatment or abuse at home, bullying or sexual exploitation. The assessment of whether a child might run away again should be based on information about:

- Their individual circumstances;
- Family circumstances and background history;
- Their motivation for running away;
- Their potential destinations and associates;
- Their recent pattern of absences;
- The circumstances in which the child was found or returned; and
- Their individual characteristics and risk factors such as whether a child has learning difficulties, mental health issues, depression and other vulnerabilities.

Independent Return Review

The independent return review is an in-depth interview and should be carried out by an independent professional (e.g. a social worker, teacher, health professional or police officer, not involved in caring for the child and who is trained to carry out these interviews). The child should be seen on their own unless they specifically request to have someone with them. The child should be offered the option of speaking to an independent representative or advocate. The IRO should be informed.

The responsible local authority should ensure the return review interview takes place, working closely with the host authority where appropriate. Contact should be made with the child within 72 hours of them being located or returning from absence, to arrange the independent return review interview in a neutral place where they feel safe.

The interview and actions that follow from it should:

- Identify and deal with any harm the child has suffered – including harm that might not have already been disclosed as part of the 'Safe and Well check' – either before they ran away or whilst missing;
- Understand and try to address the reasons why the child ran away;
- Help the child feel 'safe' / understand that they have options, to prevent repeat instances of them running away;
- Understand what the child would like to see happen next whether short term and/or long term;
- Gather the parents or carers views of the circumstances, if appropriate;
- Provide the child with information on how to stay safe if they choose to run away again, including helpline numbers.

It is especially important that the independent Return Review interview takes place when a child:

- Has been reported missing on two or more occasions;
- Is frequently absent without authorisation;
- Has been hurt or harmed while they have been missing;
- Is at known or suspected risk of sexual exploitation or trafficking;
- Is at known or suspected risk of involvement in criminal activity or drugs;
- Has contact with persons posing risk to children; and/or
- Has been engaged (or is believed to have engaged) in criminal activities during their absence.

Follow up

The local authority children's social care services, police and other agencies involved with the child should work together to assess the child and build up a comprehensive picture of:

- Why the child went missing;
- What happened while they were missing;
- Who they were with when they went missing and where they were found;
- What support they require upon returning home; and
- Whether a statutory review of the care plan is required.

Where children refuse to engage with the interviewer, parents and/or carers should be offered the opportunity to provide any relevant information and intelligence they may be aware of. This should help to prevent further instances of the child running away and identify early the support needed for them.

Repeat Running Away

If a child continually runs away actions following earlier incidents need reviewing and alternative strategies should be considered.

To reduce repeat running away and improve the longer-term safety of children and young people, the agencies involved may want to provide:

- Better access and timely independent return interviews, particularly for the most vulnerable;
- Safety planning with the child for their missing;
- Better access to support whilst a young person is away, which may come from the voluntary sector.

There may be local organisations in the area that can provide repeat runaways with an opportunity to talk about their reasons for running away, and can link runaways and their families with longer-term help if appropriate. Local authorities should work with organisations that provide these services in their area.

Children's homes staff and foster carers should be trained and supported to offer a consistent approach to the care of children, including being proactive about strategies to prevent children from running away; and to understand the procedures that must be followed if a child goes missing.

The competence and support needs of staff in children's homes and foster cares in responding to missing from care issues should be considered as part of their regular appraisal and supervision.

The Children's Homes Regulations 2015 require children's homes to have a missing child policy. They also require that before implementing, or making substantive changes to an existing policy, children's homes shall consult with relevant partners and have regard to any relevant local authority or police protocols on missing children. Finally, where a child is, or has been, persistently absent without permission from the children's home; or is at risk of harm, the children's home shall ask the local authority that looks after the child to review that child's care plan.

Please also refer to the Department of Education's, '[Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care: Flowchart to accompany the statutory guidance](#)'.

Children Missing from Home

- [Children Missing from Home](#)
- [Notifying the Police](#)
- [Actions when a Child is Missing](#)
- [Actions when a Child has been Found](#)

Children Missing from Home

When Birmingham City Council and the West Midlands Police Force analyse trends and patterns in relation to children, who run away or go missing from home, particular attention should be paid to repeat 'missing' and 'absent' episodes.

Birmingham City Council and Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board should be alert to the risk of sexual exploitation or involvement in drugs, gangs or criminal activity such as trafficking and be aware of local "hot spots" as well as concerns about any individuals, who children run away to be with.

Birmingham City Council and Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board should also consider the 'hidden missing', who are children who have not been reported missing to the police, but have come to an agency's attention after accessing other services. There may also be trafficked children who have not previously come to the attention of children's services or the police. Research demonstrates that children from black and minority ethnic groups, and children that go missing from education are less likely to be reported as missing. Local authorities and the police should be proactive in places where they believe under reporting may be more likely because of the relationships some communities, or individuals, have with the statutory sector.

Children missing from home are subject to risks and vulnerabilities similar to those of children who are looked after. NHS designated and named professionals hold a statutory role with regards to safeguarding in the local health community, and must be included in the information sharing and management processes being put in place for children deemed to be at high risk.

Notifying the Police

The police will respond to all notifications of children categorised as 'missing' as medium or high risk in accordance with this guidance. Where a child is categorised as being absent, the details will be recorded by the police, who will also agree review times and any on-going actions with the person reporting.

The information required by the police to assist in locating and returning the child to a safe environment is as follows:

- The child's name/s; date of birth; status; responsible authority;
- Where and when they went missing;
- Who, if anyone, they went missing with;
- What the child was wearing plus any belongings they had with them such as bags, phone etc;
- Description and recent photo;
- Medical history, if relevant;
- Time and location last seen;
- Circumstances or events around going missing;
- Details of family, friends and associates.

Actions when a Child is Missing

Whenever there are concerns that a child who is missing may be suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm child protection procedures must be initiated in collaboration with children's social care services. See [Referrals Procedure](#).

A risk assessment should be completed in line with this protocol and action by the police will include:

- An active and measured response by police and other agencies in order to trace the missing child and support the person reporting;
- A proactive investigation and search in accordance with the circumstances to locate the missing child as soon as possible;
- Putting family support in place;
- Notifying the UK Missing Persons Bureau of the case;
- Notifying CEOP and children's social care services.

Where a child is living at home, and is the subject of a child protection plan, or, the subject of a s47 enquiry, additional action is required. This includes:

- Ensuring that a strategy meeting is arranged as soon as practicable and in any event within 7 days. If the child has returned prior to the date of the strategy meeting, it is not a requirement for the meeting to go ahead. Representatives from both the Police Missing Persons Unit and Public Protection Unit should attend the strategy meeting, as well as other practitioners involved with the child;
- In addition, a member of the senior management team or similar command level must be involved in the examination of initial enquiry lines and approval of appropriate staffing levels.

Actions when a Child has been Found

Where the child is known to children's social care services or meets the criteria for referral to children's social care services, the Local Authority will ensure that an assessment takes place and there are a range of service options available to address the child's needs following the safe and well check and independent return review interview.

Young people who have run away and are at risk of homelessness may be placed in supported accommodation, with the provision of specialist support, for example, for those who may have been sexually exploited.

Safe and Well Checks

Safe and well checks should be carried out by the police as soon as possible after the child has returned. Their purpose is to check for any indications that the child has suffered harm, where and with whom they have been, and to give the child an opportunity to disclose any offending against them.

Where a child goes missing frequently, it may not be practicable for the police to see them every time they return. In these cases a reasonable decision should be taken in agreement between the police and the child's parent with regard to the frequency of such checks bearing in mind the established link between frequent missing episodes and serious harm. In addition consideration should be given to a referral to children's social care services for an assessment to understand the reasons why the child is going missing and to further assess the risk of harm.

The assessment of whether a child might run away again should be based on information about:

- Their individual circumstances;

- Family circumstances and background history;
- Their motivation for running away;
- Their potential destinations and associates;
- Their recent pattern of absences;
- The circumstances in which the child was found or returned; and
- Their individual characteristics and risk factors such as whether a child has learning difficulties, mental health issues, depression and other vulnerabilities.

Independent Return Review

The Independent Return Review is an in-depth interview and should be carried out by an independent professional (e.g. a social worker, teacher, health professional or police officer, who does not usually work with the child and is trained to carry out these interviews). Children sometimes need to build up trust with a person before they will discuss in depth the reasons why they ran away.

The police should make a referral to the children's social care services to ensure that a return review interview takes place. Contact should be made with the child within 72 hours of them being located or returning from absence, to arrange an independent return review interview in a neutral place where they feel safe.

The interview and actions that follow from it should:

- Identify and deal with any harm the child has suffered – including harm that might not have already been disclosed as part of the 'Safe and Well check' – either before they ran away or whilst missing;
- Understand and try to address the reasons why the child ran away;
- Help the child feel 'safe' and understand that they have options, to prevent repeat instances of them running away;
- Understand what the child would like to see happen next whether short term and/or long term;
- Gather the parents or carers views of the circumstances, if appropriate;
- Provide the child with information on how to stay safe if they choose to run away again, including helpline numbers.

It is **especially** important that the independent return review interview takes place when a child:

- Has been reported missing on two or more occasions;
- Is frequently absent without parental agreement;
- Has been hurt or harmed while they have been missing;
- Is at known or suspected risk of sexual exploitation or trafficking;
- Is at known or suspected risk of involvement in criminal activity or drugs;
- Has contact with persons posing risk to children; and/or
- Has been engaged (or is believed to have engaged) in criminal activities during their absence.

Following the safe and well check and independent return review, the local authority children's services, police and voluntary services should assess the child's needs and work together:

- To build up a comprehensive picture of why the child went missing;
- What happened while they were missing;
- Who they were missing with and where they were found; and
- What support they require upon returning home

Where children refuse to engage with the interview, parents should be offered the opportunity to provide any relevant information and intelligence they may be aware of. This should help to prevent further instances of the child running away and identify early the support needed for them.

Information about local help lines and agencies working with runaways should be provided to the child and family.

Children Missing from Education (CME)

- [Definition of Children Missing Education](#)

- **Recognition and Response**
- **Notifications and Actions**

Definition of Children Missing Education

For the purpose of the Statutory Guidance on Children Missing Education (2015), children missing education are defined as those who are not on a school roll or receiving suitable education otherwise than at school. Those who are regularly absent or have missed 10 school days or more without permission may be at risk of becoming 'children missing education'.

Recognition and Response

Enquiries into the circumstances surrounding a child who is missing from school can be effectively supported by schools adopting an admissions procedure which requires a parent/carer to provide documentary evidence of their own and the child's identity and status in the UK, and the address that they are residing at. These checks should not become delaying factors in the admissions process.

If a member of school/educational establishment/college staff becomes aware that a child may have run away or gone missing, they should try to establish with the parents/ carers, what has happened. If this is not possible, or the child is missing, the designated safeguarding teacher/advisor should, together with the class teacher, assess the child's vulnerability.

From the first day that a child does not attend school and there is no explanation or authorisation of the absence, the following steps should be taken:

- A trained staff member will make contact with the parents/carers (person with parental responsibility for the child) to seek reassurance that the child is safe at home;
- The outcome of the contact should be assessed and if there are any concerns a consultation with the school/establishment/colleges designated safeguarding adviser should take place to consider the child's vulnerability.

In the following circumstances a referral to children's social care and /or the police should always be made promptly:

- The child may be the victim of a crime;
- The child is subject of a Child Protection plan;
- The child is subject of s47 enquiries;
- The child is looked after;
- There is a known person posing a risk to children in the household or in contact with the household;
- There is a history of the family moving frequently;
- There are serious issues of attendance.

The answers to further questions could assist a judgement whether or not to inform LA children's social care and the police:

- In which age range is the child?
- Is this very sudden and unexpected behaviour?
- Have there been any past concerns about the child associating with significantly older young people or adults?
- Was there any significant incident prior to the child's unexplained absence?
- Has the child been a victim of bullying?
- Are there health reasons to believe that the child is at risk? e.g.
- Does the child need essential medication or health care?
- Was the child noted to be depressed prior to the absence?
- Are there religious or cultural reasons to believe that the child is at risk? e.g.
- Rites of passage or forced marriage planned for the child?
- Has the child got a disability and/or special educational needs?
- Have there been past concerns about this child and family which together with the sudden disappearance are worrying? e.g.
 - Is there any known history of drug or alcohol dependency within the family?
 - Is there any known history of domestic violence?
 - Is there concern about the parent/carer's ability to protect the child from harm?

The length of time that a child remains out of school could, of itself, be an alerting factor of risk of harm to the child. Accordingly if a situation is not resolved within 3 days the Education Welfare Service should be contacted, then referrals should be made to the police and LA children's social care, as appropriate over the next two weeks.

Extended leave of absence can be authorised by the head teacher, at which point a return date is set. In these cases the time line for enquiries starts from when the child does not attend school on the expected return date, not from the day the extended leave started.

Notifications and Actions

Day one

If the answers to any of the points set out in the previous section indicates that there are concerns about the child's safety then a referral should be made to the police and children's social care on day one. The education welfare service should be informed and requested to assist in locating the child.

Step one:

- Contact the local police station (24 hour response);
- Any suspicion/evidence of crime must be clearly stated;
- The circumstances and all available information regarding the child and family will be required.

Step two:

- The missing person report will be risk assessed and the local police response team will carry out immediate actions;
- The investigation will be progressed by the police response team, in conjunction with either the local Missing Persons Unit and/or the CID.

Step three:

- The missing person report will generate a notification to the police;
- The police will work with, and refer information to Birmingham City Council children's social care;
- LA children's social care, who must be contacted as soon as possible in these circumstances, will also liaise with the the Police Public Protection Unit in order to identify, and act upon, any suspicion of child abuse or child related crime.

Step four:

The school / educational establishment / college should work in collaboration with children's social care and the police and a safeguarding education representative should participate in any strategy discussions, s47 enquiries and Child Protection Conferences which may arise.

Reasonable enquiry:

If the judgement reached on day one is that there is no reason to believe that the child is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm, then the school may delay making a referral. The process of 'reasonable enquiry' has not been identified in regulations, however this includes school staff checking with all members of staff whom the child may have had contact with, and with the pupil's friends and their parents, siblings and known relatives at this school and others.

School staff should also make telephone calls to any numbers held on record or identified, sending a letter to the last known address, home visits by some school based staff and consultation with local authority staff.

Days two to twenty-eight

If the above response was unsuccessful, the school should contact the local authority Children Missing in Education (CME) Team, Tel: 0121 303 4983. The local authority should make enquiries by visiting the child's home and asking for information from the family's neighbours and their local community, as appropriate.

The CME Team should also check databases within the local authority, use agreed protocols to check local databases, e.g. LA housing, health and the police; check with agencies known to be involved with the family, with the local authority the child moved from originally, and with any local authority to which the child may have moved.

The child's circumstances and vulnerability should be reviewed and reassessed regularly jointly by the school's nominated safeguarding advisor and the CME Officer in consultation with children's social care and the police as appropriate.

Child missing from school for more than four weeks

A child may not be removed from the school roll before the end of four weeks. After four weeks the child's Common Transfer file should be uploaded to the Department for Education secure site for the transfer of pupil information when a pupil moves between schools. The Local Authority Children Missing in Education Team must also be informed.

Transfer of information when a pupil changes school

The Education (Pupil Information) (England) Regulations 2000 (SI 2000/297) (as amended by SI 2001/1212 and SI 2002/1680) governs the transfer of information between schools.

- Regulation 10(3) states that 'The head teacher of the pupil's old school shall send the information within fifteen school days of the pupil's ceasing to be registered at the school'.

However:

- Regulation 10 (4) states that 'This regulation does not apply where it is not reasonably practicable for the head teacher of the old school to ascertain the pupil's new school or where the pupil was registered at his old school for less than four weeks'.

If the CME team or any other agency becomes aware the child has moved to another school the service should ensure all relevant agencies are informed so that arrangements can be made to forward records from the previous school.

Children who are Foreign Nationals and go Missing

- **Definitions**
- **Action and Responsibilities when the whereabouts of a Child 'subject to restrictions' is not known**
- **Action when the Child 'subject to restriction' is found**

Definitions

This section applies to children who are 'subject to restriction'. I.e. who have:

- Proceeded through immigration control without obtaining leave to enter; or
- Left the border control area Border Force accommodation without permission; or
- Been granted temporary admission; or
- Been granted temporary release or bail; or
- Released on a restriction order; or
- Served with a 'notice of liability to deport' or is the dependant of a foreign national offender whose status in the UK is under consideration by criminal casework – these dependants could be British Citizens or have extant leave.

Action and Responsibilities when the whereabouts of a Child 'subject to restrictions' is not known

Home Office staff must make a missing person's referral to the police, the UK Missing Person Bureau and the local authority children's social care in a number of circumstances including:

- When a child 'subject to restriction' is identified as having run away from their parents;
- Where they are looked after and have gone missing from their placement;
- Where they are being hidden by their parents and where there is concern for the child's safety because they are being hidden by, or have gone missing with, their family.

A copy of the missing persons notification form must be faxed or emailed to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and the UK MPB.

If Home Office staff believe that a child is being coerced to abscond or go missing, they must treat this as a concern that the child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm and report it to the local police and children's social care services.

Notifications will also be made where a missing child is found by Home Office staff. See **Home Office Guidance: Missing Children and Vulnerable Adults Guidance**.

The local authority and health are responsible for:

- Reporting any missing child who is in their care to the police;
- Notifying the Home Office when a child is reported missing to the police or is found.

The police are responsible for:

- Investigating all children reported missing by the Home Office - following receipt of a missing person's notification;

- Conducting joint investigations with the Home Office where necessary;
- Circulating a missing child on the Police National Computer (PNC).

The Police central point of contact is the PNC Team in Liverpool.

The local authority will also notify the Home Office Evidence and Enquiry Unit when a child in their care goes missing or when a missing child returns or is found. The Home Office must maintain regular weekly contact with the local authority and the police until the child is found and record all contact with the police and local authority.

Action when the Child 'subject to restriction' is found

Found by Home Office Staff

The local police and local authority must be informed immediately.

In consultation with the local police and local authority children's social care, a decision will be made as to where the child is to be taken, if they are not to be left at the address where they are encountered. The Home Office must follow up enquiries with the local police and children/adult services in order to identify if there are any safeguarding issues.

Found by the police or local authority

The Home Office Command and Control Unit [1] will be the single point of contact for the local police and the Evidence and Enquiry Unit [2] will be the single point of contact for local authorities to notify the Home Office that a child has been found.

[1] CommandandControlUnit@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

[2] [Home Office UK Border Agency](#), Evidence and Enquiry Unit, 12th Floor Lunar House, 40 Wellesley Road, London, CR9 2BY

Flowchart: Statutory Guidance on Children who Run Away or go Missing from Home or Care

[Click here to view flowchart showing roles and responsibilities when a child goes missing from care](#)

Relevant Legislation and Statutory Guidance

[The Education Act 1996](#)

[The Education Act 2002](#)

[The Children Act 1989](#)

[The Children Act 2004](#)

[Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities: Children Missing Education \(January 2015\)](#)

[The Education \(Pupil Registration\)\(England\) Regulations 2006](#), as amended (Education law regarding pupil registration where a child is on a school role):

[The Education \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2013](#)

[Section 175 of the Education Act 2002](#)

[Section 11 of the Children Act 2004](#)

[The Children's Homes Regulations 2015](#)

Amendments to this Chapter

This chapter was updated throughout in August 2015 and should be re-read.

End.

SCOPE OF THIS CHAPTER

This procedure applies when a looked after child goes missing from a foster home or children's home.

This procedure does not apply to situations in which a looked after child seems to have been forcibly removed from their placement. This should be reported immediately to the police as a crime.

RELATED GUIDANCE

[Statutory Guidance on Children who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care \(January 2014\)](#)

[Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services \(2011\) Paragraphs 3.88 – 3.94](#)

Contents

1. [Child/Young Person at Risk of Going Missing](#)
2. [If the Young Person Goes Missing from Placement](#)
3. [Missing Person's Strategy Meeting](#)
4. [When the Young Person is Located](#)
5. [Safe and Well Check](#)
6. [Return Interview](#)
7. [Updating the Placement Plan and Care Plan](#)
8. [The Risk Assessment List](#)

1. Child/Young Person at Risk of Going Missing

All concerns that a looked after child may be at risk of going missing must be reported to the child's social worker who will review the [Placement Plan](#) with the carer (foster carer or key worker). This will take into account:

- The reasons why the young person may wish to go missing from the placement; and
- The risks to the young person's welfare if s/he goes missing from the placement.

The Risk Assessment List (See [Section 8, The Risk Assessment List](#)) may help in identifying any specific risks to the young person.

The social worker and the carer will:

- Consider whether any changes to the placement plan might reduce the risk of the young person going missing and the risks to the young person if s/he does go missing;
- Decide whether one or both of them should talk to the young person about the risks of going missing and the seriousness with which it is taken; and
- Draw up a vulnerable person's pen picture.

The vulnerable person's pen picture is a record of information about the young person that is likely to be necessary if s/he goes missing, including a physical description, information about particular risks relevant to his/her circumstances and information likely to be useful in tracing his/her whereabouts.

When a looked after child moves to a new placement, if there is a known risk that s/he will go missing, the social worker will:

- Complete a vulnerable person's pen picture with the new carer; and
- Ensure that the new placement plan sets out clearly how the carer will minimise the risk that the young person will go

missing and the actions to be taken if s/he does go missing.

2. If the Young Person Goes Missing from Placement

When a young person is **Absent Without Consent** from his/her placement, this will not necessarily raise immediate concerns for his/her welfare: the carer (foster carer or key worker) must exercise personal discretion in deciding how long to delay before taking action. The Risk Assessment List (See **Section 8, The Risk Assessment List**) may help in this decision.

The carer will normally try to locate the young person before contacting the police but may decide to alert them immediately if there seems to be an imminent risk of serious harm. After notifying the police s/he will continue to try to locate young person.

The carer will try to ascertain the young person's whereabouts by making phone calls to the young person's own phone, family members, friends etc. These initial calls may succeed in making contact with the young person, but the carer should be cautious about declaring that his/her whereabouts are known. It is not enough to accept the young person's assurance about where they are: the carer should seek confirmation - for example speaking to an adult whose voice they recognise or calling back on an identifiable landline.

The carer should check whether the young person has returned to the placement by searching the premises, and may wish to check other sites in the immediate area where the young person is likely to be.

If the young person's whereabouts cannot be ascertained the carer will notify.

- The police;
- The young person's social worker; and
- The young person's parents (unless this would not be reasonably practicable or would be inconsistent with the young person's welfare).

If out of hours the carer will also notify the Emergency Duty Team.

On receiving information that the young person has gone missing the social worker will immediately notify.

- The independent reviewing officer; and
- If the placement is outside the city, the host local authority.

The social worker will ensure that the young person's carer has clear instructions about the actions expected when the young person is located.

It is important to be aware that the police work to different definitions:

- Under the police definition a person is missing only if their whereabouts cannot be established **and** either the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests that the person may be the subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another person. If the young person is classified as missing, the police will actively search for him/her;
- If the young person is not classified as missing the police will regard him/her as "absent". In this case they will not actively search for him/her. They will hold the information on record and review it from time to time, and may later decide that changed circumstances or new information require that the young person should now be regarded as "missing".

The social worker and carers should continue their efforts to locate the young person and return him/her to the placement.

3. Missing Person's Strategy Meeting

If the young person is missing for more than 72 hours the social worker will arrange a missing person's strategy meeting to share information and co-ordinate the action plan to locate the young person. The strategy meeting must be held within 5 working days of the 72 hour time limit being met.

The social worker may trigger this meeting earlier if s/he feels that the young person is at high risk – for example when there are concerns about possible sexual exploitation.

If two or more young people go missing together, then the social workers responsible for all the young people will consider

whether to arrange a single missing person's strategy meeting to address the needs of all of them. Recording this meeting may raise issues of confidentiality and a separate individual record of the meeting and a separate action plan must be drawn up for each young person.

The social worker and the child's carer (foster carer or key worker) will discuss who should be invited to the meeting. For example:

- Social Care - *The social worker, the child's foster carer or residential key worker and the independent reviewing officer. Is any other person undertaking direct work?*
- Police - *Missing persons coordinator; neighbourhood officer; Public Protection Unit if there is specific involvement or concern;*
- Education/LACES;
- The young person's family and other connected persons - *Who in the young person's network is likely to have relevant information about the young person's movements and/or have a role in the recovery plan?*
- Health;
- Other Agencies - *Any other professional who may have information concerning the disappearance, or have a role in the recovery plan (for example Youth Services, TESS, Youth Offending Service, Lifeline).*

The missing person's strategy meeting will be chaired by the team manager responsible for the young person. It will:

- Share and clarify information relating to the young person's disappearance and the action already taken to locate him/her;
- Consider what further information may be needed to locate the young person;
- Decide on action to be taken to locate and return the young person – by whom and within what timescale;
- Consider the need for legal action - police protection, emergency protection order or recovery order;
- Outline what action should be taken once the young person is located, including confirming that s/he will return to the same placement or making alternative arrangements;
- Consider any issues relating to involvement of the media; and
- Suggest actions that may reduce the risk of future incidents.

The strategy meeting will set out a plan of action to locate the young person and steps to be taken once s/he is located. This plan will identify tasks, allocate responsibility for them to specific individuals, and set time-scales.

The police are responsible for deciding whether media involvement will assist or hamper missing person enquiries. A decision to use the media will only be made after consultation with the parents and the team manager. Where media publicity is required, any statement made by agencies will normally be agreed between press (or media) officers.

In situations where a group of young people go missing together, the meeting will discuss the dynamics of this. However it is important to note that they will not necessarily remain together or be found at the same location. Each young person must be considered as an individual and an individual action plan devised.

The meeting should consider whether there are any concerns about possible organised abuse or sexual exploitation. If so, the social worker must consult the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, who will advise about arranging a specific strategy meeting to address the identified concerns.

The chair will make a record of the agreed actions. These will clearly identify those responsible for tasks, time scales and a review date.

4. When the Young Person is Located

The young person may return to the placement willingly or may be located somewhere else in the city or outside it, and action may be needed to transport him/her back to the placement - or to alternative accommodation if the previous placement is no longer available or is no longer felt to be appropriate.

When the young person is located it is important not to assume that s/he is safe: urgent action may be needed to protect his/her welfare. The social worker must be notified as soon as possible and will coordinate action to return him/her to the

placement or to another place of safety. If the young person is located outside normal office hours the Emergency Duty Team must be notified and will ensure that his/her immediate welfare is safeguarded.

Responsibility for arranging the young person's return lies with the local authority, not with the police. Normally the social worker or the carer (foster carer or key worker) will go to bring him/her back. However it may be necessary to request police support if:

- Removing the young person from his/her current whereabouts would pose a significant risk to the safety of the young person or of another person; or
- An attempt has been made to remove the young person but s/he is refusing to cooperate and/or an adult is refusing to hand over the young person to City Council staff.

When the young person returns, or is returned, to the placement the carer will:

- Address any health and welfare needs that are immediately evident;
- Notify the social worker (if not already aware);
- Inform the young person of his/her right to an interview about the episode with a person independent of the placement and of the local authority (See [Section 6, Return Interview](#)); and
- If any child protection concerns come to light, report them immediately to the young person's social worker or the Emergency Duty Team.

On becoming aware that the young person has returned to the placement the social worker will inform:

- The parents and any other person who holds parental responsibility for the young person (unless this would not be reasonably practicable, or it would be inconsistent with the young person's welfare);
- The independent reviewing officer;
- If the placement is outside the city, the host local authority.
- The emergency duty team, if they were notified that the young person was missing; and
- The police, if they were notified that the young person was missing and are not already aware of the return.

The carer will discuss with the young person:

- His/her reasons for going missing;
- His/her whereabouts while s/he was missing;
- If s/he was away overnight, where s/he slept;
- Who the young person associated with while absent (both adults and other young people);
- How the young person funded him/herself (food, transport etc.); and
- Any harm s/he suffered or risk of harm during the episode.

The carer will notify the social worker of any significant information arising from this discussion. The social worker will discuss the implications with the police missing persons coordinator.

5. Safe and Well Check

If the police classified the young person as "missing" they will conduct a "safe and well check". If the young person was classified as "absent" they will not do this.

The purpose of the safe and well check is:

- To check for any indications that the young person has suffered harm;
- To check where the young person has been, and with whom; and
- To give the young person an opportunity to disclose any offending against or by them.

If the safe and well check identifies that the young person has suffered significant harm, the police officer will notify the social

worker, who will discuss with the team manager whether a strategy discussion is needed.

If the young person goes missing frequently it may not be practicable for the police to carry out a safe and well check every time s/he returns. However this pattern may point to issues with the potential for serious harm, such as gang involvement or sexual exploitation. The social worker will reach an agreement with the police about the frequency of checks and record the decision and the reasons for it on the young person's case file.

6. Return Interview

The social worker will ensure that the young person is offered an opportunity to talk about the episode with someone independent of the placement. The return interview should be carried out within 72 hours of the young person returning to their placement and should be held in a neutral place where the young person feels safe. The young person should be involved in the choice of an independent person – it should be someone with whom s/he feels comfortable.

The purpose of the return interview is to explore with the young person the reasons why s/he went missing and to identify the risks to the young person's welfare while s/he was missing. If the young person goes missing frequently it may not be appropriate to arrange a return interview after every episode. If so the social worker will decide when these should be arranged, in consultation with the young person

7. Updating the Placement Plan and Care Plan

The social worker and the carer (foster carer or key worker) will meet to discuss the implications of the incident and to update the young person's placement plan. This should include a strategy to minimise the likelihood of him/her going missing in the future.

The social worker should consider whether to request an early statutory review of the young person's care plan. This would include an opportunity to reconsider whether the current placement addresses the young person's needs.

If the young person goes missing frequently the social worker may feel that the young person cannot be kept safe in this placement. If so, s/he will discuss with the IRO whether an early statutory review should be arranged to revise the care plan.

8. The Risk Assessment List

When a looked after child goes missing from placement the risk assessment should consider the following issues:

- The young person's age and general vulnerability;
- Whether the young person has been prescribed essential medication or requires medical treatment;
- Any difficulties the young person may have in interacting safely with others or in an unknown environment, such as visual impairment or learning difficulty;
- Any diagnosed mental illness;
- Any history of threats of suicide, of suicide attempts or of self-harm;
- Any history of substance misuse;
- Any history of going missing and of suffering significant harm whilst missing;
- Whether the young person has been the subject of sexual exploitation, or is believed to be at risk of sexual exploitation;
- Whether the young person has made a threat of harm to another person before going missing;
- Whether the young person is considered likely to be in contact with a person posing a risk to children;
- Whether the young person is considered to pose a risk to children or young people;
- Whether the young person has recently been the victim of bullying or harassment;
- Any recent violent or confrontational incident involving the young person immediately prior to his/her going missing;
- Whether the young person exhibited unusual behaviour immediately before going missing;
- Any other pointers to the young person's state of mind at the time s/he went missing;

- Whether the timing, weather conditions and other circumstances at the time the young person went missing raise extra concerns for his/her welfare.

End



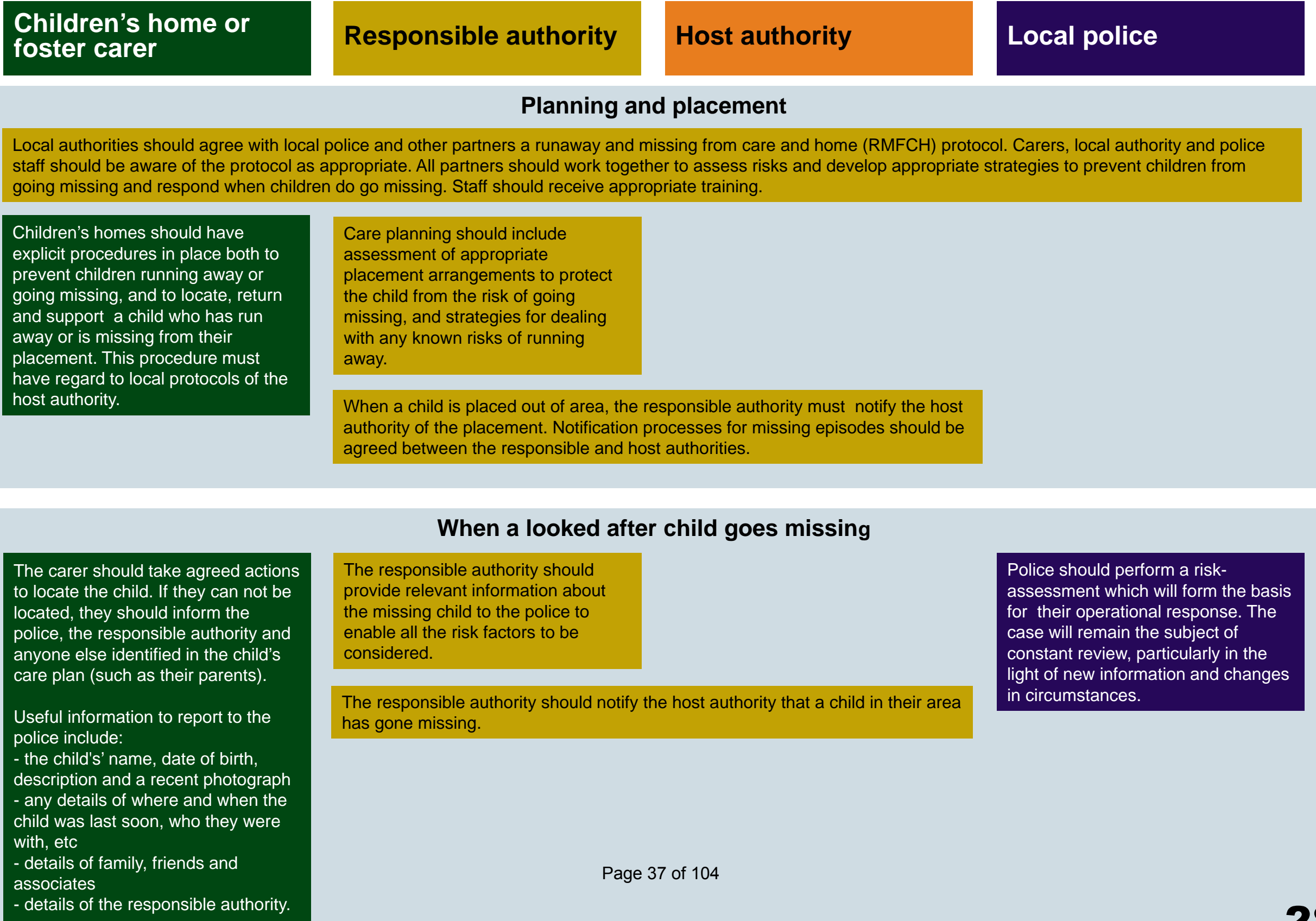
Department
for Education

Item 5

Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care

Flowchart showing roles and responsibilities when a child goes missing from care

The following chart shows the main steps that need to be taken when a child goes missing from local authority care, and where responsibility lies for those steps. It should be read alongside the full statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care, and is not intended to be a comprehensive list of actions.



Children’s home or foster carer

Responsible authority

Host authority

Local police

When a looked after child is found

If the child returns to their placement, the responsible authority and police should be informed.

Carers should continue to offer warm and consistent care when a child returns, and running away should not be viewed as behaviour that needs to be punished.

If the child is located but meaningful contact can not be established, the responsible authority and police should consider appropriate action.

An independent return interview should be offered and provided within 72 hours of the child’s return. When a looked after child is placed in a host authority, the responsible authority should ensure the independent review interview takes place, working closely with the host authority.

A safe and well check should be carried out by the police as soon as possible after a child reported as missing has been found.

The responsible local authority should review whether the child’s placement remains appropriate. The decision should be informed by discussions with the child and carers where appropriate.

Care plans should include a strategy to minimise future risk of repeated missing episodes.

IROs should be informed about missing episodes and address these in statutory reviews.

Data and analysis

Children’s homes should be prepared to provide information on missing incidents to those conducting independent visits to monitor the effectiveness of the home.

Data on missing episodes , including intelligence from return interviews, should be analysed regularly by all relevant partners to map problems and patterns. Regular reports should be provided to council members and the LSCB.

Data for children missing or away from placement without authorisation should be reported to the Department for Education by the responsible authority through their annual data returns on looked after children.



Department for Education

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Department
for Education

Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care

January 2014

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Introduction

1. Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is a key duty on local authorities and requires effective joint working between agencies and professionals. When a child goes missing or runs away they are at risk. Safeguarding children therefore includes protecting them from this risk. Local authorities are responsible for protecting children whether they go missing from their family home or from local authority care¹.

2. There are no exact figures for the number of children who go missing or run away, but estimates suggest that the figure is in the region of 100,000 per year². Children may run away *from* a problem, such as abuse or neglect at home, or *to* somewhere they want to be. They may have been coerced to run away by someone else. Whatever the reason, it is thought that approximately 25 per cent of children and young people that go missing are at risk of serious harm³. There are particular concerns about the links between children running away and the risks of sexual exploitation. Missing children may also be vulnerable to other forms of exploitation, to violent crime, gang exploitation, or to drug and alcohol misuse.

3. Looked after children missing from their placements are particularly vulnerable. In 2012, two reports highlighted that many of these children were not being effectively safeguarded: the Joint All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) Inquiry on Children Who Go Missing from Care and the accelerated report of the Office of the Children's Commissioner's on-going inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups. Key issues identified suggested that:

- children in residential care are at particular risk of going missing and vulnerable to sexual and other exploitation; and
- Local Safeguarding Children Boards have an important role to play in monitoring and interrogating data on children who go missing.

4. The Ofsted report 'Missing Children' published in February 2013 on local authorities' work in relation to children missing from home and care highlighted a number of concerns. These were that:

- risk management plans for individual looked after children were often not developed or acted on;

¹ It is important that any looked after child should consider their placement as their home. This document uses the terms "missing from care" and "away from placement" to make clear the additional responsibilities of local authorities towards looked after children. When such a child goes missing, however, they should be considered as having gone missing from their home.

² The Children's Society: [*Still Running 3: Early findings from our third national survey of young runaways \(2011\)*](#)

³ *ibid*

- placement instability was a key feature of looked after children who ran away;
- reports about looked after children missing from their care placement were not routinely provided to senior managers in local authorities; and
- there was little evidence that safe and well checks or return interviews were taking place.

5. Although looked after children are particularly vulnerable when they go missing, the majority of children who go missing are not looked after, and go missing from their family home. They can face the same risks as a child missing from local authority care. The same measures are often required to protect both groups of children. The first part of this guidance therefore refers to protecting all children from the risks associated with going missing, whether from home or from care. A separate section sets out the additional steps to be taken in regard to children missing from care.

6. This guidance sets out the steps local authorities and their partners should take to prevent children from going missing and to protect them when they do go missing. It is not intended to provide a comprehensive review of best practice, research or evidence regarding missing children. This guidance replaces the statutory guidance issued in 2009, in line with changes in evidence, policy and the statutory framework covering looked after children.

Status of this guidance

7. This guidance is issued under Section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970, which requires local authorities in exercising their social services functions to act under the general guidance of the Secretary of State. Local authorities must comply with this guidance when exercising these functions, unless local circumstances indicate exceptional reasons that justify a variation.

8. It also complements:

- Working Together to Safeguard Children and related statutory guidance (2013);
- the Missing Children and Adults Strategy (2011);
- Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation (2009);
- the Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan (2011); and
- the Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations volumes on care planning and review.

Who is this guidance for?

9. The guidance is addressed to Chief Executives, Directors of Children's Services and Lead Members for Children's Services. It will be of interest to Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCB) Chairs, senior managers within organisations providing services for children and families (including police, health, schools and the voluntary sector), as well as social care professionals, health and education practitioners and those who care for looked after children. Police forces should read this document in conjunction with Authorised Professional Practice guidance on Missing Persons.

Definitions used in this guidance

10. The terms below are used throughout this document with the following definitions:

- *Child*: anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people' throughout this guidance.
- *Young runaway*: a child who has run away from their home or care placement, or feels they have been forced or lured to leave.
- *Missing child*: a child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers.
- *Looked after child*: a child who is looked after by a local authority by reason of a care order, or being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.
- *Responsible local authority*: the local authority that is responsible for a looked after child's care and care planning.
- *Host local authority*: the local authority in which a looked after child is placed when placed out of the responsible local authority's area.
- *Care leaver*: an eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989.
- *Missing from care*: a looked after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (eg, school) and their whereabouts is not known.
- *Away from placement without authorisation*: a looked after child whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be and the carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the police.

Police definitions

11. Since April 2013 police forces have been rolling out new definitions of 'missing' and 'absent' in relation to children and adults reported as missing to the police. These are:

- *missing*: 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; and
- *absent*: a person not at a place where they are expected or required to be.

12. The police classification of a person as 'missing' or 'absent' will be based on on-going risk assessment. Note that 'absent' within this definition would not include those defined as "away from placement without authorisation" above: a child whose whereabouts are known would not be treated as either 'missing' or 'absent' under the police definitions. Guidance on how police forces will apply these definitions to children was issued by ACPO in April 2013. Paragraph 19 below explains how local protocols for safeguarding young runaways or children missing from home or care should reflect these definitions.

Roles and responsibilities

Local authority

13. Section 13 of the Children Act 2004 requires local authorities and other named statutory partners⁴ to make arrangements to ensure that their functions are discharged with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. This includes planning to prevent children from going missing and to protect them when they do. Through their inspections of local authority children's services, Ofsted will include an assessment of measures with regard to missing children as part of their key judgement on the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection.

14. Local authorities should name a senior children's service manager as responsible for monitoring policies and performance relating to children who go missing from home or care. The responsible manager should look beyond this guidance to understand the risks and issues facing children missing from home or care and to review best practice in dealing with the issue. Some further resources are listed at Annex B of this guidance.

Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

15. In fulfilling their statutory roles, LSCBs should give due consideration to the safeguarding risks and issues associated with children missing from home or care. To do this, they will need to see that partners from children's social care, police, health, education and other services work effectively together to prevent children from going missing and to act when they do go missing. They should ensure that the local Runaway and Missing From Home and Care (RMFHC) protocol (see paragraph 19) is adequate and up to date. They should receive and scrutinise regular reports from the local authority analysing data on children missing from home and from care. As part of this, they should review analysis of return interviews. They should also review regular reports from children's homes used by the local authority or within the local authority area on the effectiveness of their measures to prevent children from going missing.

Multi agency working

16. The local authority and police should work together to risk assess cases of children missing from home or care and to analyse data for patterns that indicate particular concerns and risks. As part of their framework to safeguard children, individual local authorities and police forces should have an agreed RMFHC protocol.

⁴ [The Children Act 2004: Section 13](#)

17. Local authorities should also consider those children who have not been reported missing to the police, but have come to an agency's attention from accessing other services. There may also be trafficked children who may not have previously come to the attention of children's services or the police. For example, the Office of the Children's Commissioner's report (see Paragraph 3) highlights that children from black and minority ethnic groups, and children that go missing from education, are less likely to be reported as missing. Local authorities and the police should be pro-active in places where they believe under reporting may be more likely because of the relationships some communities, or individuals, have with the statutory services.

Voluntary sector

18. Those working in the voluntary sector, as well as youth workers working in both statutory and voluntary services, are experienced in building trusted relationships with children. Their projects can often provide a range of additional services, such as family mediation and specialist support to parents. They can also help play a part in engaging with children to develop a support package to meet their needs if they are at risk of running away.

Jobcentre Plus

19. In some circumstances, 16 and 17 year olds will be eligible to claim a Social Security benefit. Although the numbers of 16 and 17 year olds that are currently in receipt of benefit are low, most Jobcentre Plus (JCP) offices will come into contact with 16 and 17 year olds, some of who may be at risk of running away or who are already missing from their families or from care. JCP under 18 advisers are required to create and maintain close working links with local authority personal advisers, identifying and forwarding information required by local authorities.

Runaway and Missing From Home and Care (RMFHC) protocol

20. Local authorities should agree with local police and other partners a protocol for dealing with children who run away or go missing in their area. Where appropriate, they should also have agreed protocols with neighbouring authorities or administrations. The protocols should be agreed and reviewed regularly with all agencies and be scrutinised by the LSCB. Police force operational areas often cover more than a single local authority area. RMFHC protocols should therefore be agreed by agencies on a regional or sub-regional basis to ensure a consistent approach. The key elements that should be described in the protocol are detailed in the box below.

Responding to missing children

- details of the lead person in local authority, police and other agencies responsible for children missing from home or care
- an agreed inter-agency framework for assessing and classifying the degree of risk when a child goes missing from home or care or when a missing child comes to agency notice
- guidance on what responses different agencies will offer in relation to each degree of risk
- an agreed list of measures to ensure that police 'missing' and 'absent' definitions are applied to children with due consideration given to their age, vulnerability and developmental factors
- details of what assessments will be carried out following missing and absent episodes, particularly assessments under S17 and S47 of the Children Act 1989 and how this information should be shared
- responses for groups facing specific risks of going missing, such as children with learning difficulties who may have little understanding of their actions or the risks to them, or to previously trafficked children who may be at risk of returning to exploitation
- which agencies will support the family while the child is missing and after they return
- details of how safe and well checks are conducted
- arrangements for independent return interviews, agencies which can provide them and how they will be offered to young runaways

Additional arrangements relating to looked after children

- the actions residential or foster carers should take to locate the child before they are reported as missing (such as trying to contact the child by phone or contacting known friends)
- appropriate responses to children going missing or away from placement without authorisation, including an assessment of risk, the actions and arrangements for making reports to the police when looked after children go missing
- agreed local authority reporting and recording systems on children missing and away from placement without authorisation, including children placed in other local authority areas
- details of any agencies providing independent advocacy services to looked after children
- arrangements to monitor outcomes and analyse patterns including of children placed in the area by other local authorities

Intelligence and prevention

- arrangements for information sharing between the local authority, the police and other agencies
- arrangements for information sharing between different local authorities when a child runs away to another area
- details of data to be analysed on a regular basis, arrangements and frequency for data monitoring by LSCB and partners
- agreed safeguards for runaways and missing children to identify those at risk of significant harm, particularly looking at the length of the missing episode, frequency of running away, risk factors, family history of the child
- details of preventative approaches to avoid further instances of running away, including the provision of alternative accommodation when appropriate
- details of work with children, including both those in care and those not in care, so that they understand the risks associated with running away and the support that is available to them

When a child goes missing

21. The response set out in the RMFCH protocol should be put into action as soon as a child is reported as missing.

Access to support

22. When a child has run away or is missing from home they should be able to easily access support services, such as help lines or emergency accommodation. Support should also be made available to families to help them understand why the child has run away and how they can support them on their return.

Risk assessment

23. The police will prioritise all incidents of children categorised as 'missing' from home or care as medium or high risk. Where a child is categorised as 'absent', the details will be recorded by the police, who will also agree review times and any on-going actions with child's family, carer or responsible local authority.

24. A missing child incident would be prioritised as '*high risk*' where:

- the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the child is in danger through their own vulnerability; or
- the child may have been the victim of a serious crime; or
- the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger.

25. The high risk category requires the immediate deployment of police resources. Police guidance makes clear that a member of the senior management team or similar command level must be involved in the examination of initial enquiry lines and approval of appropriate staffing levels. Such cases should lead to the appointment of an Investigating Officer and possibly a Senior Investigating Officer and a Police Search Advisor (PoISA). There should be a media strategy and / or close contact with outside agencies. Family support should be put in place. The UK Missing Persons Bureau should be notified of the case immediately. CEOP and local authority children's services should also be notified.

26. A missing child incident would be prioritised as '*medium risk*' where the risk posed is likely to place the subject in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others. This category requires an active and measured response by police and other agencies in order to trace the missing person and support the person reporting. This will involve a proactive investigation and search in accordance with the circumstances to locate the missing child as soon as possible.

27. Where a child is categorised as 'absent' within the police definition, the details will be recorded by the police. Review timings and any on-going actions will be agreed as set out in the RMFCH protocol. The case will remain the subject of constant review, particularly in the light of new information and changes in circumstances.

When a child is found

28. The attitude of professionals, such as police officers and social workers, towards a child who has been missing can have a big impact on how they will engage with subsequent investigations and protection planning. However “streetwise” they may appear, they are children and may be extremely vulnerable to multiple risks. A supportive approach, actively listening and responding to a child’s needs, will have a greater chance of preventing the child from going missing again and safeguarding them against other risks.

Safe and well checks

29. Safe and well checks are carried out by the police as soon as possible after a child reported as missing has been found. Their purpose is to check for any indications that the child has suffered harm, where and with whom they have been, and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them. Further guidance is available in the ACPO guidance on Missing People.⁵

30. Where a child goes missing frequently, it may not be practicable for the police to see them every time they return. In these cases a reasonable decision should be taken in agreement between the police and the child’s parent or carer, or their social worker, with regard to the frequency of such checks bearing in mind the established link between frequent missing episodes and serious harm, which could include gang involvement, forced marriage, bullying or sexual exploitation. The reason for a decision not to conduct a safe and well check should be reported on the case file.

Independent return interviews

31. When a child is found, they must be offered an independent return interview. Independent return interviews provide an opportunity to uncover information that can help protect children from the risk of going missing again, from risks they may have been exposed to while missing or from risk factors in their home.

32. The interview should be carried out within 72 hours of the child returning to their home or care setting. This should be an in-depth interview and is normally best carried out by an independent person (ie, someone not involved in caring for the child) who is trained to carry out these interviews and is able to follow-up any actions that emerge. Children sometimes need to build up trust with a person before they will discuss in depth the reasons why they ran away.

⁵ Association of Chief Police Officers and National Policing Improvement Agency: [*Guidance on The Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons, Second Edition \(2010\)*](#)

33. The interview and actions that follow from it should:

- identify and deal with any harm the child has suffered – including harm that might not have already been disclosed as part of the ‘safe and well check’ – either before they ran away or whilst missing;
- understand and try to address the reasons why the child ran away;
- help the child feel safe and understand that they have options to prevent repeat instances of them running away;
- provide them with information on how to stay safe if they choose to run away again, including helpline numbers.

34. The interview should be held in a neutral place where the child feels safe. The interview provides an opportunity hear from the child about why they went missing and to understand the risks and issues faced by the child while missing. This could include exploring issues where a child:

- has been reported missing on two or more occasions;
- is frequently away from placement (or their home) without authorisation;
- has been hurt or harmed while they have been missing;
- is at known or suspected risk of sexual exploitation or trafficking;
- is at known or suspected risk of involvement in criminal activity or drugs;
- has contact with people posing risk to children; and/or
- has been engaged (or is believed to have engaged) in criminal activities while missing.

35. The assessment of whether a child might run away again should be based on information about:

- their individual circumstances, including family circumstances;
- their motivation for running away;
- their potential destinations and associates;
- their recent pattern of absences;
- the circumstances in which the child was found or returned; and
- their individual characteristics and risk factors such as whether a child has learning difficulties, mental health issues, depression and other vulnerabilities.

36. Following the safe and well check and independent return interview, local authority children’s services, police and voluntary services should work together:

- to build up a comprehensive picture of why the child went missing;

- to understand what happened while they were missing;
- to understand who they were with when they were missing and where they were found; and
- what support they require upon returning to home or their care placement in accordance with the 'Working Together' guidance.

37. Safe and well checks and independent return interviews provide an opportunity to inform case planning, for wider strategic planning and for professionals to take into account children's views. The outcomes of the checks and interviews should therefore be recorded on case files so that they can be shared with professionals.

38. Where children refuse to engage with the independent interviewer, parents and carers should be offered the opportunity to provide any relevant information and intelligence of which they may be aware. This should help to prevent further instances of the child running away and identify early the support needed for them.

39. When children missing from home are located but have not been reported missing to the police by their families, parents and carers should be encouraged to report any future episodes of running away. This may require particular work in some communities, for example those with high levels of gang crime. Local authorities should pro-actively consider investigating further to identify early any safeguarding concerns, or whether the child and their family need further support.

Emergency accommodation

40. It is important that emergency accommodation can be accessed directly at any time of the day or night. Bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation is not considered suitable for any child under the age of 18 even on an emergency accommodation basis.

41. The police have powers to take immediate action to protect a child⁶. Should it be necessary to take the child into police protection, the child must be moved as soon as possible into local authority accommodation. The local authority should consider what type of accommodation is appropriate in each individual case. It is important that children are not placed in accommodation that leaves them vulnerable to exploitation or trafficking.

16 and 17 year olds

42. When a 16 or 17 year old runs away or goes missing they are no less vulnerable than younger children and are equally at risk, particularly of sexual exploitation or involvement with gangs. A 16 or 17 year old who has run away may present as

⁶ [The Children Act 1989, Part V - Protection of Children, Section 46](#)

homeless. In this case, local authority children's services must assess their needs as for any other child. Where this assessment indicates that the child is a child in need and requires accommodation under section 20 of the Children Act 1989, they will become looked after.

43. The accommodation provided must be suitable, risk assessed and meet the full range of a child's needs. Sustainability of the placement must be considered. Children who have run away and are at risk of homelessness may be placed in supported accommodation. For example, the accommodation may include provision of specialist support for those who have been sexually exploited.

44. Local authorities should have regard to statutory guidance issued in April 2010⁷ to children's services authorities and local housing authorities about their duties under Part 3 of the Children Act 1989 and Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 to secure or provide accommodation for homeless 16 and 17 year olds.

Children who repeatedly run away and go missing

45. Repeatedly going missing should not be viewed as a normal pattern of behaviour. For example, repeat episodes of a child going missing can indicate sexual exploitation. In addition to strategies and issues already highlighted, the following should also be considered when dealing with this specific group.

46. If a child has run away two or more times, local authorities should ensure a discussion is held, either with the child, their family or both, to offer further support and guidance. Actions following earlier incidents should be reviewed and alternative strategies considered. Access to and timeliness of independent return interviews should also be reviewed.

47. There may be local organisations in the area that can provide repeat runaways with an opportunity to talk about their reasons for running away, and can link runaways and their families with longer-term help if appropriate. They may also be able to provide support to children while they are away from home or care. Local authorities should work with organisations that provide these services in their area.

Collecting, sharing and analysing data on children who go missing

48. Early and effective sharing of information between professionals and local agencies is essential for the identification of patterns of behaviour. Relevant data may include

⁷ Department for Education: [*Provision of Accommodation for 16 and 17 year old young people who may be homeless and/or require accommodation \(2010\)*](#)

times and duration of missing episodes, information from return interviews, absence data from schools, etc. This may be analysed to identify areas of concern for an individual child, or to identify 'hotspots' of activity in a local area. This will help authorities to identify risks in their area, such as exploitation, gangs or crime related activity that might not be apparent. It will also help identify trends, for example, whether children are going missing from a particular children's home or other patterns across the local authority.

49. Data and analysis of children who go missing both from home and from care should be included in regular reports to council members, especially to the lead member for children's services and in reports by the local authority to the LSCB.

Additional actions to protect looked after children

50. Looked after children are particularly vulnerable. Though the number of looked after children going missing is a small percentage of the overall number of children that go missing, it is disproportionately high compared with the children's population as a whole. Further responsibilities on local authorities for looked after children who go missing are detailed below.

Looked after children who are away from placement without authorisation

51. Sometimes a looked after child may be away from their placement without authorisation. While they are not missing, they may still be placing themselves at risk because of where they are. For example, they may choose to stay at the house of friends where the carer has concerns about risks of sexual exploitation. The police will not consider this child as missing or absent, but the RMFHC protocol should describe the appropriate course of action to protect the child and seek their return.

Reducing the risk of looked after children running away

52. Local authorities have a duty to place a looked after child in the most appropriate placement available, subject to their duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. Placing the child in an appropriate placement should help to minimise the risk of the child running away. The care plan should include details of the arrangements that will need to be in place to keep the child safe and minimise the risk of the child going missing from their placement.

53. Any decision to place a child at distance should be based on an assessment of the child's needs including their need to be effectively safeguarded. Evidence suggests that distance from home, family and friends is a key factor for looked after children running away.

54. Listening to a child is an important factor in protecting and minimising the chances of a child running away. The Children's Rights Director (2012) reported that "*one of the major influences of them running away is having a sense that they are not being listened to and taken seriously*", particularly about placement decisions and moves. All looked after children should be informed about their right to be supported by an independent advocate.

Care planning and review

55. Care plans should include a detailed assessment of the child's needs, including the need for the provision of an appropriate placement that offers protection from harm. Where a child goes missing from a placement, a statutory review of their care plan can provide an opportunity to check that it addresses the reasons for an absence. The review should result in the development of a strategy to minimise a repeat of the missing episode. In particular, any issues relating to the vulnerability of the child to sexual exploitation, trafficking or criminal or gang involvement should be identified. Actions to address these needs and ensure the child is kept safe should be clearly set out in the care plan. The police and other relevant agencies should be given the opportunity to contribute to the review.

56. Where a child already has an established pattern of running away, the care plan should include a strategy to keep them safe and minimise the likelihood of the child running away in the future. This should be discussed and agreed as far as possible with the child and with the child's carers and should include detailed information about the responsibilities of all services, the child's parents and other adults involved in the family network. Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) should be informed about missing and away from placement without authorisation episodes and they should address these in statutory reviews.

Out of area placements

57. When a child is placed out of their local authority area, the responsible authority must make sure that the child has access to the services they need. Notification of the placement must be made to the host authority and other specified services.

58. If children placed out of their local authority run away, the local RMFHC protocol should be followed, in addition to complying with other processes that are specified in the policy of the responsible local authority. It is possible that the child will return to the area of the responsible authority so it is essential that liaison between the police and professionals in both authorities is well managed and co-ordinated. A notification process for missing and away from placement without authorisation episodes should be agreed between responsible and host local authorities.

Children's home staff and foster carers

59. Children's home staff and foster carers should be trained and supported to offer a consistent approach to the care of children. This should include being proactive about strategies to prevent children from running away and understanding the procedures that must be followed if a child goes missing.

60. The competence and support needs of children's home staff and foster carers in responding to missing from care issues should be considered as part of their appraisal and supervision.

National Minimum Standards – looked after children

61. The National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Children's Homes and those for Fostering Services⁸ set out expectations about how providers should take account of the needs of the children who rely on their services. Standards concerned with protecting children from abuse and neglect, countering bullying, promoting leisure opportunities, privacy and confidentiality, access to advocacy, and maintenance of familial contact are likely to be relevant to creating a constructive caring environment designed to minimise the likelihood that children will run away from their placements.

62. Registered children's home providers are required to have quality assurance arrangements in place. As a minimum, this will involve an independent person visiting the home at least once a month to monitor the effectiveness of the home's arrangements for safeguarding children and for promoting their wellbeing. This visit may be unannounced. The independent person undertaking the visits will wish to be satisfied that the home has an effective approach to behaviour management. They should routinely examine missing person's reports to check the home provides stable, secure and safe care. The visit must, wherever possible, include private interviews with children and young people living at the home (and if appropriate their parents, relatives or carers). Staff employed at the home must also be interviewed privately. A written report on the conduct of the home must be prepared after the visit and sent to Ofsted, to the local authorities responsible for the care of each child in the home, to the homes provider and manager, and, on request to the authority where the home is located.

63. The Children's Home Regulations require providers to have explicit procedures in place both to prevent children going missing and to take action if they do go missing. This policy must specify the procedures to be followed and the roles and responsibilities of staff when the child is absent. For example, this may include whether there is an expectation that staff attempt to locate missing children and how staff should support children on return to the home. This procedure must take into account the views of appropriate local services and have regard to police and local authority protocols for responding to missing person's incidents in the area where the home is located. The NMS specifies that staff should actively search for children and, where appropriate, work with the police.

64. On 1 April 2013, regulations came into force requiring Ofsted to provide details of the locations of children's homes to local police forces to support the police in their

⁸ Department for Education: [Children's Homes: National Minimum Standards \(2011\)](#)

strategic and operational approach to safeguarding children. This duty is in addition to the existing obligation for Ofsted to provide this information to local authorities. A protocol published alongside the regulations sets out the responsibilities of the public authorities to use information about the location of children's homes only for the purposes for which it was disclosed, and to share it onward only where this is compatible with safeguarding children and promoting their welfare⁹.

Care Leavers

65. Care leavers, particularly 16 and 17 year olds may go missing from their home or accommodation and face the same risks as other missing children. Local authorities must ensure that care leavers live in "suitable accommodation" as defined in regulation 9(2) of the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010, (made under section 23B(10) of the Children Act 1989). In particular, young people should feel safe in their accommodation and the areas where it is located. Local authorities should ensure that pathway plans set out where a young person may be vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking or going missing, and put in place support services to minimise this risk.

When a looked after child goes missing

66. Whenever a child runs away from a placement, the foster carer or the manager on duty in their children's home is responsible for ensuring that the following individuals and agencies are informed within the timescales set out in the local RMFHC protocol:

- the local police;
- the authority responsible for the child's placement – if they have not already been notified prior to the police being informed; and
- parents and any other person with parental responsibility, unless it is not reasonably practicable or to do so would be inconsistent with the child's welfare.

Please see the accompanying document, *Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from care: Flowchart to accompany the statutory guidance*.

When a looked after child is found

67. The responsible authority should ensure that plans are in place to respond promptly once the child is located. Care staff should inform the child's social worker and the independent reviewing officer that the child has returned. If the child is located but

⁹ Department for Education: [Joint protocol: children's homes - procedure for disclosing names and addresses \(2013\)](#)

professionals are unable to establish meaningful contact, then the responsible authority should contact the police and consider the appropriate action to take.

68. When the child has been located, the responsible local authority should review whether the child's placement remains appropriate. The decision should be informed by discussions with the child and carers where appropriate. The outcomes and reasons for the decision should be recorded.

69. An independent return interview should be offered when a missing looked after child is found. Where possible, the child should be given the opportunity to talk before they return to their placement. The person conducting the interview should usually be independent of the child's placement and of the responsible local authority. An exception maybe where a child has a strong relationship with a carer or social worker and has expressed a preference to talk to them, rather than an independent person, about the reasons they went missing. The child should be offered the option of speaking to an independent representative or advocate. When a looked after child is placed in a host authority, the responsible authority should ensure the independent review interview takes place, working closely with the host authority.

70. Children's home staff or foster carers should continue to offer warm and consistent care when a child returns, and running away should not be viewed as behaviour that needs to be punished. The need for safe and reliable care may be particularly significant for a child who faces pressure to run away from their placement as a result of circumstances beyond the control of their carers. In these circumstances, it will be even more important that the child's care and placement plans are kept up-to-date and include a strategy to reduce the pressure on the child to run away.

Data on looked after children who go missing or are away from placement without authorisation

71. Looked after children who go missing, or who are away from placement without authorisation, can be at increased risk of sexual or other forms of exploitation or of involvement in drugs, gangs, criminal activity or trafficking. Particular attention should be paid to repeat episodes. Data on these episodes should be analysed regularly in order to map problems and patterns. Regular reports on this data should be provided to council members and the LSCB.

72. Data for children missing or away from placement without authorisation should be reported to the Department for Education by the responsible authority through their annual data returns on looked after children.

Looked after children who may have been trafficked from abroad

73. Some looked after children are unaccompanied asylum seeking children or other migrant children. Some of this group may have been trafficked into the UK and may remain under the influence of their traffickers even while they are looked after. Trafficked children are at high risk of going missing, with most going missing within one week of becoming looked after and many within 48 hours. Unaccompanied migrant or asylum seeking children who go missing immediately after becoming looked after should be treated as potential victims of trafficking.

74. The assessment of need to inform the care plan will be particularly critical in these circumstances and should be done immediately as the window for intervention is very narrow. The assessment must seek to establish:

- relevant details about the child's background before they came to the UK;
- an understanding of the reasons why the child came to the UK; and
- an analysis of the child's vulnerability to remaining under the influence of traffickers.

75. In conducting this assessment, it will be necessary for the local authority to work in close co-operation with the UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC) and immigration staff familiar with patterns of trafficking into the UK. Immigration staff who specialise in trafficking issues should be able to advise on whether information about the individual child suggests that they fit the profile of a potentially trafficked child.

76. Provision may need to be made for the child to be in a safe place before any assessment takes place and for the possibility that they may not be able to disclose full information about their circumstances immediately. The location of the child should not be divulged to any enquirers until their identity and relationship with the child has been established, if necessary with the help of police and immigration services. In these situations the roles and responsibilities of care providers must be fully understood and recorded in the placement plan. Proportionate safety measures that keep the child safe and take into account their best interests should also be put in place to safeguard the child from going missing from care or from being re-trafficked.

77. It is essential that the local authority continues to share information with the police and immigration staff, concerning potential crimes against the child, the risk to other children, or other relevant immigration matters.

78. 'Safeguarding Children Who May Have Been Trafficked'¹⁰ contains practical guidance for agencies which are likely to encounter, or have referred to them, children

¹⁰ HM Government: [Safeguarding children who may have been trafficked: practice guidance \(2011\)](#)

and young people who may have been trafficked. Where it is suspected that a child has been trafficked, they should be referred by the local authority into the UK's victim identification framework, the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). The Trafficked Children Toolkit¹¹, developed by the London Safeguarding Children Board, has been made available to all local authorities to help professionals assess the needs of these children and to refer them to the NRM.

79. NSPCC Child Trafficking Advice Centre provides specialist advice and information to professionals who have concerns that a child may have been trafficked. Phone 0808 800 5000 Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm; email help@nspcc.org.uk ; or web http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/ctail/ctail_wda84866.html

¹¹ London Safeguarding Children's Board: [The Trafficked Children Toolkit](#)

Annex A

Checklist for local authorities

This is a short checklist that local authorities may find helpful to refer to the relevant paragraph in the guidance.

Checklist	Paragraph
Do you have a lead manager in place with strategic responsibility for children who run away or go missing?	13-14
Do you have a Runaway and Missing From Home and Care Protocol (RMFHC Protocol)?	15, 16, 20
Do you have a clear definition of a child who has run away?	10, 11-12, 20
Does your LSCB have in place systems to monitor prevalence of and the responses to children who go missing, including gathering data from LSCB members and other local stakeholders in order to understand trends and patterns?	15, 20, 49, 71
Do you have effective working relationships with your local police force?	16, 20, 23-27, 66
Do you have effective partnerships with the voluntary sector, relevant specialist services and information about national level resources, eg, helplines for missing children?	18, 22, 79
Do you have clear procedures in place to offer return interviews when a missing child is found?	31-39, 69
Do you have support services in place for children and their families?	22, 40-41
Do you have a strategy to prevent children from running away and to deal with repeat runaways?	20, 45-47, 52-54

Annex B

Associated resources

General guidance

- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2013) clarifies the core legal requirements on individuals and organisations to keep children safe, including the legal requirements that health services, social workers, police, schools and other organisations who work with children must follow.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children>
- Joint statutory guidance, DCLG and DfE 'Provision of Accommodation for 16 and 17 year old young people who may be homeless and/or require accommodation' (April 2010)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/provision-of-accommodation-for-16-and-17-year-olds-who-may-be-homeless-and-or-require-accommodation>

Missing children guidance, strategy and police resources

- Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons <http://www.acpo.police.uk/documents/crime/2011/201103CRIIMP02.pdf>
- Missing Children and Adults strategy (2011) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/missing-children-and-adults-strategy>
- Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) website <http://www.ceop.police.uk/>

Prevention and supporting missing children and their families

- Railway Children Reach model, which looks at before, during and after incidents (RMFHC)
<http://www.railwaychildren.org.uk/our-solution/where-we-work/uk/reach-model/>
- ChildLine (telephone: 0800 1111)
<http://www.childline.org.uk/pages/home.aspx>
- Safe@Last, working with and on behalf of children and young people at risk through running away
<http://www.safeatlast.org.uk/>

- What to do if a child goes missing: a guide for those working in education and youth work (2013) from the Children's Society http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/pro_guide_to_runaways_-_online_versionfinal_0.pdf
- What to do if your child goes missing: practical advice for parents and carers (2013) from the Children's Society http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/runaways_parents_guide_2013_final_six-page.pdf
- Developing local safeguarding responses to young runaways. Planning guide for professionals (2013) from the Children's Society <http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/resources>
- Missing People research: reports on various related issues <https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/missing-people/about-the-issue/missing-people-research>

Child sexual exploitation

- Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation (2009) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-children-and-young-people-from-sexual-exploitation-supplementary-guidance>
- Tackling child sexual exploitation action plan (2011) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-child-sexual-exploitation-action-plan>
- What to do if you suspect a child is being sexually exploited. A step-by-step guide for frontline practitioners (June 2012) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-to-do-if-you-suspect-a-child-is-being-sexually-exploited>
- National Working Group website, a UK network of over 1000 practitioners working on the issue of child sexual exploitation (CSE) and trafficking within the UK. includes relevant resources for practitioners www.nationalworkinggroup.org
- Parents Against Child Sexual Exploitation (PACE) <http://www.paceuk.info/>

Child trafficking

- Safeguarding Children Who May Have Been Trafficked Guidance (2011) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-children-who-may-have-been-trafficked-practice-guidance>

- NSPCC Child Trafficking Advice Centre (CTAC)
http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/ctail/ctail_wda84866.html
- London Borough of Hillingdon resources for trafficked children
at <http://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/article/16450/Child-trafficking-sub-group>
- On the Safe Side: Principle of Safe Accommodation of Child Victims of Trafficking (ECPAT UK, 2011) link available
here: http://www.ecpat.org.uk/sites/default/files/on_the_safe_side.pdf
- Conducting good return interviews for young people who run away (2014) from the Children's Society
http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/8pp_a5_runaway_return_interviews_final.pdf



Department
for Education

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Reference: DFE-00009-2014

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.

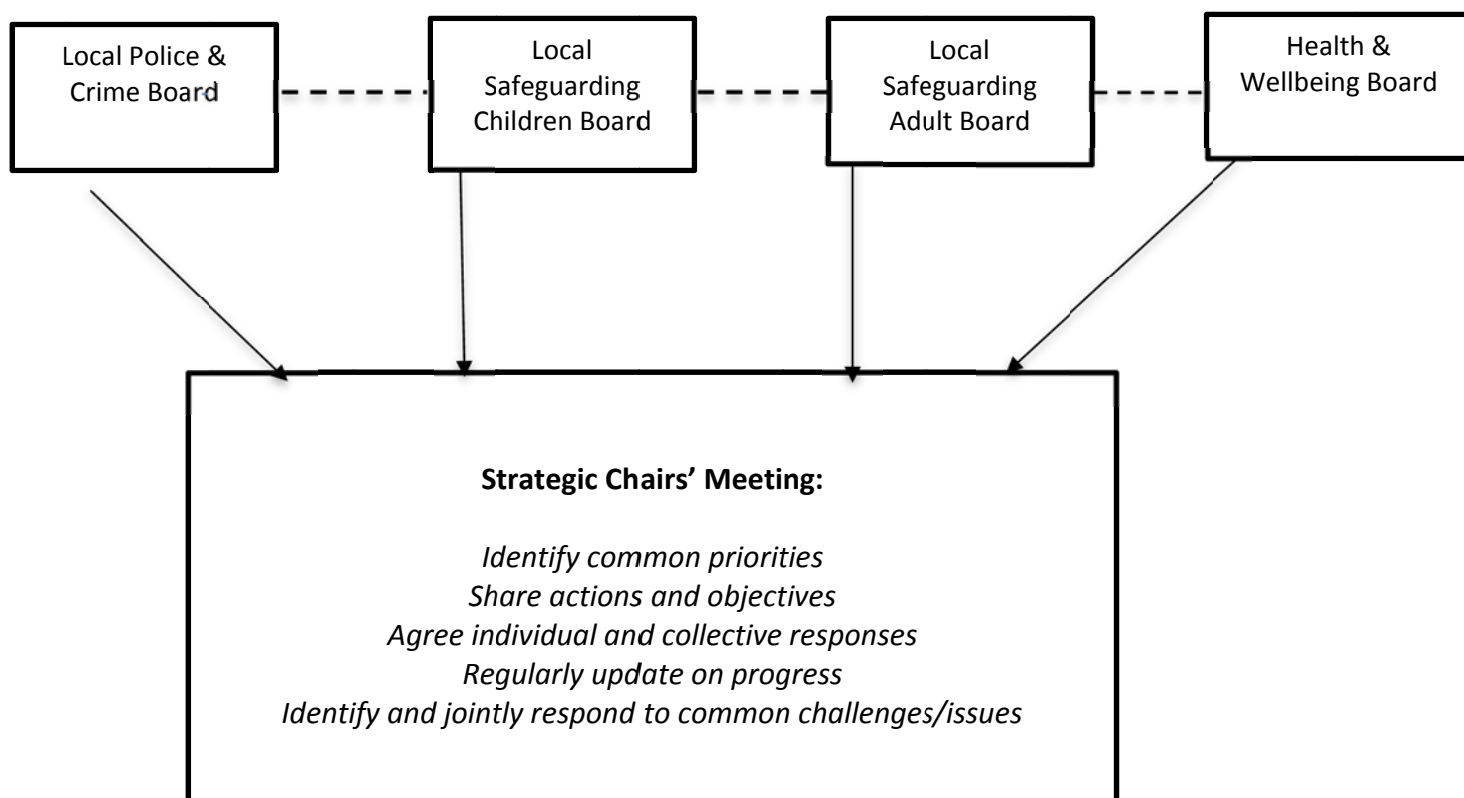
The reporting person should not have any uncertainty over who has responsibility.

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.

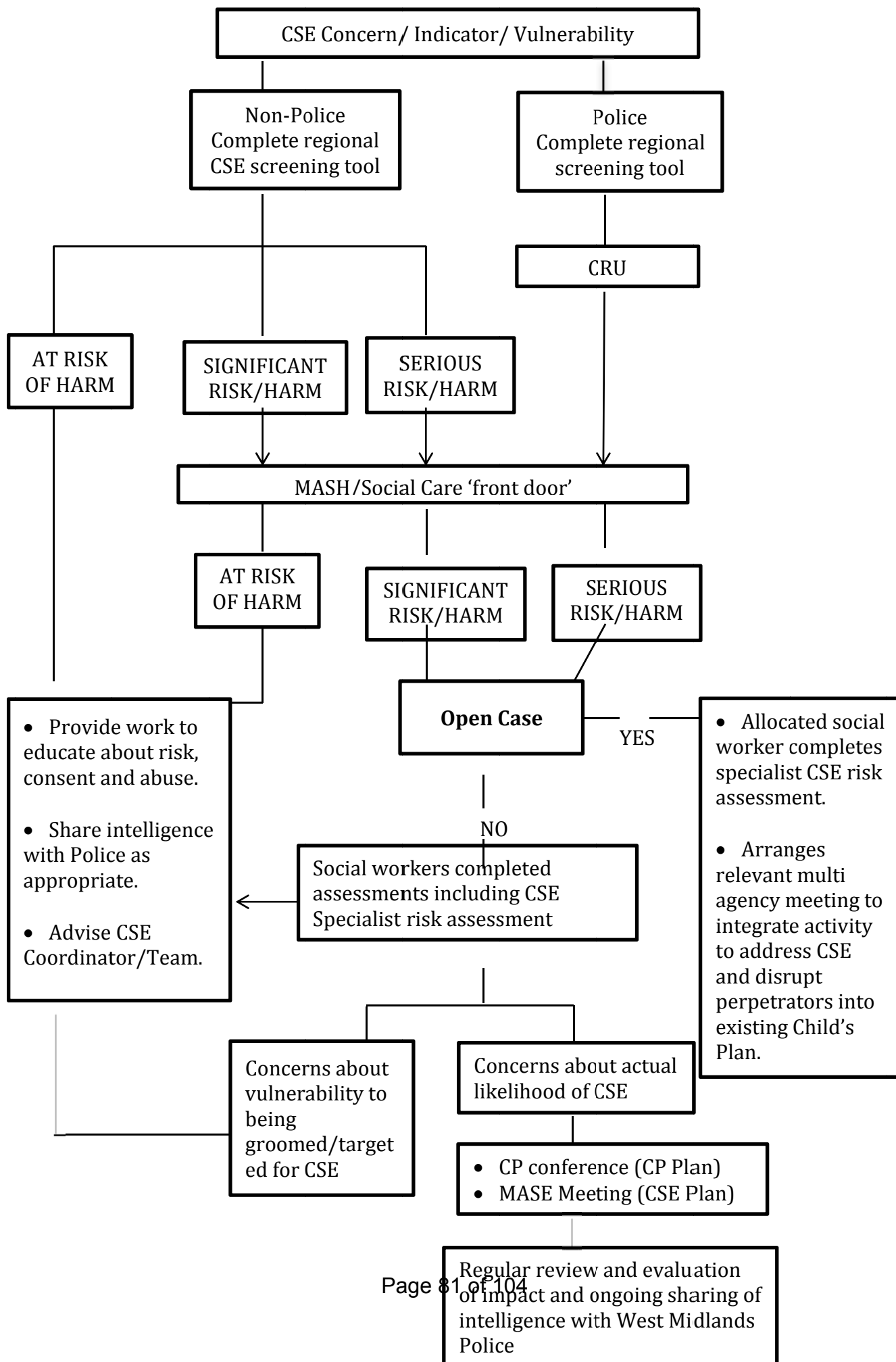
The outcome of the meeting may be that:

- 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.



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

The Children's Society



Birmingham Scrutiny Enquiry - Missing Children

21st of October 2015

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7.	Key issues for the future	19

1.	<p>Introduction</p> <p>The Children's Society (TCS) helps change children's stories, working towards a country where all children are free from disadvantage.</p> <p>We've been trusted for over a century to drive change locally and nationally and provide support where it's needed most. We base this vital work on the experiences of every child we help and the solid evidence we gather.</p> <p>Every year, we work directly with more and more of the most disadvantaged children. We do this through our extensive network of frontline services, supported by an army of volunteers. Together we tackle child poverty and neglect head on. Our services range from helping families trapped in debt, child runaways and young carers, to stopping child sexual exploitation.</p> <p>We focus on helping young people aged 10-18 who are most marginalised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at risk of, or affected by, sexual exploitation; • missing from care or home; • affected by poor emotional wellbeing or poor mental health; • impacted by involvement with the care system; • substance misusers or who are affected by parental substance misuse. <p>TCS's commitment to supporting children at risk is more relevant now than ever. We have a vision of a country where children are free from disadvantage. Our mission states that we fight for change and support disadvantaged children to have better lives.</p> <p>We both target the specific issues that lead children and young people to go missing from care and respond to the wider challenges that they face in life. Workers follow best practice in relation to engaging young people – through use of creative, persistent and flexible engagement techniques (Warrington & Shuker, University of Bedfordshire; May 2015).</p>
2.	<p>What is Missing from Home or Care</p> <p><i>ACPO Interim Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons</i> (2013) uses the following definitions (as used by the police):</p> <p>Missing: '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'</p> <p>Absent: 'A person is not at a place where they are expected or required to be'</p> <p><i>Statutory Guidance On Children Who Run Away Or Go Missing From Home Or Care</i> (January 2014) uses the following definitions:</p>

Away from Placement without Authorisation:	A Looked After child whose whereabouts are known but who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be and the carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the police.
Young Runaway:	A child who has run away from their home or care placement, or feels they have been forced or lured to leave.
Missing Child:	A child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers.
Missing from Care:	A Looked After child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (e.g. school) and their whereabouts are not known.

The police classification of a person as 'Missing' or 'Absent' will be based on on-going risk assessment. Note that **Absent** within the police definition would not include those defined as **Away from Placement Without Authorisation** above: a child whose whereabouts are known would not be treated as either 'Missing' or 'Absent' under the police definitions.

Children represented approximately two thirds of the estimated 360,000 missing person incidents in 2009 - 2010 (*Missing persons: data and analysis 2009 - 2010*, National Policing Improvement Agency, 2010). The reasons for running away are varied, complex and unique to individual children. The most frequent reason given is 'problems at home'. Physical abuse from adults, mental health and substance misuse problems, and involvement in criminality are commonly associated with children running away.

Missing children are at high risk of physical and sexual abuse, criminality and homelessness. Persistent running away is increasingly understood to be an indicator that a child may be a victim of sexual exploitation (*Report from the joint inquiry into children who go missing from care*, The All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the All Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care leavers, 2012). Each locality delivering services to young people and children missing from home or care has a local awareness of this link. This highlights TCS's commitment to open up new referral pathways via assertive engagement in order to identify all young people in need of a service.

3.	<p data-bbox="183 1541 507 1574">National context</p> <p data-bbox="183 1619 1530 1798">For over 25 years TCS has campaigned to protect young runaways through our policy and practice work. TCS has produced 3 major research reports (Still Running I; II and III) and campaigns focused on missing young people leading to lasting policy and practice change with the publication of the Guidance on Runaways and Missing from Home and Care (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009).</p> <p data-bbox="183 1843 1530 2018">The current statutory guidance defines a missing child or a young runaway as 'children up to the age of 18 who have run away from their home or care placement, have been forced to leave, or whose whereabouts are unknown' (<i>Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care</i>, Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009). This guidance makes it a requirement for Local Authorities to prepare local Runaways and Missing</p>
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	<p>from Home and Care protocols and offer all children that run away or go missing from home or care an independent return interview.</p> <p>A national strategy to reduce the number of children and vulnerable adults who go missing from home or care was published by the Home Office in December 2011 (Missing Children and Adults: A Cross Government Strategy, Home Office, 2011). The action plan sets out how local and central government should respond to the problem, including plans for preventative work, education and early intervention.</p> <p>The strategy followed an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) inquiry into the support for families of missing people in July 2011, which made the overarching recommendation that there should be a cross-government outcomes policy framework for missing persons.</p> <p>The evidence base for this intervention includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ofsted (2013), <i>Missing Children</i>.¹ • The Children's Society (2007), <i>Stepping up – the future of runaways services</i>.² • The Children's Society (2011), <i>Still Running 3: early findings from our third national survey of runaways</i>.³ • The APPG for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers (2012), <i>Report from the joint inquiry into children who go missing from care</i>.⁴
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4.	<p>Local Context</p> <p>Our work in Birmingham 2004 - 2012</p> <p>In 2004 The Children's Society and Birmingham City Council Social Care and Health joined together to establish a project providing an independent visit to children and young people who went missing from care. The project was named LAMP (Looked After Missing Persons).</p> <p>In 2005 - 2006 LAMP employed a part time Programme Manager and two part time project workers. The Children's Society put in additional income to allow the project to move the Programme Manager from part time to full time and to provide seven hours of administrative support.</p> <p>In 2006 - 2007, Birmingham Community Safety Partnership funded an Enhanced Visit Programme for Persistent Runaways. The Pilot Programme was devised by the LAMP Project to respond to issues affecting young people who persistently abscond or run away from Local Authority care. The Pilot Programme sessions were based on the five Every Child Matters outcomes and the Self Development Model used by the Foyer Foundation. This Programme was designed to help the young people consider what is happening in their lives, the risks</p>
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¹

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/419144/Missing_children.pdf

² http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/research_docs/Stepping%20up%20-%20The%20future%20of%20runaways%20services.pdf

³ http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/still_running_3_full_report_final.pdf

⁴ http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/u32/joint_appg_inquiry_-_report...pdf

they are taking, their attitudes and behaviour, relationships and how they see their future.

In 2007 - 2008 we re-launched as Safe in the City Birmingham, bringing together LAMP and the new Birmingham Young Runaways Initiative.

During 2007, the Community Safety Partnership funded The Children's Society for a 6-month pilot project to look at the issue of young people missing from home across two police Operational Command Units (OCU).

Funding from the Big Lottery for 3 years (from September 2007) enabled The Children's Society to expand this initial pilot and work across Birmingham, providing an independent return visit to young people known to police or other agencies to be missing. The Birmingham Young Runaways Initiative (BYRI) was the result. This return visit looked at reasons why the child had run away; where they had been, with whom, and whether there were safeguarding issues that needed addressing. As part of this work, the project worker reported to the Missing Children and Young People's sub-group to feed into strategic processes for the City.

In addition, Birmingham Community Safety Partnership funded us to develop support for persistent runaways, following the Enhanced Visit Pilot.

In 2008 - 2009, we set up The Safe Friends Scheme to run alongside the Birmingham Young Runaways Initiative – a dedicated volunteer mentoring and befriending service for young runaways, offering consistent and long term support from adult volunteers. Our Persistent Runaways work was developed into The Game Plan, a 10 session intensive programme, allowing young people to define their goals and assess their progress throughout. Together, The Game Plan and the Safe Friends Scheme offered a long term (up to 2 years) package of intensive development and support work for young people who run away.

In 2009 - 2010, we opened the Building Bridges Project, a partnership between The Children's Society and Spurgeons, funded by the Parenting Fund for two years. Our work through BYRI had highlighted the needs of the parents of children and young people who run away from home, many of whom were in need of parenting advice and support which simply was not available for the parents of older children and teenagers. Building Bridges offered individual and group support to parents, using the Triple P and Strengthening Communities programmes.

In addition, we were commissioned by Birmingham City Council to convene and chair strategy meetings for children and young people who had been missing for more than 72 hours.

In 2010 - 2011, with the Big Lottery funding for BYRI ending, we published 'Out of Sight, Out of Mind' a report on running away from home.

During this year, Safe in the City Birmingham took on management of staff at Dudley Circles Restorative Justice project, and work began on Restorative Justice in Birmingham Children's Homes, funded by Birmingham City Council.

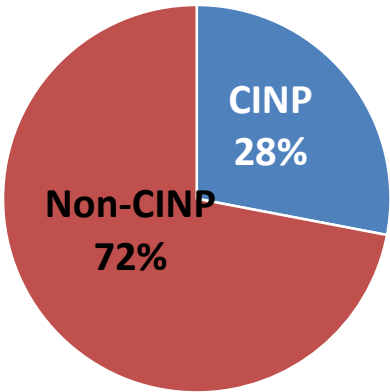
In December 2010, Birmingham decommissioned our work on 72hr meetings and Persistent Runaways (The Game Plan).

In 2011 - 2012, the Safe in the City Birmingham team was restructured, and we were

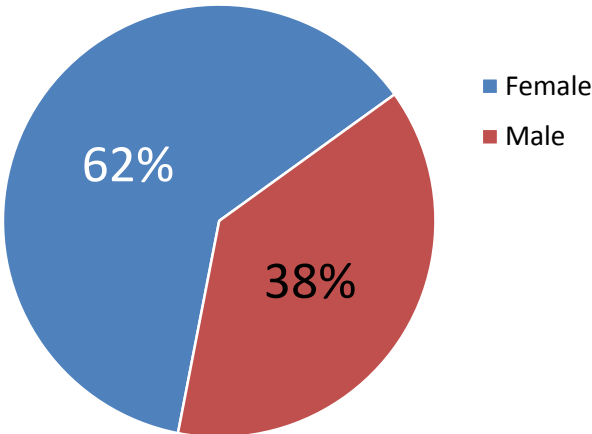
	<p>successful in obtaining funding from The Children's Society nationally to continue direct work with runaways in Birmingham, in addition to the ongoing funding for LAMP. The programme hosted the Birmingham launch of the Make Runaways Safe campaign with the Archbishop of Canterbury.</p> <p>In 2012 - 2013, we received funding from Birmingham City Council for LAMP and for the first time for Missing from Home for our work with children and young people who go missing in Birmingham. Most of our direct work with young runaways was funded by The Children's Society, through an allocation of unrestricted funds, which allowed us to maintain our intensive work, support for families, and work with volunteers where external funding had come to an end.</p>
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5.	<p>Our work in Birmingham 2013 - 2014</p> <p>The funding in Birmingham was £35,000 from the City Council and about £75,000 funding from the Children's Society. Towards the end of the year the Birmingham Children's Safeguarding officers awarded TCS some £45,000 to work with intensive cases for a 12 month period.</p> <p>In 2013 the Birmingham runaways project (Safe in the City/LAMP) and the Coventry CSE project (Streetwise) were amalgamated into the 'Streetwise Birmingham and Coventry' service.</p> <p>Over 2013 - 2014 the Streetwise service has reached just over 8,000 children and young people in Birmingham and Coventry to talk to them about these issues, risks and behaviours. This has been achieved through the provision of advice, return visits, 1:1 sessions, assemblies and group school sessions.</p> <p>In 2013 - 2014 Streetwise Birmingham received 1181 referrals 584 of these referrals were children and young people (CYP) missing from care.</p> <p>The RAG system (Red, Amber, Green) continues to be used to triage each referral or missing and found report. The RAG rating is dependent on the level of risk identified within each referral (number of missing episodes, associates, CSE, places visited, length of missing episode etc).</p> <p>Green referrals have less than 2 missing episodes and few or no risk factors. The parent/carer and young person each receive a letter and leaflet offering advice around running away.</p> <p>Amber referrals require further information from agencies, young people or families, with the possibility that a return interview may be needed due to risk factors.</p> <p>Red referrals require a return interview due to identified risk factors. These include (but are not exclusive to) more than 2 missing episodes, associates, places visited, length of missing episode, substance misuse, domestic violence, learning difficulty, troubled family.</p>
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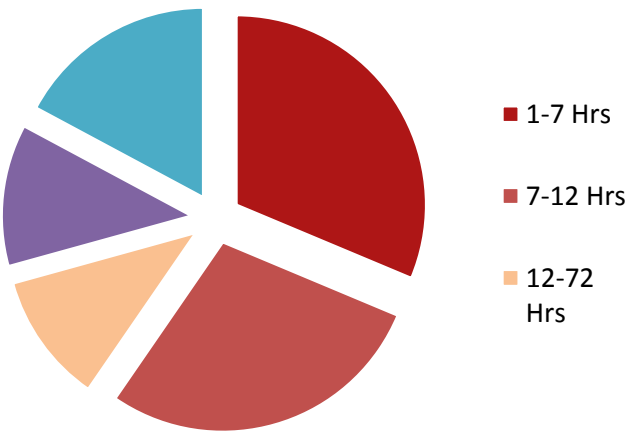
Ratio of CYP Requiring CINP Referrals



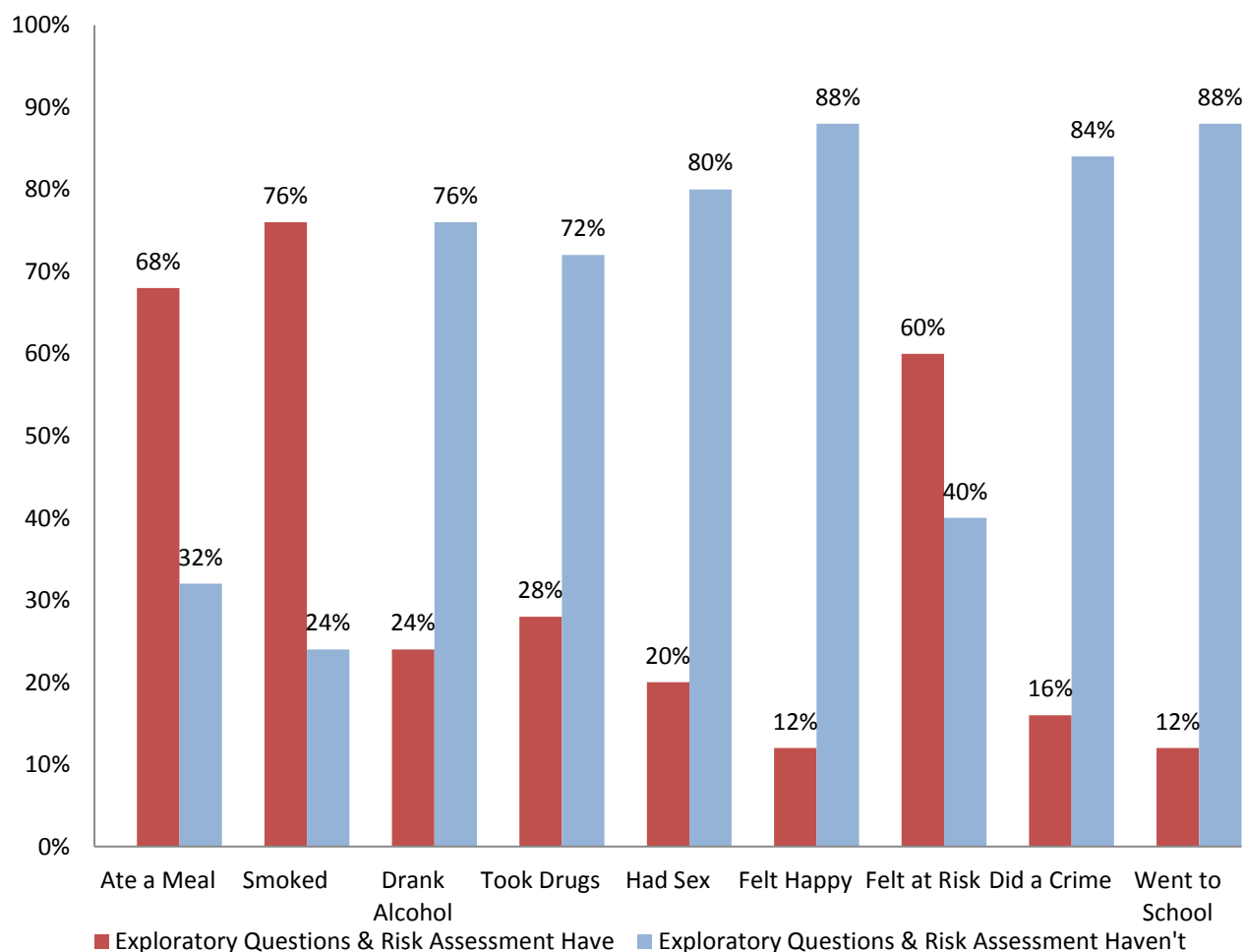
Sex Ratio of CYP Return Interviews



Time Missing



Exploratory Questions & Risk Assessment



6. **Our work in Birmingham 2014 – 2015**

The work in this year was significantly different in the second six months of the year.

April 2014 – September 2015

From April 2014 The Children's Society continued to provide Return Home Interviews as best as possible given the resources available.

Funding at the start of this year consisted of some £35,000 from Birmingham City Council, the £45,000 funding brought forward from 2013 - 2014 from the Safeguarding Board for intensive support cases and about £75,000 funding from The Children's Society. However our activities were continuing to be constrained by demand being significantly greater than our staff capacity to respond.

The Children's Society approached the City Council in September 2014 with an urgent request for further resources – which were made available within a matter of days. This was a six month grant for some £83,000 that enabled additional staff to be recruited and deployed.

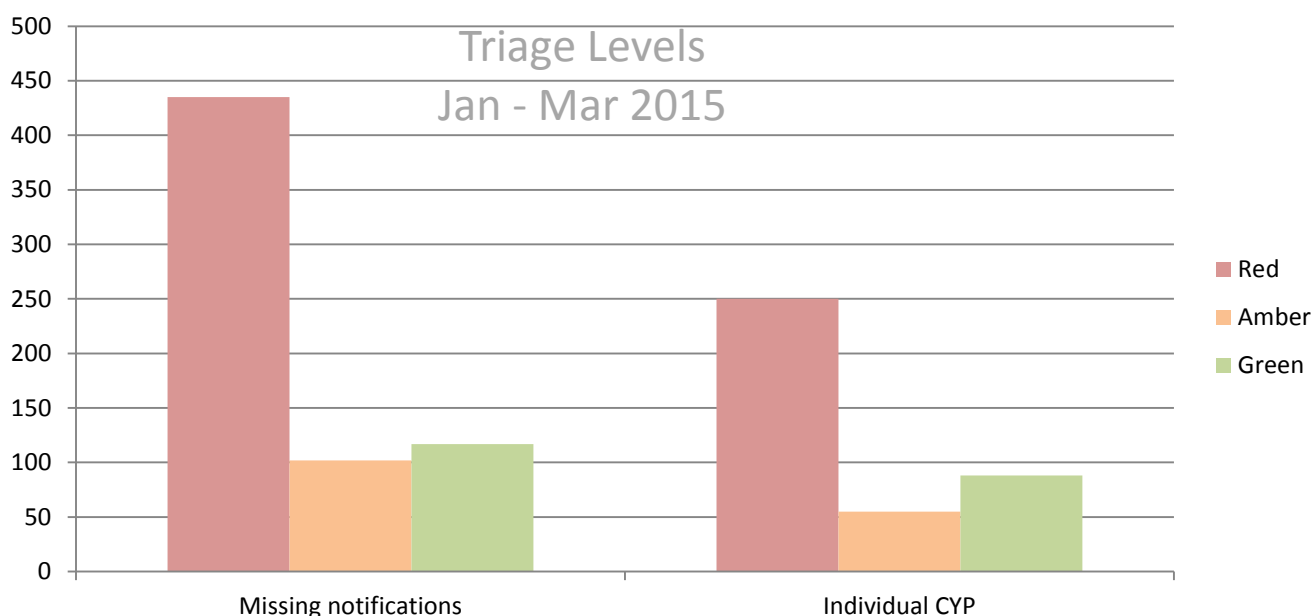
October 2014 – March 2015

During October 2014 – March 2015 Streetwise Birmingham dealt with 654 missing episodes (equating to 1308 missing and found notifications) for 393 children and young people (CYP).

100% of these young people were contacted by Streetwise (this was by phone or letter).

In addition, we have been able to analyse the West Midlands Police absent statistics for the same period and the implications this has for managing missing episodes.

The number of CYP classed as Red has increased from the October – December 2014 figures (54.8%):



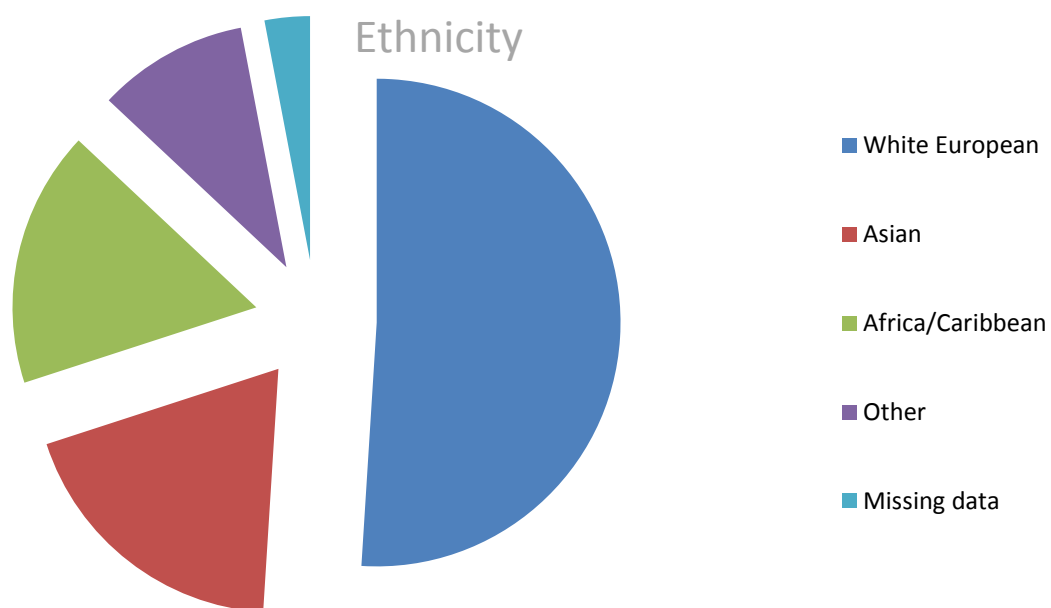
Gender

The proportion of boys to girls referred remains constant across the whole period at about 74% girls and 26% boys. In our interim report we did not analyse how many from each gender were triaged as red. However, in the period from January 2015 we found that of the 146 girls referred, 79% were triaged as red compared to 61% of boys. It is difficult to say with certainty why this is because it could be due to a number of factors:

- The information provided on the police compact sheets/referrers does not highlight risk as often with boys
- A general societal attitude that boys are not as much at risk as girls
- Bias by Streetwise in assessing risk

Ethnicity

- White European - 51%
- Asian - 19%
- Africa/Caribbean - 17%
- Other - 10%
- Missing data - 3%



Thus 46% of missing CYP are from BAME communities.

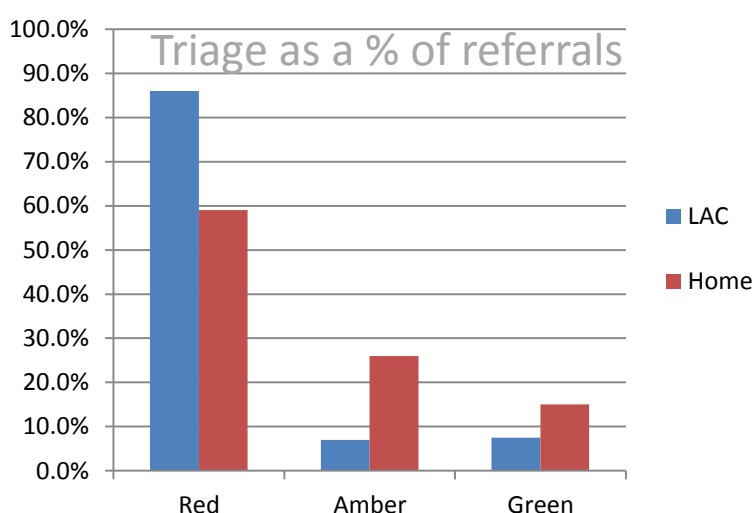
Home or Care?

In our interim report we found that the number of referrals for young people in care (51%) was slightly more than those from home (49%). From January 2015 until April the figures were significantly different:

Of the 185 CYP **119 (64%)** were in care and **66 (35%)** were living at home.

Of those CYP referred who were in care:

- **86% (102)** of them were offered return interviews i.e. triaged as red,
- **7% (8)** were classified as amber i.e. requiring more information, and
- **7.5% (9)** classified as green and thus received a letter informing them of where to go to



for advice and information.

Of those that lived at home:

- **59% (39)** were classified as red
- **26% (17)** as amber
- **15% (10)** as green.

It has been reported that return interviews weren't being done on CYP in care but these figures show that in fact Streetwise offered proportionately more return interviews to CYP in care than to those living at home. This is to be expected if one assumes that those CYP in care are more likely to exhibit concerning behaviour. The gap in perception could be due to:

- More CYP in care refusing a return interview when offered
- A misunderstanding by care staff of what constitutes a return interview vis-à-vis a police safe and well check, and whether all CYP in care get a safe and well check
- A misunderstanding by care staff of whether incidents are being classified as absent rather than missing and so not requiring a return interview.

Comprehensive Data Analysis

This information is based on the young people who were triaged as red and offered return interviews.

At the point of the interim report 86% of red triaged CYP were offered a return interview. From January to April this figure went down to 46%. This is due to:

- A protracted period of funding uncertainty leading to a number of staffing issues that impacted our ability to deliver outputs and outcomes: redundancy notifications; staff vacancies; low staff morale; project wind-down. This issue emphasises the need to secure medium term funding in order to prevent funding uncertainty affecting the outputs.
- An increase in the need to offer intensive support work impacted on the team's capacity to carry out additional return interviews between January and March. This was exacerbated by the staffing issues mentioned above.

However, between October 2014 and April 2015, 160 young people were offered a return interview and 65% accepted and completed an interview. Given the high levels of disengagement by this group of young people this is a high success rate.

Of the 56 CYP's who did not undertake a return interview, approximately 24% (39) refused and the remainder were added to the waiting list.

In addition between January and April Streetwise has completed Intensive Support Work with 53 individual CYP's. This has been follow up work identified as needed through the initial return interview. Topics covered within these sessions include (but are not exclusive to) the risks of running away and going missing, healthy relationships, grooming, sex and the law, identity, confidence and self-esteem, CSE, internet safety.

Missing From Locations

East: 48% of referrals

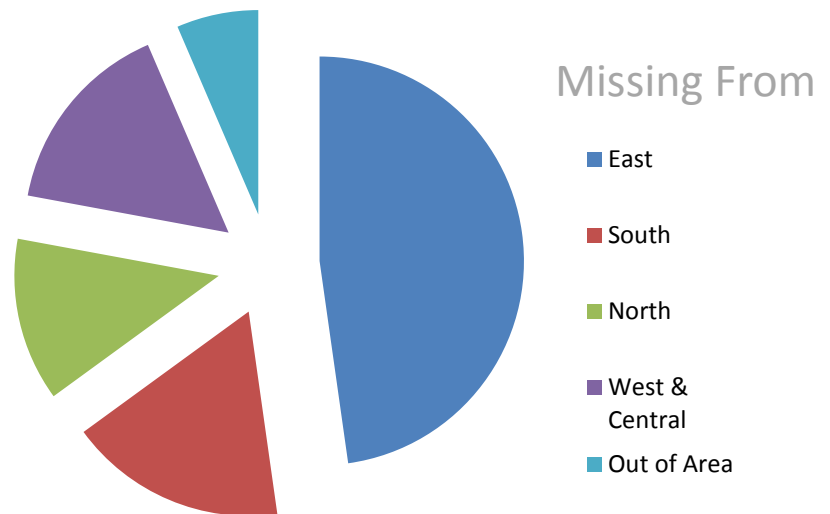
South: 17.3% of referrals

North: 13% of referrals

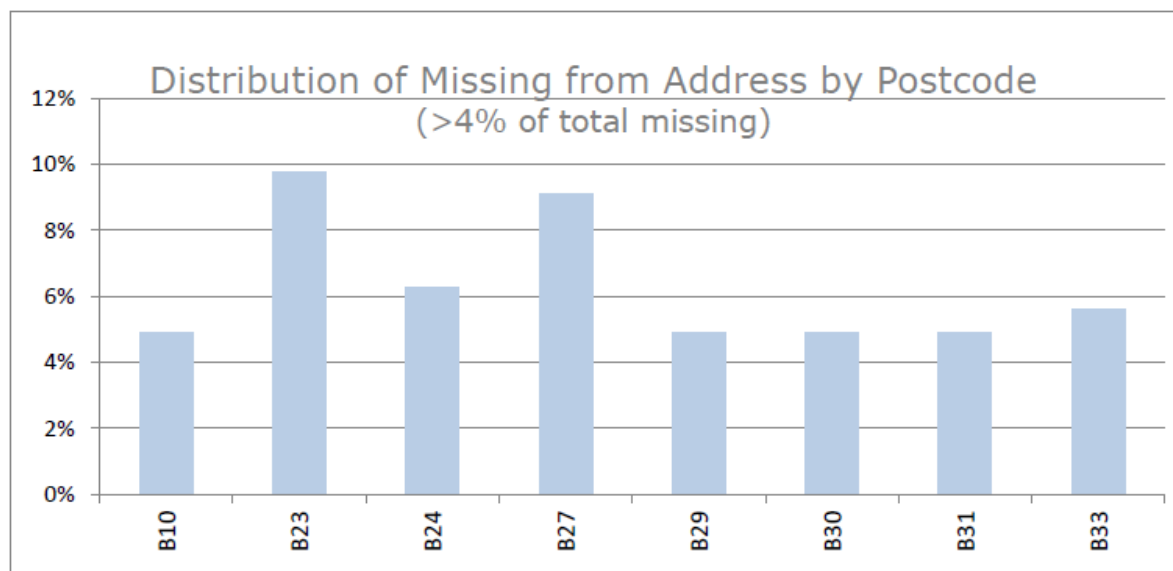
West & Central: 15.7% of referrals

Out of Area*: 6.5% of referrals

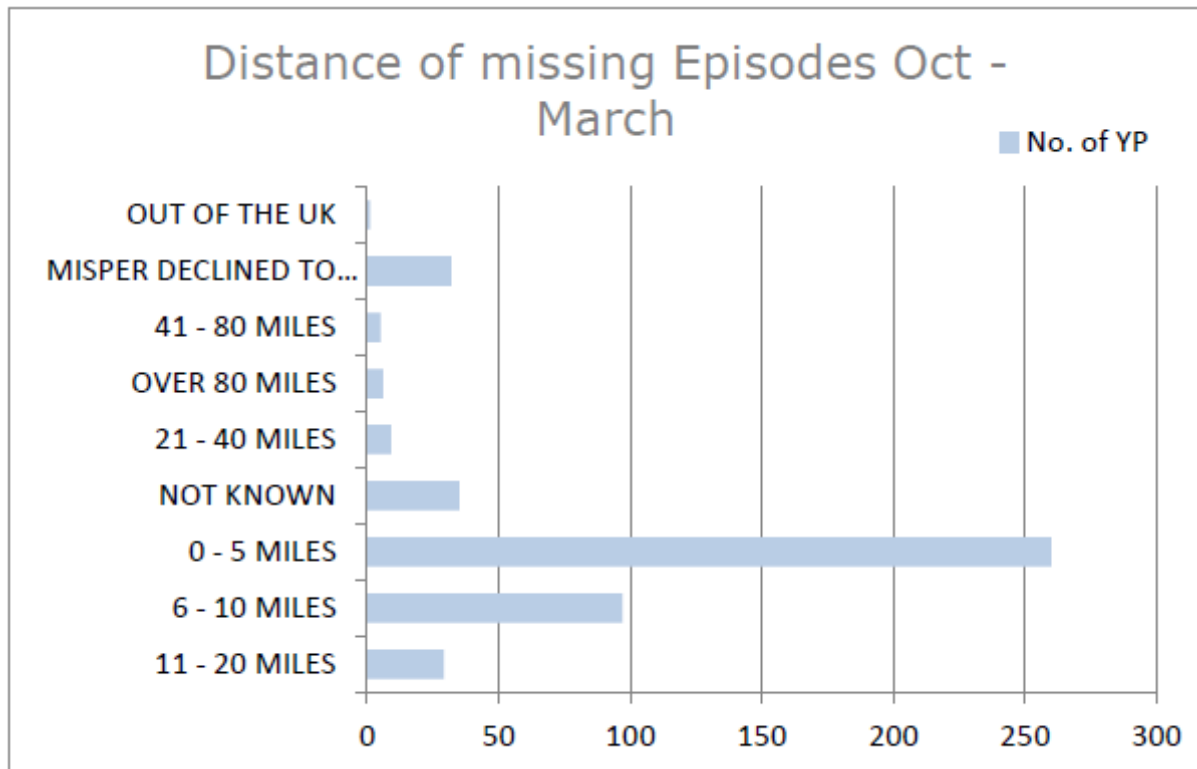
**Out of area young people who do not reside in Birmingham*



The following chart shows that approximately 10% of missing episodes in the city between November and April were from the B23 postcode (Erdington, Stockland Green, Short Heath, Perry Common) and 9% of missing episodes were generated by the B27 Postcode area of the city (Acocks Green). These are the two areas of the city young people are most likely to run from.



How far did young people run to?

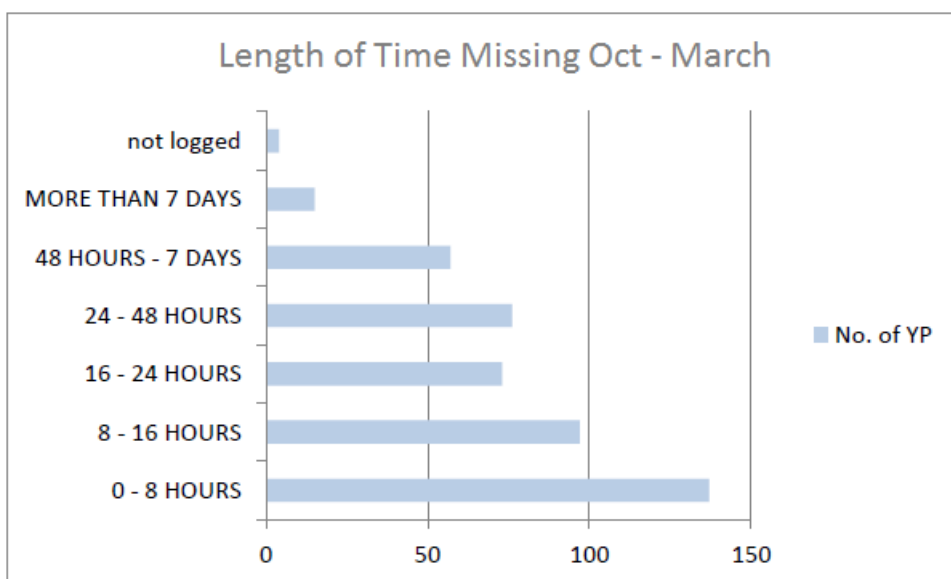


- **59%** of CYP were found between 0–5 miles from their home
- **22%** were found between 6-10 miles
On the whole these will be CYP found within Birmingham – a total of 81%
- **6.6%** were found between 10-20 miles
- **2%** were found 21-40 miles
These CYP would be mainly found in the West Midlands region – nearly 9%
- **1.1%** were found between 41- 80 miles
- **1.3%** were found over 80 miles way
These will be found in other UK regions – 2.4%
- **7.3%** CYP declined to give information.

Thus 89% are likely not to have travelled outside the West Midlands region when they were found.

Length of time missing

0 – 8 hrs	30%
8 – 16 hrs	21%
16 – 24 hrs	16%
24 – 48 hrs	16.5%
2 – 7 days	12%
7+ days	3%
Missing Data	0.8%



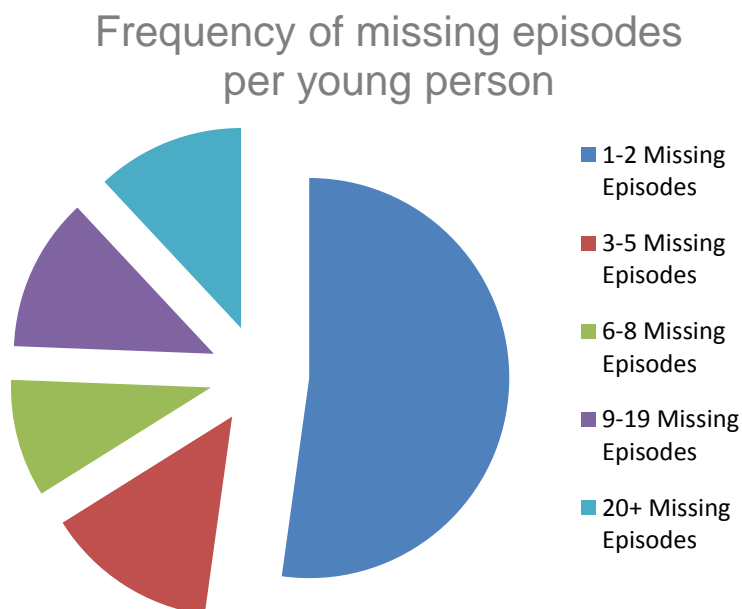
Thus whilst **51%** of CYP are not missing for longer than 16 hrs, we don't have the data to say whether this was overnight, although it is likely that this will usually be the case. What is of additional concern are the percentage that went missing for 24–48 hrs, and in total 21.5% were missing for more than 24 hrs and that the numbers of CYP who were missing for more than two days stands at **15%**.

Persistent Missing

Streetwise classify a persistent missing person as someone who has more than 3 missing episodes.

November – April Figures:

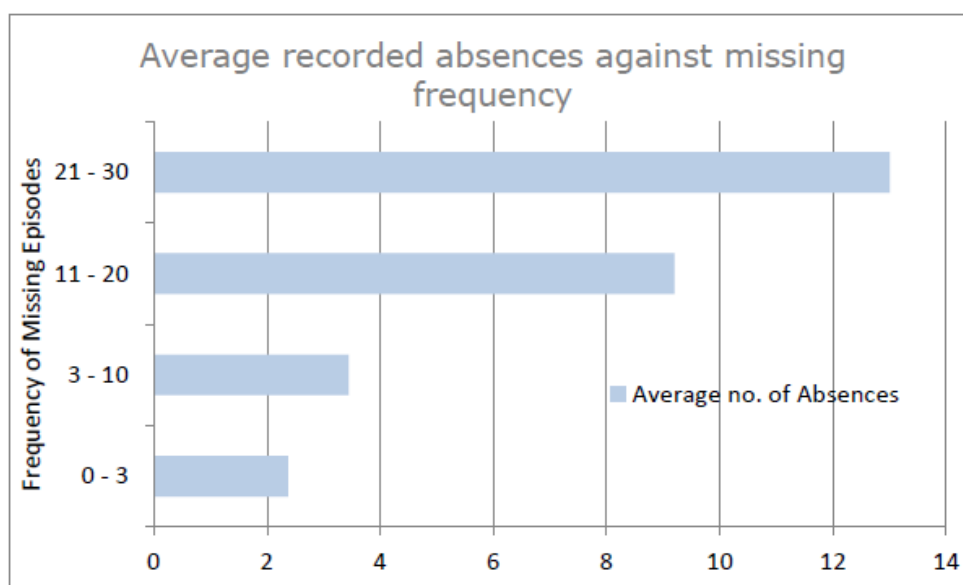
1-2 missing episodes:	214 (52%)
3-5 missing episodes:	57 (14%)
6-8 missing episodes:	39 (9.5%)
9-19 missing episodes:	51 (12.4%)
20+ missing episodes:	49 (12%)



The top three persistent runaways for the period January – March 2015 are all from care and together have a total of 34 missing episodes between them.

In the period from January to March 2015 there was a significant increase in the number of CYP who had more than 9 missing episodes. From October to December 13.4% of CYP had more than 9 missing episodes whereas after January 2015 this went up to 38.9%. This may go

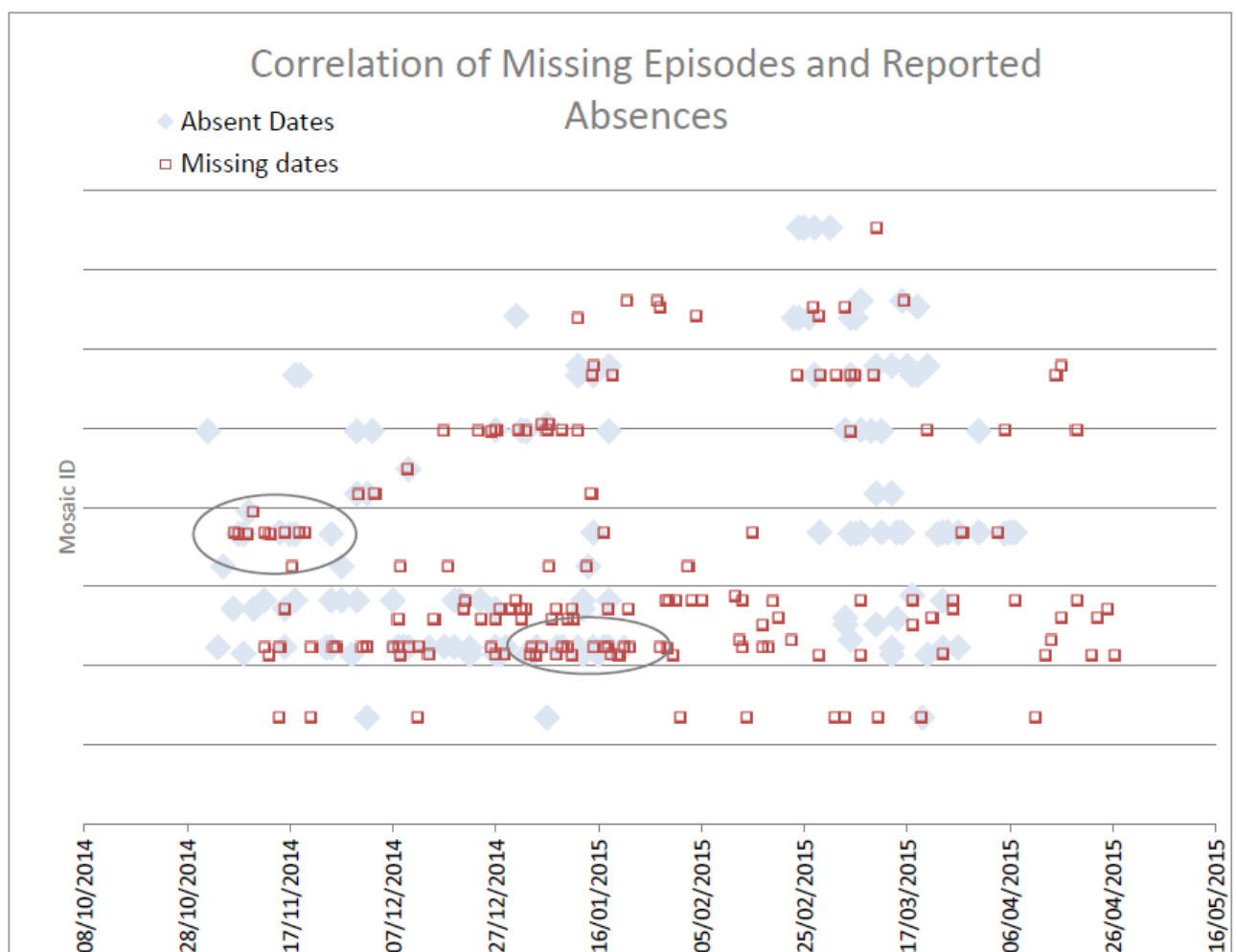
some way to account for the drop in numbers of return interviews completed in the second period – it is not possible to complete a return interview if the CYP is missing at the time. Additionally it may also explain why we have done more intensive support work with young people as the vulnerabilities and risks increase. Alternatively it may also be a result in the drop in return interviews delivered in the second period due to the funding uncertainties, as Streetwise were unable to intervene as early as a backlog built up. This explanation would also fit with the drop in CYP who went missing 1-2 times (68.8% October – December; 52% from January - March) as we were unable to intervene earlier, the CYP went on to go missing more times.



In addition to the missing episodes, we can look at how many ‘absences’ were also recorded for young people classed as missing.

The chart previous correlates the two measures and shows that a young person who went missing between 21-30 times also, on average, had 13 recorded absences *in addition* to the missing episodes.

Similarly to our previous report, we can identify that persistent missing young people are often simultaneously categorised as absent and missing as demonstrated by the following chart. On the following chart each horizontal line represents an individual with their missing and absent plotted in date order.



The blue diamonds indicate when an individual has been classified as absent, whilst the red squares indicate a single missing episode. Where the dots coincide (examples circled) one individual has been classed as 'absent' at the same or very similar time as being classified as missing.

There have been instances where a missing young person whom we would consider high risk has simultaneously had several incidents characterised as absent. Absences carry a default lower risk rating within the Police service. Streetwise is increasingly concerned about a failure to correlate missing and absent for individuals. This is leading to procedural mis-diagnosis of risk levels for the most vulnerable.

Streetwise triages its missing referrals by examining the number of missing episodes, absences, and other risk factors. There have been instances, before absence data was made available to us, where we've assessed a young person as low risk without the contextual intelligence of 5 or more absent incidents attributable to that young person. This intelligence catapults the young person into a red risk category requiring a return interview. We have seen that early intervention works better than later trouble shooting. Correlating the missing and absent together from the start allows us to spot problems and intervene earlier to prevent escalation of issues and entrenchment of behaviours. We would recommend that others in this field also correlate data to have more complete context when assessing risk.

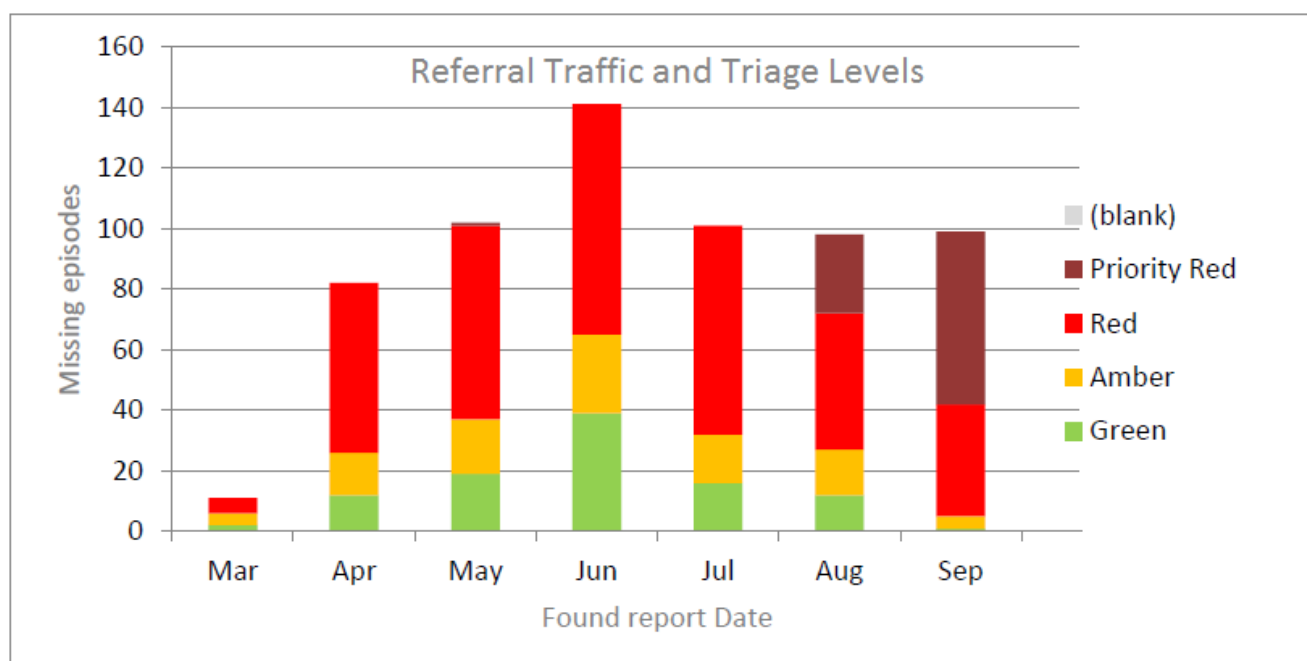
April 2015 – September 2015

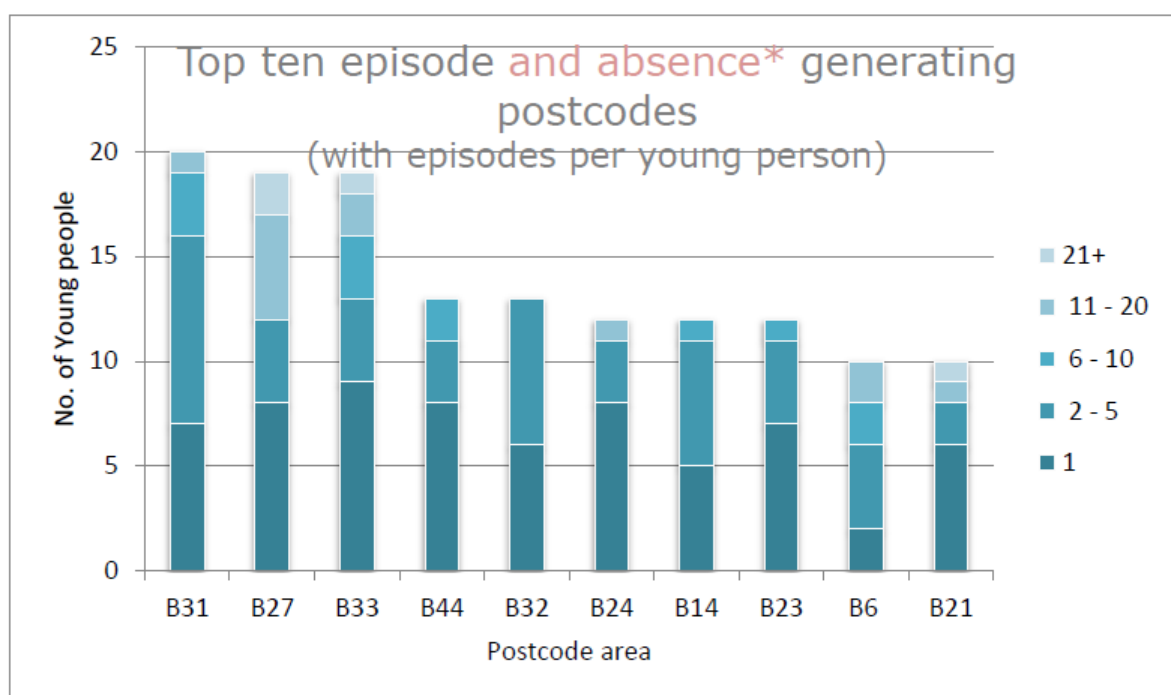
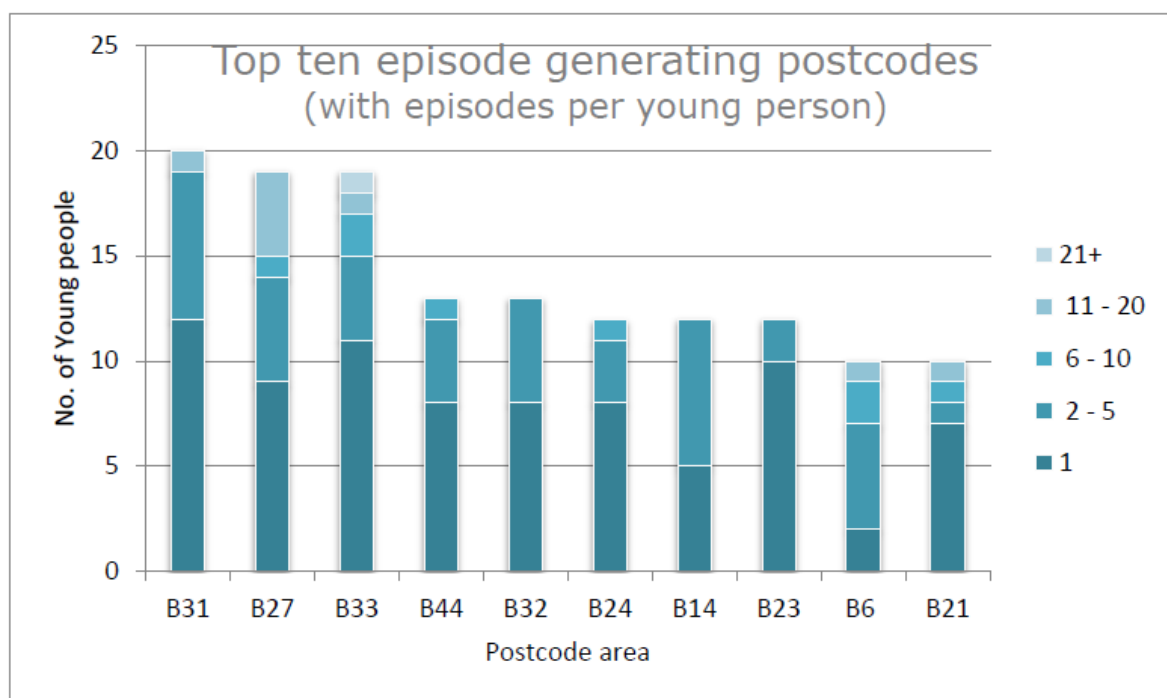
Funding

At the end of 2014 the Big Lottery Fund awarded a three year grant to The Children's Society to support its work with CSE and missing in Birmingham and Coventry. This funding is complimentary to the support from the City Council and TCS focusing on additional counselling capacity, volunteers and family support.

In addition although it has taken a long time in the current year for funding from Birmingham City Council to be confirmed we have now the following contributions to support the missing RHI service over the following three years.

Schedule	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Total	% of total
Birmingham City Council	152,087	154,310	161,023	467,420	49%
Lottery	79,720	80,566	82,983	243,269	26%
TCS	77,521	79,620	81,765	238,906	25%
Total	309,327	314,496	325,771	949,595	100%





The two charts above (Episodes and Absence) show which Birmingham postcodes generate the most individual young people that go missing. B31 (Northfield), B27 (Acocks Green) and B33 (Kitts Green/ Stetchford) have each generated at least 19 missing young people in the rolling year.

The colours of the individual bars denote how many times an individual has been classified as missing in the rolling year.

The charts above are the addition of absence and missing which gives a fuller picture of activity for prolific missing young people.

*NB: Absence data not provided for July - September by Police

7.

Key issues for the future

- The Children's Society would like to see the Missing Operational Group become much more effective in managing the interagency support for and intelligence gathering concerning children who are missing.
- The Children's Society is very concerned about the welfare not just of the children notified to the police as missing but also absent, and we know that some of these absent categorisations concern young people with known levels of vulnerability.
- The trigger questions for WMP call operators to assess young people as absent or missing may not be the right questions. We recognise that this is a national standard/ procedure. Streetwise suggests that at least there needs to be a more considered look at the type of questions to ask to assess risk. The safeguarding board and West Midlands Police to make representations to review this process.
- Streetwise is concerned about the poor level of information supplied from children's homes who make referrals to us. More training for residential care workers on risk indicators around safeguarding, CSE, substance misuse, gang involvement and criminality and corporate parenting responsibility and on the difference between safe and well check and return interviews.
- Placing a young person out of area does not necessarily reduce missing episodes and on occasions exacerbates them. Streetwise does not have the resource to conduct out of area return interviews, or to offer intensive support. Consideration to be given to explore a "spot purchase arrangement" to enable out of area return interviews/intensive support.