

GREATER MANCHESTER RUNAWAY AND MISSING FROM HOME AND CARE PROTOCOL (RMFHC)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 When a child goes missing or runs away from home or care setting, they are at risk and therefore this is a safeguarding issue. When missing, children may experience physical and/or emotional abuse or sexual abuse, be exposed to risk of harm or exploitation by perpetrators. They may feel fear and loneliness, and be placed in a position where they are taking risks or self-harming. They may also find themselves in dangerous situations such as having to sleep rough or be forced to commit crimes. Family and social relationships may suffer, education may be affected, and life chances may be at risk of being adversely affected. Missing children are in a position of vulnerability from trafficking, violent crime, drug and alcohol misuse and exploitation amongst other crime types.
- 1.2 Greater Manchester partners recognise that there are significant opportunities and statutory responsibilities to provide a framework for a co-ordinated, standardised and effective response to protect, prevent and reduce risks associated with missing episodes. The protocol also takes account of the statutory responsibilities of local authorities and their partners in relation to all missing children including children in the care of the local authority, children subject to a child protection plan, children in receipt of services as part of 'Child in Need' or Early Help plan and those missing from home who access universal and community support only.
- 1.3 This protocol should be read alongside [Statutory Guidance on children who runaway or go missing from home or care 2014](#)
- 1.4 Based on information gathered from GM police and partners, there are three distinct groups of children who go missing in the Greater Manchester area. These are:
 - Children living at home with parents, in a family environment where parental responsibility is with another party within that home setting or where private fostering arrangements are in place.
 - Children living under the care of the Local authority within the geographic boundaries of that authority.
 - Children living in our geographic area having been placed by other local authorities who are 'Accommodated'/'Looked after' by that authority.
- 1.5 By far, most children are missing for a short period or stay out overnight and return of their own accord the next day, often within 24 hours. Many are missing only once. A smaller number of children run away multiple times, still often for short periods, also returning independently. A number of children go missing for longer periods and interventions are always required to locate and return them safely. Any missing episode is potentially serious and the principles of individual risk assessments by parents, carers and professionals must be used to respond to missing incidents. There must also be consideration and recognition of factors that may result in the child being additionally vulnerable. Please refer to your local threshold document.
- 1.6 This protocol is relevant to all children and young people under the age of 18. For the purposes of the document, the term 'child' will be used. 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 exploitation and involvement with gangs and associated criminal activity.
- 1.7 There are additional risks for young adults leaving care who have experienced Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)/ Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and/or go missing which includes: effects on their mental health, criminal behaviours, alcohol and drug misuse, domestic abuse and social

care interventions relating to their own child/children. Therefore, there is a need for there to be ongoing support and services available to those people who have been victims of or have increased vulnerability to CSE/CCE and who go missing. If they are a Care Leaver their Personal Advisor should monitor any risks presented from missing episodes. If the young person has additional care and support needs, they should be referred to Adult Social Care at this point.

2. **PREVENTION OF MISSING**

2.1 The prevention of children and young people going missing requires a multi-agency approach; Prevention strategies will include:

- Awareness and training for all professionals
- Awareness and safety sessions for young people via curriculum opportunities
- Multi-agency assessment procedures, including Early Help, identifying push and pull factors that may lead to a child going missing and actions to address these
- Monitoring and reporting of missing from home, care and education settings
- Support to parents, carers and family members
- Regular review and identification of what services and interventions are available to reduce the likelihood of a child repeatedly going missing
- Consistent implementation of this protocol across all agencies through partnership working, information sharing, problem solving and effective performance management of all elements of this protocol.

3. **WHEN A CHILD IS MISSING**

3.1 **Before contacting police it is vitally important that:** When a child is identified as missing, or not at the location they are expected to be at, the reporting individual (parent/carer/other agency) must take proactive steps to trace the child's whereabouts before contacting the police. Such steps would include:

- Physical checks of the child's residence or where they are meant to be, including any location the child may be hiding within the house or building
- Physical checks of any garden, garage, sheds, grounds and surrounding area(s)
- Attempting to contact the missing person directly, via mobile phone, text or social networking sites
- Contacting the missing individual's family and friends
- If it is safe to do so, visiting locations that the child is known to frequent, or where they have previously been found if missing before
- Referring to any existing plan that may be in place for that child, which could provide information to locate the child or identify any vulnerabilities

3.2 Each child's circumstances should always be considered including:

- age
- vulnerability of the child
- the nature of any incident that led to the child going missing
- the child's previous history of going missing
- prevailing weather conditions

- any other associated risks (such as risk of exploitation or physical or emotional health, if the child has a learning difficulty , additional learning needs or diagnosed disabilities or has previously been trafficked)
 - Where there is a risk of immediate or serious harm, the police should be contacted straight away
- 3.3 If the person is located through such enquiries, they should not be reported as missing person to the police. Parents or carers should arrange to collect the child where they won't return of their own accord. Any actions needed to respond to risks and dangers relating to that incident should be taken and existing plans should be reviewed and updated accordingly.
- 3.4 Should there be significant safety issues with the location where the child is, the reporting individual should contact the police and report their concerns for that child's welfare at that location
- 3.5 If the child is found, but is reluctant to return, the police may be requested to assist in their safe return; however, the individual must not be reported as missing simply to facilitate involvement of the police in their return or as a behavioural tool.

4. **REPORTING TO POLICE**

- 4.1 When all reasonable checks to locate the individual have been carried out and the child is not located, Greater Manchester Police should be contacted via 101 to report them missing. There may be emergency situations where you may need to ring 999, but it is expected that these occasions will be rare. Those reporting a child missing should be prepared to answer the following questions and all relevant information should be to hand at the time of contacting the police:
- Full name, (spell correctly to call taker)
 - Date of birth and address of the child/young person
 - Whether they have been missing before
 - A description of the child/young person including their clothing
 - When they were last seen and with whom
 - Any info regarding risks and vulnerabilities, additional learning needs or diagnosed disabilities, concerns, such as self-harm behaviours and/or suicide risk, CSE/CCE, criminality, drugs and any risk of radicalisation
 - What has led to the missing episode?
 - Telephone numbers, including the young person's mobile number and/or social media contact details if they have one
 - What efforts have already been made to make contact with the Missing child or your person
 - Names of family, known friends/acquaintances, addresses and telephone numbers and what efforts have been made to contact family.
 - Details of other people the child/young person may be with
 - Details of any ongoing medical treatment or relevant concerns regarding medical information
 - Legal status including social care involvement (full care orders/section 20 for example)

The primary function of the police is to investigate the disappearance of the child and attempt to locate the child at the earliest opportunity in order to prevent any harm to that child or the public at

large. Police response and associated actions will be based on a Greater Manchester Police risk assessment of the incident and knowledge of the individual(s) concerned, the info given will be used to inform the police response.

People may be reported as missing who could also be classed as wanted. Each case should be evaluated on an individual basis and responded to according to the priority. For example, if a person is wanted for a minor matter but the missing persons risk assessment indicates a high risk, it may be appropriate to deal with the case as a missing person's enquiry. Similarly a low risk missing person wanted for murder may be more appropriately dealt with as a wanted person and the correct investigative approach applied.

The guiding principle is to adopt an approach that will bring both matters to the safest, most efficient conclusion.

Duplicating the investigation and record keeping should be avoided. If a decision is taken to treat an individual as 'wanted', a missing report will still need to be recorded in order to reflect the appropriate level of investigation. This **MUST** be endorsed by a senior officer to the effect that the missing person investigation should be considered **INACTIVE** until such time the person is located as wanted, or they are no longer considered to be wanted.

5. LOCATING THE CHILD

5.1 When GMP receives a call reporting a child missing the call handler will conduct a priority deployment assessment to determine the appropriate response grading. The attending police officer will subsequently conduct a risk assessment, and initially prioritise all episodes according to the table below. The police investigation and all resulting actions will be proportionate to the risk level. Whilst partner agencies have their own risk assessments, the GMP investigation will be proportionate to the GMP risk assessment.

High	The risk of serious harm to the subject or the public is assessed as very likely (Subject refers to both adult and a child)
Medium	The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as likely but not serious (Subject refers to both adult and a child)
Low	The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as possible but minimal (Subject refers to both adult and a child)

Risk assessment is a dynamic process which is open to regular review from GMP as follows:

- During each shift by District Supervisor
- After 48 hours by a detective
- After 72 hours by Chief Inspector – Operations
- After 7 days by District Superintendent and referred to Missing Persons Section
- Every 28 days by Chief Inspector – Operations
- After 6 months by District Superintendent

5.1 In addition to GMP risk assessments, partners should work together with police, to share information including identifying any other risks or vulnerabilities not shared at the point of a child missing report. This could include GMP district missing teams, local authority missing teams including missing co-ordinators/CSE or complex safeguarding teams, social workers, health and education providers.

- 5.2 GMP will ensure that they provide details to the Local Authority missing co-ordinator or the team with responsibility for all children reported missing. The Local Authority will record all missing episodes on their social care management systems.
- 5.3 If a child is missing for 72 hours, a multi-agency strategy meeting will be convened. Statutory guidance requires a missing multi-agency strategy meeting at 72 hours of a child going missing. It is for each local authority to determine whether this meeting should be earlier, based on risk and vulnerability of the child. The chair will be a social care team manager or Independent Reviewing Officer and will include social care, police, education, health and any other relevant agencies. Actions will be considered such as notifying press communications and the Director of Children's Services (DCS) where escalation is appropriate. Close liaison should be ongoing between partners and relevant agencies. It will be agreed who will maintain contact with parent/carers (with parental responsibility regardless of whether the child is living within the family unit or not).
- 5.4 If the child is missing for 5 days, a further multi-agency meeting/discussion will be held and led by a social care manager along with the appropriate senior leadership member for your area. The Assistant Director and DCS must be informed at this point if not previously done so. Consideration should be given to inviting the parent/carer, where appropriate.

6 WHEN A CHILD IS FOUND

- 6.1 The attitude and response of all professionals, such as police and social workers, towards a child who has been missing, can have a significant impact on how they will engage with the investigation and safeguarding plans. There will be people who will seek out vulnerable children to exploit them. Although some children may present as knowing how to deal with difficult or dangerous situations, they may be extremely vulnerable to in multiple risk situations. A supportive approach is needed when a child returns, actively listening and responding to their needs to create a greater chance of preventing further missing episodes and safeguarding them against all risks.
- 6.2 If the child is found by police, the first consideration will be any concerns for the child's welfare and/or the circumstances (or location) at which they have been found. Where necessary, attending officers may consider the use of Police Protection Powers, as PARA 6.5.
- If the locating officer has no concerns for the welfare of the child, they must;
- Conduct a Safe and Well Check/Prevention Interview
 - Notify the family or carer of the child's location
 - Ensure the child is safe, advise them on how to return home if needed
 - Otherwise leave the child at the place they were found
 - Close the missing report
- 6.3 If the child is found by another agency or family member or returns of their own accord, the police must be informed and Safe and Well Check /Prevention Interview be completed by the police. If the police and locating agency consider no concerns to be evident and the family allows the child to remain where found, this decision will be recorded on the missing report on the relevant police systems.
- 6.4 When children missing from home are found but have not been formally reported missing to the police by their families, parents and carers should be encouraged to report any future missing episodes. Partners should proactively consider whether there are any safeguarding concerns or whether early help support may be required at this time.
- 6.5 Returning to home: When a missing child is located it is the responsibility of parents/carers to collect the child unless, the circumstances pose a risk to any parties concerned. Only in these circumstances may the police be asked to assist in returning that child, but it must be recognised that the police only have powers to return an individual who is subject to Section 32(1) (a) and

Section 32 (1b) of the Children and Young Peoples Act 1969. Where there are concerns that a child would be likely to suffer significant harm, the police may take the person into police protection and return them to their home address, a place of safety, Local Authority accommodation or a place chosen by the Local Authority. A police station should not be considered a place of safety. Police Protection will not be used as a tool to simply facilitate the return of a child. If any information is shared by the child that suggests they are not safe by returning home this will be discussed with the appropriate social work team to establish a course of action and a place of safety. Where a child is located by parents and carers and refuses to return home then they should be reported as a concern for welfare to police as per PARA 3.4. Mental Capacity should be considered for 16/17-year-olds going missing and refusing to return home.

- 6.6 Officers will also consider markers on an address that may indicate abuse or other concerns.
- 6.7 Safeguarding the child from criminality: When a missing child is found steps should be taken to make sure that all aspects of criminality are considered specifically exploitation or vulnerability whether they consider themselves a victim or not.
- 6.8 The missing child will be dealt with as a priority; however, consideration should be given to the adults and any other children that the child is found with.
- 6.9 Safe and Well Check: All missing children should have a Safe and Well Check/ Prevention Interview. Such checks should be completed by police, such as “Madison” trained police officers/staff (including PCSOs) and appropriate members of police staff or officers. These should be completed within 24 hours of the child being located. If possible and appropriate, the child should be talked to away from their parents/carers. The child must be informed about who else will receive the information gathered from the safe and well check and why. Once the Missing report has been updated by the attending officer/staff member then this will be reviewed by the duty Sergeant. Where a safe and well check has not been completed the Sergeant on duty must sign off the missing incident with a rationale that explains why this could not be completed. In any event ALL safe and well checks should be completed in person.
- 6.10 The purpose of the Safe and Well Check/Prevention Interview is:
 - 6.10.1 Check for any indications that the child has suffered, or is suffering harm and follow normal Child Protection procedures if necessary, including consideration of a safeguarding referral to Social Care for the child and/or others in the household (CAP to be completed by attending officer)
 - 6.10.2 Record appropriately the Voice of the Child
 - 6.10.3 Identify where they have been
 - 6.10.4 Identify who they have been with
 - 6.10.5 Give them an opportunity to disclose any offending against them (or by them)
 - 6.10.6 Offer and encourage a full return interview with a relevant agency
 - 6.10.7 Provide information about support services, including ChildLine
 - 6.10.8 Additionally, the Safe and Well Check will:
 - 6.10.9 Consider and record appearance and demeanour as well as verbal information
 - 6.10.10 Be recorded on Police Case Management System
 - 6.10.11 Sent to the relevant Local Authority who will share it with the person carrying out the Independent Return Interview who can pick up on any information shared or observed

7 RETURN INTERVIEW

- 7.1 Statutory guidance stipulates that all children who have been classified as missing by police, regardless of how long they have been missing, **must** be offered an Independent Return Interview (RI) in addition to the Safe and Well Check. RIs provide an opportunity to safeguard the child and hear their voice. It can also provide information to professionals to understand why the young person ran away, to uncover information that can be used to reduce the likelihood of the child going missing again; to address the risks or incidents they may have been exposed to while missing and the risk factors in their home life. It is the child's choice about whether this offer is accepted. A partnership approach should be used with parents, there may be rare occasions when a return interview is refused by parents, however it is expected that there would be a clear rationale offered by parents and this will be recorded. The child's perspective should always be paramount, however, where the young person doesn't accept the return interview with the independent reviewer, 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.
- 7.2 The local authority is responsible for ensuring that the RI is offered. It is good practice for Local Authorities to offer RI for all children on their footprint. Some Greater Manchester authorities offer this service. If this service isn't available, it is the duty of the placing authority to ensure there are arrangements in place to undertake the return interview with the young person and share information accordingly.
- 7.3 Statutory guidance states that this should be completed within 72 hours of the young person's return home or to their care setting. While time is a factor in completing the interview, it is of equal importance that interview allows space for the child to share information. Return interviews can help understand and address the reasons why a child has run away, such as abuse, neglect or exploitation, involvement in gangs or crime, use of alcohol or drugs. Also, to identify harm that may have occurred while the child was away, allow professionals to identify actions they need to take to address and prevent further risks. The discussion can help the child feel safe and understand how and where they can seek help if they want to run away again and provide them with information on how to stay safe if they do so.
- 7.4 If the young person has several missing episodes in quick succession, it may be more important to talk about a pattern of missing's over one interview to gain a picture of how best to safeguard them.
- 7.5 Young people should be given information about what a return interview is about before they take part, so they can fully contribute. It should be made clear to the child what information should be shared with whom and what it is that parents and workers are worried about and what steps they may take to address this. It is crucial that relevant information is shared with police and those involved with the child so that a picture is built up and any issues can be dealt with.
- 7.6 The interviewer should know how to communicate with children and young people and have a good understanding of risks. A positive professional approach will impact on the quality of the response received, so workers must be respectful to develop trust. A conversational approach should be used - which is caring and creative to encourage the young person to talk and share their information. Experienced workers report that completing the form directly with the young person is not the best approach and for some children the use of tools may be appropriate. Some young people may want the opportunity to contribute or write their own views – interviewers can use appropriate ways of doing this such as 'wishes and feelings' sheets or use of technology if

available. Ultimately, the return interview should reflect the child's voice about the missing episode.

7.7 Information can be gathered from other sources (such as parents and carers or other professionals); however the best quality information will be received from the child if they are able to freely discuss the missing episode directly with the interviewer. The Return Home Interview should give full consideration to a child/young person's individual needs, for example, the use of an interpreter, as well as the use of additional tools as previously referred to.

8 **RESPONSE AND ACTION**

8.1 **Referral:** If safeguarding concerns are identified for any child relating to the missing episode, from a safe and well check or a return interview, a referral should be made to Children's Social Care. Local procedures for the child's local authority should be followed. Professionals should consider children who may be:

- At serious risk to themselves or from others due to their vulnerability
- Known or believed to be at risk of harm from / due to:
 - Child Sexual Exploitation
 - Criminal Exploitation
 - Trafficking
 - Physical/Mental/Sexual/Emotional abuse (including bullying)
 - Neglect
 - Parenting Capacity Issues
 - Domestic Abuse (as a victim or witness)
 - Harmful Practices - Forced Marriage/Honour Based Violence/Female Genital Mutilation (as a victim or witness)
- Disability
- At risk from radicalisation

8.2 **Meetings:** If a child is missing 2 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. Repeatedly going missing should not be viewed as normal behaviour and can indicate exploitation or other safeguarding issues. Actions following earlier incidents should be reviewed and alternative strategies considered.

If a child is missing 3 or more times in a 28-day period or for 72 hours or more, a Strategy meeting must be called. It should be chaired by a social care team manager and attended by core statutory partners of police, local authority & health and any agencies who are also involved with the child, and a request made via the Missing Person Safeguarding Officer from GMP for police representation at the meeting. This will be reviewed on a case by case basis depending upon the concerns raised. Wherever possible GMP will send a representative, and in some high-risk cases the "Cluster" Missing Person Safeguarding Officer may attend. The provision of historic MFH related information may also be passed by secure email and via telephony. The purpose of the meeting is to identify any push/pull factors that need tackling, decide jointly on an action plan (or review and existing plan) and identify any services that could provide additional support.

9.0 MISSING FROM CARE (INCLUDING FOSTER CARE) – in addition to the above guidance, when a Looked After Child is reported missing, carers, the LA with Parental Responsibility (PR) and the police have joint responsibility for protecting the wellbeing of the child.

9.1 Care planning process: Prior to any accommodation arrangement for a Looked After Child, the social worker must consider within the care planning process all potential risks to the child, including an assessment of the potential for them to go missing. The child’s individual needs, previous history and views and missing episodes prior to the child becoming Looked After must be considered. This includes planning to prevent children from going missing and protect them when they do. When placing outside the placing (home) Authority, it is even more critical to properly assess the above issues. If there is a need to discuss specific risks or issues, the placing Authority should speak to the Safeguarding Unit in the Authority in which the child would live. When a placement is confirmed, the Placing Authority with Parental Responsibility must always follow the Formal Notification Process to inform the new Authority that a Looked after Child is being placed in their area.

9.2 The initial placement plan should include consideration of issues of missing and absent and to explain and agree rules and responsibilities of all involved. The placement plan should cover:

- Trigger points for absence or missing episodes
- Risks to the child, the public and/or carer before, during or after a missing episode, including when being picked up
- What steps can be taken to reduce the likelihood of the child going missing and coming to any harm or harming others
- Friends and family details and contact numbers as well as addresses commonly found at
- Expectations of the young person, e.g. curfew, when and how to make contact, consequences of lateness etc.
- Expectations of care provider, e.g. at which point the police will be notified, what processes will follow an incident, who will collect a child if they are missing, details of who conducts immediate assessments on their return and arrangements for full return interviews
- Agreements around rules for staying overnight at friends’ houses or going on trips.
- Agreement of the specific arrangements for return home interview including who the provider is.
- Who is responsible for notifying Police & Local Authority when a child goes missing/returns

9.3 Residential homes and 16+ provision

In 2023, the Department for Education will introduce national standards for currently unregulated accommodation for 16- and 17- year-olds. Ofsted will inspect and register the providers of accommodation for older children, which the government now calls ‘supported’ provision instead of ‘independent’ or ‘semi-independent’. The inspectorate will develop the registration and inspection framework and begin registering providers from April 2023, with pilot inspections beginning in 2023 before they begin in earnest in 2024.

Residential homes and 16+ provision should keep detailed records of what happened in the period leading up to a child being missing as well as recording carefully all efforts to find the young person and contacts with professionals. Cases of “away from placement without authorisation” should be agreed with the social worker as part of the young person’s plan. The placement should record

and review at what stage it is deemed that the child's status should change from "away from placement without authorisation" to missing. It is good practice for care providers to record all incidents of "away from placement without authorisation" to build a picture of behaviour and work with the social worker to reduce the risk of these escalating to missing episodes. It is the responsibility of the care provider to inform the family and the social worker of the child being reported missing. It is the responsibility of the residential staff or foster carers to collect the child, unless the circumstances pose a risk to them. Only then, the police may be requested to assist in returning the child. It must be recognised that police only have powers to return a child to care if they are on a care order or police protection is required. Any known risks from the young person or their known associates should be detailed in the care plan. Children must not be reported missing as a behaviour management tool. When a child is reported missing from a voluntary care placement (Section 20), the police have no power to return the child without consent. If the child returns to the care placement of their own accord, the care providers must notify police immediately.

9.4 Children placed in Greater Manchester from other Local Authorities: Children who are Looked After by another authority and placed within the Greater Manchester boundary, remain the responsibility of the placing LA. If any of these children go missing, they should be reported to Greater Manchester Police by their carer. Greater Manchester Police will include this information in the usual daily reporting information to the Greater Manchester Local Authority. The child's placement should also inform the child's allocated social worker in their home authority. The home local authority is responsible for response and action, including arranging return interviews, sharing information and calling strategy meetings. If the child is frequently missing, the placing LA should be contacted to escalate concerns, asking them to consider whether the placement is meeting the child's needs and can safeguard them. It is expected that both local authorities will share information about any safeguarding concerns.

10. Missing from non-residential settings

10.1 Missing from Hospital: When children are missing from hospital, staff must conduct a structured search of the premises prior to the police being called. In all circumstances, staff must consider the following points before contacting the police:

- What is the risk to the individual or what risk do they present to others?
- In practical terms, what is known about the child?
- What are the ramifications of their condition worsening?
- What actions do the hospital expect the police take when the child is found?

Medical staff should be mindful that the police have very few powers to return a person to a location without using Police Protection Powers. If there is a concern for a child's safety or well-being, usual child protection procedures should be followed, which could include making a referral to social care or discussion with the 'hospital safeguarding team and any other designated person'.

10.2 Missing from School/Educational settings: schools should follow the **Guidance for schools when pupils abscond from school or go missing** see Appendix C.

10.3 Child Missing Education (CME): When children are not registered on a school roll they are categorised as missing education. This category specifically refers to a school roll and does not include non-attendance or absconding from a registered school setting. In these cases, there is a heightened safeguarding risk as there is no school or setting monitoring the child's welfare or

maintaining daily contact. Standard timeframes for contact and supervision are set in the context of multi-agency support. In cases where children are not registered at a school wider professional groups should consider the need to increase the frequency of their scheduled support of children and how they support identification of an appropriate education setting from the child. This should be carried out in collaboration with local CME procedures and services.

11. Collecting, Sharing and Analysing Data about children who go missing

11.1 Early and effective sharing of information between professionals from local agencies is essential for the identification of patterns of behaviour. This may be used to identify areas of concern for an individual child, or to identify trends and 'hotspots' of activity in a local area. Data and analysis of children who go missing both from home and care should be included in regular reports to council members, especially to the lead member for children's services and in reports to Multi-agency Safeguarding Arrangements which have replaced Local Safeguarding Children Boards.

Appendix A

Glossary

CAMHS	Child and adolescent Mental Health Services
CAP	Care Action Plan (Police)
CCE	Child Criminal Exploitation
CIN	Child in Need
CLA	Child Looked After
CP	Child subject to child protection plan
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation
DfE	Department for Education
EDT	Emergency Duty Team
EHA	Early Help Assessment
GMP	Greater Manchester Police
IRO	Independent Reviewing Officer
LA	Local Authority
MASA	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements
MFH	Missing from home (or care)
MPSO	Missing Person Safeguarding Officer (Police)
NPCC	National Police Chief's Council (Replaced ACPO in 2015)
PACE	Police and Criminal Evidence Act (1984)
PPP	Police Protection Powers
RI (IRI)	Return interview (Independent return interview)
SPOC	Single Point of Contact
SWC	Safe & Well Check

Appendix B – Key information to be included in referral

- **Young person information:**
 - Name
 - Date of Birth
 - Age in years
 - Missing date(s) and time(s)
 - Return date(s) and time(s)
 - Name of allocated social worker/lead professional
 - Whether the young person is from another authority area or is placed outside of your authority area
 - Primary reason for being missing
- **Safe and well information:**
 - Who completed the safe and well check?
 - Was the safe and well information passed to the return home interview service
- **Return Home Interview Information:**
 - Name of worker completing the return home interview
 - Agency
 - Contact details
 - When was commissioned service notified/allocated return interview (if relevant):
 - Date of contact to complete return interview, method of contact, outcome and response
 - Date return home interview was completed, and date sent to Local Authority
 - If not completed within 72 hours rationale as to why
 - If the return home interview was declined what were the circumstances and reasons?
 - Information collected from parents and carers that is relevant to the missing episode
 - Who has the return home interview been shared with?

Prompt sheet for return interviews

Return interviews can help understand and address the reasons why a child has run away, such as abuse, neglect or exploitation, involvement in gangs or crime, use of alcohol or drugs. Also, to identify harm that may have occurred while the child was away, allow professionals to identify actions they need to take to address and prevent further risks. The discussion can help the child feel safe and understand how and where they can seek help if they want to run away again and provide them with information on how to stay safe if they do so. Information can be gathered from other sources (such as parents and carers or other professionals); however the best quality information will be received from the child if they are able to freely discuss the missing episode directly with the interviewer.

The interviewer should know how to communicate with children and young people and have a good understanding of risks. A positive professional approach will impact on the quality of the response received, so workers must be respectful to develop trust. A conversational approach should be used - which is caring and creative to encourage the young person to talk and share their information. Experienced workers report that completing the form directly with the young person is not the best approach and for some children the use of tools may be appropriate. Some young people may want the opportunity to contribute or in write their own views – interviewers can use appropriate ways of doing this such as ‘wishes and feelings’ sheets or use of technology if available. Ultimately, the return interview should reflect the child’s voice about the missing episode.

Consider the following issues and discuss with the young person sensitively. Assume that any or all the issues could be relevant – but avoid using a ‘check list approach’.

- **What happened to make you go missing?** Were there ‘pushes’ from home relationships or circumstances? ‘Pulls’ from or to someone/something else? Peer pressure or trouble with friends or bullies? Issues with school? Drugs or alcohol issues? Influence from risky adults? Mental health or self-harm?
- **What happened when you were missing?** How did you keep yourself safe, were you able to get in contact with a safe adult? Did anything harmful happen to you while you were away? Or any near misses? Who were you with? (Adults or children?) If you had wanted to go home was anything or anyone stopping, you? Did you have to do something you didn’t want to in exchange for something or to keep yourself safe?
- **What happened when you returned?** When did you decide to return? Were you scared to come back? Did anyone try to stop you from coming back? How did you get back? What would stop you going away again? If there were problems that made you go missing, do these still exist? What support do you need now? Do you need advice, tests or other medical support?

Appendix C

Guidance for dealing with circumstances where pupils are “missing” from school

Purpose

The purpose of this guidance is to set out procedures to support schools in dealing with instances where a pupil fails to arrive at school without notification or leaves the school without permission.

Context

Schools and other educational settings have a duty of care towards their pupils. This duty of care requires that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure that pupils are safe and remain within the care of the school at all times throughout the school day and during school led activities.

Schools should have clear rules and procedures about pupils leaving the school premises. Children should only be allowed to leave the school grounds during the school day with written parental permission, and if they are to be collected it must be by an adult known to the school. The school should have information on who this person is and their relationship to the child.

Schools should have accurate contact details in relation to all pupils and these should be regularly verified and updated.

Where a pupil fails to arrive at school without notification, the procedures outlined in the attached Failure To Attend flow chart should be followed.

Where a pupil, present at registration, is subsequently found to be absent from school without authorisation, the procedures outlined in the attached Absent Without Authorisation flow chart should be followed.

An assessment of risk is required prior to consideration of police contact (refer to “Schools` Risk Assessment” document). However, schools should take account of each pupil’s individual circumstances, and considerations such as: age and vulnerability of the pupil; the prevailing weather conditions; the nature of the incident which led to the pupil absenting/leaving; the pupil’s previous history of being involved in episodes of absconding, and any other associated risks (such as LAC / CP/ CSE / CCE etc).

The Designated Safeguarding Lead should make an assessment of the risk of harm, based on up to date information. Only where the risk of serious harm to the pupil or public is assessed as being very likely should the police be contacted straight away via 999. (Serious harm is defined as a risk which is life threatening and/or traumatic, and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be difficult or impossible)¹. Where any level of identified risk does not meet this threshold, the relevant flow chart should be followed and any call to police should be via 101.

For preparation purposes please refer to call handler questions (see “Call Handler Questions” document) and have the following information ready to give to police:

- A description of the child/young person – physical and clothing
- When the child/young person was last seen and by/with whom
- The child/young person's mobile phone number if they possess one

- Details of family; known friends/acquaintances; professionals involved with the child / young person, including addresses and telephone numbers
- Details of other people the child/young person may be with
- Details of any medical condition or mental health issues
- Information regarding any other risks, vulnerabilities or concerns
- Details of any previous missing behaviour
- Legal Status of the child / young person

¹ Risk of Serious Harm as defined in the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice : First published Nov/2016; modified Oct/2018

Schools' Risk Assessment

The level of risk for every missing pupil will depend on their individual circumstances and the assessment of this risk will determine at what point Police contact should be made, and by what means. In some situations it will be appropriate for schools not to contact Police at all.

Wherever possible, the Risk Assessment should be undertaken by the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead, and the considerations / information / rationale upon which it is based should be documented. Clearly the level of perceived risk can go up or down as enquiries to locate the missing pupil progress, so the initial assessment should be kept under review throughout the process. Once the incident is finalised, the Risk Assessment should be filed with the pupil's Missing Plan.

In general terms, the level of risk should be identified as follows¹:

HIGH RISK would be identified where risk of SERIOUS harm to the pupil (or public) is assessed as being VERY LIKELY. ("Serious harm" being a risk which is life threatening and/or traumatic and from which recovery – physical or psychological – can be expected to be difficult or impossible).

MEDIUM RISK would be identified where risk of harm to the pupil (or public) is assessed as being LIKELY but NOT SERIOUS.

LOW RISK would be identified where risk of harm to the pupil (or public) is assessed as being POSSIBLE but MINIMAL.

Some examples of considerations to be taken into account when assessing risk are as follows, but this is not an exhaustive list and should therefore only be used as a guide since each child / situation will be different:

Physical Considerations:

- Age
- Vulnerability due to learning difficulties or additional needs; autism; other disability
- Medical issues – does the pupil need to take medication; do they have it with them; can they self-medicate
- Mental health issues – does the pupil suffer from depression; risk of self-harm; suicidal
- Risk of CSE; CCE / County Lines ("Trapped")
- Risk of domestic abuse; child abuse (neglect, physical, emotional, sexual)
- Risk of honour based violence; forced marriage; female genital mutilation; radicalisation
- Are they a danger to others
- Are they likely to commit crime

- Weather – what is it currently / forecast to be and are they dressed appropriately for it

Other Considerations

- When were they last seen
- Is this behaviour out of character
- What prompted / preceded them going missing
- Are they alone or with other/s
- Have there been previous episodes – if so what was/were the outcome/s
- Family background
- Do they know how to use public transport
- Is there a sibling in school who could provide further information/context if parent/guardian can't be contacted

Before contacting Police, please remember that they do not have specific powers to detain missing school children or to return them to school. Police can only enter a home address by force in cases of emergency in order to “save life and limb”. So before calling Police please consider:

Is it appropriate to contact the Police?

Do the risks mean action needs to be taken with urgency?

What can Police do that you can't?

What do you want Police to do?

Have your efforts to contact / locate the missing pupil failed?

¹ Level of risk definitions as per The Risk Assessment Table published in The College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice: First Published Nov 2016; Last Modified Oct/2018.

Absent without Authorisation



Absent Without Authorisation Flowchart.pub (Command Line)

Failure to attend school flowchart



Failure To Attend
Flowchart.pub

Missing Pupil Process



Missing Pupil
Document.docx