



Department
for Education

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

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Contents

Introduction	4
Status of this guidance	5
Who is this guidance for?	5
Definitions	5
Strategic Planning and Role of Organisations	7
Local authorities	7
Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs)	8
Runaway and Missing From Home and Care Protocol (RMFHC Protocol)	8
Runaway and Missing From Home and Care Protocol (RMFHC Protocol) – Looked After Children	10
Collecting and sharing data on children who go missing	10
Additional responsibilities regarding Looked After Children	11
When children in care are missing or absent	11
Access to helplines and emergency accommodation	11
16 and 17 year olds	12
Role of the Police	12
High Risk	12
Medium Risk	13
When a child is found - Safe and well checks	13
When a child is found - Independent Return Interview	14
Children who repeatedly run away and go missing	15
Voluntary sector	16
Additional actions for looked after children who are missing or absent	16
Before a looked after child runs away	16

Care Planning and Review	17
Out of Area Placements	17
Children’s home’s staff and foster carers	18
National Minimum Standards – Looked After Children	18
Care Leavers	19
When a looked after child runs away	19
Role of the Police	20
When a looked after child is found	20
Return to placement – Looked After Children	20
Looked After Children Who May Have Been Trafficked From Abroad	21
Annex A	23
Checklist for local authorities	23
Annex B	24
Associated resources	24

Introduction

1. Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is a key duty on local authorities. Children running away and going missing from home or care is a safeguarding issue. There are no exact figures for the number of children who run away, but estimates suggest that the figure is in the region of 100,000¹ missing per year. It is thought that approximately 25² per cent of children and young people that go missing are at risk of serious harm. There are particular concerns about the links between children running away and the risks of sexual exploitation. Studies in 2012 by the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), the University of Bedfordshire and the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) found that child sexual exploitation is much more prevalent than previously thought.
2. 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 OCC's on-going inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups. Key issues were 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.
3. The Ofsted report 'Missing Children' published in February 2013 on local authority work in relation to children missing from home and care highlighted a number of concerns. These are that:
 - risk management plans for individual looked after children are often not developed or acted on;
 - placement instability was a key feature of looked after children who ran away;
 - reports about looked after children missing from their care placement are not routinely provided to senior managers in local authorities; and
 - there is little evidence that safe and well checks or return interviews are taking place.

¹ Still Running 3 (2011) <http://makerunawayssafe.org.uk/campaign-stories/still-running-young-runaways-danger-england-and-uk>

² ibid

4. 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

5. 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. This guidance should be complied with by local authorities when exercising these functions, unless local circumstances indicate exceptional reasons that justify a variation.
6. 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?

7. The guidance is addressed to Chief Executives, Directors of Children's Services and Lead Members for Children's Services. Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCB) Chairs, senior managers within organisations (including police, health and schools) that provide services for children and families, 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 the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) guidance on Missing Persons.

Definitions

8. *Child /Young person:* For the purposes of this document a child or young person is someone under the age of 18. Care leavers cover young people from aged 16-24.

9. *Young runaway*: A child or young person under the age of 18 who has run away from their home or placement, or feels they have been forced or lured to leave, or whose whereabouts is unknown.
10. *Missing child/Young person*: A young runaway reported as missing to the police by his family or carers.
11. *Responsible local authority*: the authority that is responsible for the young person's care and care planning.
12. *Host local authority*: The authority in which the young person is placed when placed out of the responsible authority's area.
13. Since April 2013 police forces have been rolling out new definitions of 'missing' and 'absent' in relation to children/ young people 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 is not at a place where they are expected or required to be'.
14. The police classification of a person as 'missing' or 'absent' will be based on on-going risk assessment. Guidance on how police forces will apply new definitions to children was issued by ACPO in April 2013.
15. Paragraph 28 below explains how local protocols for safeguarding young runaways or children missing from home or care should reflect these new police definitions and what safeguards should be put in place to identify children, classified either as 'missing' or 'absent', who are at risk of significant harm.
16. *Looked after child missing from their placement*: Where a looked after child is missing from their placement, and his/her whereabouts are not known and/or the child is known or suspected to be at risk considered to be at risk they should be reported to the police as missing and a record of this should be made.
17. *Looked after children absent from their placement without authorisation*: Where a looked after child is not in their placement as agreed, their whereabouts are known and they are not at risk, carers/local authorities need to record as absent without authorisation from their placement.

Strategic Planning and Role of Organisations

18. Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children requires effective joint-working between agencies and professionals. The specific responsibilities of organisations are set out below.

Local authorities

19. Section 13 of the Children Act 2004 requires local authorities and other named statutory partners³ to make arrangements to ensure that their functions are discharged with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. Local authorities are required to set up a Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) to coordinate the effectiveness of arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in that area. Local authorities have a duty to safeguard children and therefore play a leading role within their LSCB.

20. As part of the framework to safeguard children, individual local authorities and police forces should have an agreed set of Runaway and Missing from Home or Care protocols. (See Paragraph 28)

21. There should be a named senior manager within local authority children's service departments responsible for taking the lead on monitoring policies and performance relating to children and young people who go missing from home or care.

22. Local authorities should collect data on children reported 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. The results should be reported to Lead Members. (*Note for national data collection purposes only the authority responsible for a looked after child that is missing should include that child as missing in returns to the Department for Education.*)

23. When analysing trends and patterns in relation to children in care who runaway particular attention should be paid to repeat 'missing' and 'absent' episodes and unauthorised absences from care placements. Authorities need to be alert to the risk of sexual exploitation or involvement in drugs, gangs or criminal activity, trafficking and aware of local "hot spots" as well as concerns about any individuals to whom children runaway to be with.

³ 19. Section 13 of the Children Act 2004
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/section/13>

24. Local authorities 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 from having accessed other services. There may also be trafficked children who may not have previously come to the attention of children's services or the police. The OCC report (see Paragraph 2) 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 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.
25. Local authorities have safeguarding duties in relation to children missing from home and should work with the police to risk assess cases of children missing or absent from home and analyse data for patterns that indicate particular concerns and risks.

Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs)

26. The functions of an LSCB are set out in primary legislation (Sections 14 and 14A of the Children Act 2004) and regulations (Local Safeguarding Children Regulations 2006, SI 2006/90). The core objectives of the LSCB are: to coordinate what is done by each person or body represented on the Board for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the area; and to ensure the effectiveness of what is done by each such person or body for that purpose.
27. LSCBs should, as a minimum, assess the effectiveness of help being provided to children and families; assess whether LSCB partners are fulfilling their statutory obligations (as set out in chapter 2 of Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013); quality assure practice, including through joint audits of case files involving practitioners and identifying lessons to be learned; and monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of training, including multi agency training, to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. In doing this they should give due consideration to the safeguarding needs of children and young people who are at risk because they are missing from home/ vulnerable because they are missing from home.

Runaway and Missing From Home and Care Protocol (RMFHC Protocol)

28. Local authorities should have an agreed protocol for children and young people who run away or go missing in their area and, when appropriate, 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/sub-regional basis to ensure a consistent approach is taken to safeguard children and young people. The protocols should include:

- an agreed list of measures to ensure that missing and absent definitions are applied to children with due consideration given to their age, vulnerability and developmental factors, in particular providing further explanations on what constitutes 'established whereabouts' and 'out of character' as in the police definition of 'missing person';
- an agreed inter-agency framework for assessing and classifying the degree of risk when a child goes missing from home or care, when a child is absent without authorisation or when a missing child comes to agency notice;
- guidance on what responses different agencies will offer in relation to each degree of risk;
- 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;
- details of the lead person in the local authority responsible for young runaways;
- details of arrangements in the local police force to analyse and co-ordinate responses to missing children – each police force should have a missing persons co-ordinator or equivalent post;
- details of how safe and well checks are conducted;
- arrangements for independent return interviews and details of when a return interview will be offered to young runaways;
- which agencies offer 'Independent Return Interviews';
- arrangements for information sharing between the local authority, the police and other agencies;
- arrangements for information sharing between different local authorities in case of a child running away to another area
- details of preventative approaches to avoid further instances of running away;
- which agencies will support the family while the child is missing and after they return;
- agreed safeguards for runaways, missing and absent children aimed at identifying children who are at risk of significant harm, particular looking at the length of the missing episode, frequency of running away, risk factors, family history of the child and

- details of data to be analysed on a regular basis, arrangements and frequency for data monitoring by LSCB and partners.

Runaway and Missing From Home and Care Protocol (RMFHC Protocol) – Looked After Children

29. In addition, for children and young people who are looked after, the RMFHC protocols should also include:

- appropriate responses to children going missing or absent from their placement, including an assessment of risk, the actions to undertake and arrangements for making reports to the police, when looked after children and are thought to be missing;
- agreed local authority reporting and recording systems on missing and absent episodes 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 analysis any patterns of child sexual exploitation including those placed in the area by other local authorities; and,
- arrangements that ensure return interviews take place within an appropriate timescale by a suitably experienced individual.

Collecting and sharing data on children who go missing

30. Early and effective sharing of information between professionals and 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 ‘hotspots’ of activity in a local area.

31. Data about children and young people who go missing from home or 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.

32. 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.

Additional responsibilities regarding Looked After Children

33. Local authorities must ensure that incidents are appropriately risk assessed, and record all incidents of looked after children who are absent without authorisation. All incidents of missing or absence that are reported to the police must also be collected and submitted by the local authority to the Department for Education as part of the annual SSSA903 data collection. (See Paragraph 22 about reporting this information to Lead Members)

When children in care are missing or absent

34. 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. In all circumstances local safeguarding procedures should be followed as set out in the local RMFHC protocol. If there is concern that the child may be at risk if returned home, the child should be referred to children's services' social care to assess their needs and make appropriate arrangements for their accommodation.

Access to helplines and emergency accommodation

35. While 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.

36. 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.

37. The police have powers to take immediate action to protect a child⁴. 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.

⁴ Section 46 of the 1989 Act <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/part/V>

16 and 17 year olds

38. 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 exploitations or involvement with gangs.
39. 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 child requires accommodation, they will become looked after.
40. The accommodation provided must be suitable; risk assessed; and considers the sustainability of the placement as well as meeting the full range of a child's needs. 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.
41. In April 2010 the Government issued statutory guidance⁵ 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.

Role of the Police

42. 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 person reporting.

High Risk

43. "High Risk" is a risk that is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the subject is in danger through their own vulnerability; or 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.
44. This category requires the immediate deployment of police resources. ACPO 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

⁵ Provision of Accommodation for 16 and 17 year old young people who may be homeless and/or require accommodation

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/8260/Provision_20of_20accommodation.pdf

of an Investigating Officer and possibly a Senior Investigating Officer and a Police Search Advisor (PoISA). There should be a press/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 Children's Services should also be notified.

Medium Risk

45. In this case 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.

When a child is found - Safe and well checks

46. 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. Further guidance is available in the ACPO guidance on Missing People.⁶

47. 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, bullying or sexual exploitation.

48. 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

⁶ <http://www.acpo.police.uk/documents/crime/2011/201103CRIIMP02.pdf>

- their individual characteristics and risk factors such as whether a child has learning difficulties, mental health issues, depression and other vulnerabilities.

When a child is found - Independent Return Interview

49. This is an in-depth interview and is best carried out by an independent person 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. The responsible local authority should ensure the return interview takes place, working closely with the host authority where appropriate.

50. Where a looked after child has run away they should have the opportunity to talk, before they return to their placement, to a person who is independent of their placement about the reasons they went missing. The child should be offered the option of speaking to an independent representative or advocate.

51. 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
- provide them with information on how to stay safe if they choose to run away again, including helpline numbers.

52. Contact should be made with the child within 72 hours of them being located or returning from absence, to arrange an Independent Return Interview in a neutral place where they feel safe. It is especially important that this 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

53. 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;
- what happened while they were missing;
- who they were missing with and where they were found; and,
- what support they require upon returning home in accordance with the 'Working Together' guidance.

Where children refuse to engage with the interviewer, parents and 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.

54. 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 be more pro-active and seriously consider investigating further to identify early any safeguarding concerns, or whether the child and their family need further support.

Children who repeatedly run away and go missing

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

56. If a child is known to be a repeat runaway or they have run away at least twice, local authorities should ensure a discussion is held, either with the child, their family or both, to offer further support and guidance.

57. 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.

58. To reduce repeat running away and improve the longer-term safety of these children and young people, local authorities may want to provide:

- better access and timely independent return interviews, particularly for the most vulnerable; and

- better access to support whilst a young person is away, which may come from the voluntary sector.

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

Voluntary sector

60. Those working in the voluntary sector, as well as youth workers working in both the statutory and voluntary services, are experienced in building trusted relationships with children and young people. Their projects can often provide a range of other services such as family mediation and specialist support to parents (for example, PACE offers specialist support to parents of sexually exploited children). 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 again.

Additional actions for looked after children who are missing or absent

61. Looked after children are particularly vulnerable. Though the number of looked after children going missing or absent 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.

62. Further responsibilities on local authorities for looked after children are detailed below.

Before a looked after child runs away

63. 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 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.

64. 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.

65. 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

66. 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 crime/gang involvement should be identified and actions to address these needs and ensure the child is kept safe clearly set out in the care plan. The police and other relevant agencies should be given the opportunity to contribute to the review.
67. Where a child already has an established pattern of running away, the care plan should include a strategy about keeping 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.

Out of Area Placements

68. 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.
69. 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/ absent episodes should be agreed between responsible and host local authorities.

Children's home's staff and foster carers

70. 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.
71. The competence and support needs of staff in children's homes 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

72. The National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Children's Homes and those for Fostering Services set out basic 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 of 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.
73. Registered children's homes providers are required to have quality assurance arrangements in place. As a minimum this will involve someone visiting the home at least once a month, either announced or unannounced, to observe the care provided, practice of staff, inspect compliance with regulations, systems and processes and the quality of the environment. The person undertaking the visits will wish to be satisfied that the home has an effective approach to behaviour management. The person visiting 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 made available to Ofsted, the registered manager, and anyone else with responsibility for the management of the home.
74. The Children's Home Regulations and the require providers to have explicit procedures in place to be followed whenever a child has run away or is missing from their placement. This procedure must take into account police and local authority protocols for managing missing person's incidents in the area where the provision is located. The NMS specifies that staff should actively search for children and work with the police where appropriate.

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

Care Leavers

76. 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 live in "suitable accommodation" as defined in Section 23B(10) of the Children Act 1989 and Regulations 9(2) of the Care Leavers Regulations. 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 runs away

77. Whenever a child runs away from a placement, the foster carer or the manager on duty in the 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*.

78. Local authorities may want to consider involving voluntary sector expertise as they may have already had involvement with the child or the child may be more receptive to them.

Role of the Police

79. The police will prioritise all incidents of missing children as medium or high risk (see Paragraph 42 above). 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 person reporting. Where a child is absent from their placement but their whereabouts are known, the police will consider these as child protection cases and respond to them accordingly. Their case will remain the subject of constant review, in collaboration with local authority children's services, particularly in the light of new information and changes in circumstances.

When a looked after child is found

80. Where a child has run away from their placement, the responsible authority should ensure that plans are in place to respond promptly once the child is located. If the child is located but professionals are unable to establish meaningful contact, then the responsible authority should contact the police and consider the appropriate action to take.

81. In addition to safe and well checks and independent return interviews, care staff should inform the child's social worker and the independent reviewing officer that the child has returned.

Return to placement – Looked After Children

82. When the child has been located, the local authority will be responsible for deciding whether the child's placement remains appropriate. The decision should be informed by discussions with the child and carers where appropriate. Arrangements will also need to be made for the child to have an Independent Return Interview. This will be in addition to any safe and well check carried out by the police.

83. 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.

84. 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.

Looked After Children Who May Have Been Trafficked From Abroad

85. Some of the children that local authorities look after may be unaccompanied asylum seeking children or other migrant children, and 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 child who goes missing immediately after becoming looked after should be treated as children who may be victims of trafficking.
86. 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.
87. 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.
88. 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.
89. 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.
90. 'Safeguarding Children Who May Have Been Trafficked' 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.

91. The NSPCC Child Trafficking Advice Centre (CTAC) provides specialist advice and information to professionals who have concerns that a child or young people may have been trafficked. CTAC can be contacted at free phone number: 0800 107 7057, or by email at CTAC@nspcc.org.uk.

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 or young people who run away or go missing?	20, 21
Does your LSCB have in place systems to monitor prevalence of and the responses to children and young people who go missing including gathering data from Board partners and other local stakeholders in order to understand trends, and patterns, especially in cases of a child or young person who is looked after?	19, 26 - 27
Do you have a Runaway and Missing From Home and Care Protocol (RMFHC Protocol)?	20, 28 - 29
Do you have a clear definition of a child or young person who has run away?	8 - 17
Do you have effective partnerships with the voluntary sector, relevant specialist services and information about national level resources i.e. helpline for missing children?	60, 78, 91
Do you have effective working relationships with your local police force?	24, 29, 66, 67, 69, 77, 79
Do you have support services in place for children, young people and their families?	35, 76
Are children and young people able to access support services before, during or after running away?	35, 76
Do you have a strategy to deal with repeat runaways?	55 - 59

Annex B

Associated resources

- Working Together to Safeguard Children and related statutory guidance (2012) (being revised) <http://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/index.cfm?action=consultationDetails&consultationId=1839&external=no&menu=1>
- ACPO guidance <http://www.acpo.police.uk/documents/crime/2011/201103CRIIMP02.pdf>
- Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation (2009) <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DCSF-00651-2009>
- Tackling child sexual exploitation action plan (2011) <http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/safeguarding/safeguardingchildren/a00200288/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) www.education.gov.uk/tackling-child-sexual-exploitation
- Missing Children and Adults strategy (2011) <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/police/missing-persons-strategy>
- Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) website <http://www.ceop.police.uk/missing/>
- Railway Children Reach model which looks at before, during and after incidents (RMFHC) <http://www.railwaychildren.org.uk/article.asp?id=654>
- ChildLine <http://www.childline.org.uk/pages/home.aspx>
- NSPCC National Child Trafficking Advice and Information Line (CTAIL) http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/ctail/ctail_wda84866.html
- NSPCC ChildLine number (telephone: 0800 1111) http://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-we-do/the-work-we-do/childline-services/childline-services-hub_wdh90503.html
- Safeguarding Children Who May Have Been Trafficked Guidance (2011) <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-00084-2011>
- Coalition for the Removal of Pimping (CROP) UK <http://www.cropuk.org.uk/>

- 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) <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/homelessseventeen>



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