



# **OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO EITHER GO MISSING FROM HOME OR GO MISSING FROM CARE**

**As agreed by:  
Durham Constabulary and  
Durham County Council**

**Version III  
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## **Contact Information for making a missing person report**

Where a child or young person is considered to be “missing” in line with these procedures, this should be reported without delay to the police: for Emergencies use **999**, or for routine reporting **101**.

Contact should also be made with Children’s Services on the following telephone numbers:

**Durham: 03000 267979 or out of hours via Emergency Duty Team (EDT)**

## 1. Introduction

1.1 These procedures apply to all children and young people who go missing without permission from their parents, carers, residential carers or Foster Carers.

1.2 These procedures must be followed where there are any concerns regarding a child/young person who is considered to fall under the classification of missing from home or care. The procedures cannot anticipate every situation and they outline the working practices that should be followed for children who are reported to be missing from their home, in the traditional sense, as well as children reported missing from residential care homes, foster care, or support accommodation.

1.3 These procedures recognise that there are links with children and young people who go missing from either home or care and the risk to them from *exploitation*. There are also potential links to the risk from, county lines, trafficking, radicalisation, forced marriage and so called “honour issues” evident in some cultures.

1.4 Local Authorities MUST comply with this guidance and legislation, which can be accessed in the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-who-run-away-or-gomissing-from-home-or-care>

### **Why children go missing**

1.5 The following risk factors that can precede a missing incident:

- Arguments and conflicts.
- Conflict within a placement.
- Poor family relationships.
- Physical and emotional abuse.
- Boundaries and control.
- Extra-familial threats and coercion

### **The immediate risks associated with going missing include:**

- No means of support or legitimate income – potentially placing young people in a vulnerable position.
- Involvement in criminal activities.
- Victim of abuse.
- Grooming for exploitation.
- Victim of crime, for example through sexual assault.
- Alcohol/substance misuse.
- Deterioration of physical and mental health.
- Missing out on schooling and education.
- Increased vulnerability e.g due to age, learning difficulty/disability

### **Longer-term risks include:**

- Long-term drug dependency/alcohol dependency.
- Crime.
- Homelessness.
- Disengagement from education.
- Child exploitation.
- Poor physical and/or mental health.

1.6 Durham Constabulary and Durham County Council, supported by the Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership, recognise the significant issues faced by children who go missing and for the need to provide an effective response to reduce the incidence, improve the reporting and recording procedures and to locate the missing person quickly.

## **2. Definition**

2.1 The term missing refers to, anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed.

2.2 The terms child, children or young person refers to any person under the age of 18 years.

## **3. Scope**

3.1 These operating procedures relate to:

- All children and young people living within the boundaries of County Durham including if they are placed here from another Local Authority.
- Children looked after by Durham County Council (the Local Authority) and placed in County Council Residential homes or foster homes, either Local Authority or independent, within the Local Authority boundaries.
- Children looked after by Durham County Council and placed outside of the local authority (Children's social care response)

- Children looked after by Durham County Council who are staying in the parental home, but who are currently subject to an interim or full care order and are subject to Placement with Parents Regulations.

3.2 Within this context, “Children Looked After” refers to children accommodated under Sect 20 of the Children Act 1989, children subject to Care Orders including Interim Care Orders, Sect 31 and 38 Children Act 1989, children subject to Police Protection or Emergency Protection Order (Section 46 of the Children’s Act 1989), and children who are otherwise provided with accommodation by Sect 21 Children Act 1989. These include PACE transfers, children on remand and children subject to a supervision order with a residence requirement.

3.3 In addition, these procedures will apply to all young people placed within the County or Local Authority boundaries (including those aged over 18) for whom Durham County Council have continuing responsibilities under The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

#### **4. Principles**

4.1 Every missing episode should attract considered attention to ensure a consistent and coherent response to both the initial report and return of the missing person.

4.2 If the young person is looked after by a Local Authority, as a corporate parent the Local Authority has a duty of care for the safety and wellbeing of that young person and is expected to take such action that reasonable parents would take to safeguard their children.

4.3 When a child is reported missing, the objective is to locate the child and take them to a safe environment as soon as possible. Local Authorities and other public sector agencies have a statutory duty to local arrangements to improve the wellbeing of children in the area. They must also discharge their functions having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. (Sec 10 & 11 Children Act 2004).

4.4 This will be achieved by effective partnership working, information sharing and shared problem-solving within the multiagency Missing and Child Exploitation Team.

4.5 Interventions are important in attempting to prevent repeat missing episodes. Interventions must be informed by and reflected in any care plan, as appropriate.

4.6 Interventions must also be informed by the completion of effective return interviews with returning children (see section 9). Young people’s concerns must be taken seriously. Interventions may be focused on the individual child, the care establishment or by targeting ‘pull’ factors in the community.

4.7 Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership (DSCP), Children's Services and the Police will monitor compliance with these procedures and monitor outcomes through reports presented to the Strategic Child Exploitation sub group, on a quarterly basis.

## **5. Looked After Children and Young People - the Initial Risk Assessment Process**

- 5.1 The Child's social worker has the responsibility for ensuring an initial assessment of risk is undertaken when a child is placed in a residential home, foster placement or supported accommodation and this should be shared with the placement in order to allow the accommodation to be provided with accurate information to facilitate their care plan. This should be done at the earliest opportunity. If a child placed in an emergency placement, this information must be shared on the day. If the placement is planned, the information must be shared prior to the child's arrival.
- 5.2 **The Philomena Protocol** has been adopted by Durham County Council, this works to ensure that staff caring for young people carefully and sensitively gather relevant information so that they can risk assess and work with the young person to prevent them from going missing. It also enables staff and carers work in partnership with police to trace the young people as quickly as possible if they do go missing.
- 5.3 Two forms; Misc. 283 & Misc. 283a (appendix A and B) are to be completed by the residential home or carer. These are used, firstly to establish if the young person is in fact missing and secondly, to work jointly to trace the young person. A copy must be given to the Social Worker, who must upload these forms to Liquid Logic, stored in the documents section of the young person's file. This saves time during the initial stages of a missing person investigation, by minimising the time taken to gather information and reinforces the parental responsibilities (Locus parentis) of those caring for the children.
- 5.4 The Philomena flow chart (appendix C) will help staff and carers who are considering calling the Police to report a young person missing.
- 5.5 If there is a placement move, then the Misc. 283 & 283a must be shared by the allocated Social Worker with the new placement in order to ensure the Philomena Protocol can be followed. Any updates to these forms must also be saved in liquid logic.
- 5.6 A weekly multiagency meeting takes place involving key members of the Missing and Child Exploitation Team. The aim of this is to share intelligence regarding the most vulnerable children / young people who go missing to enable safeguarding through problem solving.

## **6 Initial Action When a Child or Young Person may be Missing.**

- 6.1 A missing child anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed.
- 6.2 If there are concerns that the child is a victim of crime or at immediate danger, then the police should be contacted immediately.
- 6.3 Reporting a child missing involves recording detailed information by the police on a missing person report. The missing from home episode will be subject to a dynamic risk assessment which will include information received from several different sources. This is continually reviewed and updated throughout the child's missing period. The carer should always ask for and record a police incident log reference number.
- 6.4 When receiving a missing person report, the police will tailor their response to the circumstances and the level of risk identified.
- 6.5 Parents and carers are the people who know their young people the most and therefore there is an expectation that they will carry out initial enquiries including contacting their circle of friends and engaging with family members and checking areas and addresses they are known to frequent.

## **7 Risk classifications employed by the Police in Missing person investigations**

- 7.1 While the decision to report a child as 'missing' ultimately lies with the carer, the decision about the risk level attributed to the missing report lies with the police. In making both decisions, dialogue between carers and police is paramount. The carer will provide information about risk factors for the subject on the missing person report and risk assessment. After considering this and other information, the police will decide the risk level to be assigned to the investigation.

### **Medium Risk**

The risk of harm to the child / young person or the public is assessed as likely but not serious.

This category requires an active and measured response by the police and other agencies in order to trace the missing person and support the person reporting.

### High Risk

The risk of serious harm to the child / young person or the public is assessed as very likely.

This category almost always requires the immediate deployment of police resources - action may be delayed in exceptional circumstances, such as searching water or forested areas during hours of darkness

7.2 Risk of serious harm has been defined as (Home Office 2002 and OASys 2006):

**‘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.’**

7.3 Where the risk cannot be accurately assessed without active investigation, appropriate lines of enquiry should be set to gather the required information to inform the risk assessment.

7.4 **Premises Search:** For a child missing from a foster placement, a premises search will be undertaken by police officers. For a child reported missing from a Residential home, the police will ask the senior care manager responsible for the unit to verify that a thorough premises search has been conducted by care staff in line with the Philomena Protocol. This must include all areas/spaces where the person could conceal themselves, including outbuildings and vehicles. The police have the discretion to also conduct a premises search if deemed appropriate.

## **8 Summary of key responsibilities during any missing person investigation**

8.1 Responsibilities of the Local Authority and Foster Carers when children in care are reported missing.

Before reporting a child missing to the police it is the carers responsibility to:

- To advise the police around any important ‘leads’ (i.e. mobile phones, diaries, letters, notes explaining absence, email and website activity etc), which may inform the investigation and/or assist in protecting or recovering the child.
- Speak to other residents in a Residential home to obtain relevant information about the missing child.
- Make all appropriate telephone enquiries to attempt to locate the child. This will involve trying to contact the child themselves, friends, family, associates, appropriate locations, local hospitals and the local police custody office.



- Where feasible and reasonable to do so, carers should visit possible locations to find the missing child if safe to do so.
- 8.2 Responsibility of parents and carers – parents and those with parental responsibility would be expected to undertake actions, identified below, to locate the missing child, prior to making a report of a missing person to the police:
- Speak with family members and friends to obtain an information about the missing child.
  - Make all appropriate telephone enquiries to attempt to locate the child. This will involve trying to contact the child themselves, friends, family, associates, appropriate locations, local hospitals and the local police custody office.
  - Where feasible and reasonable to do so, parents should visit possible locations to find the missing child if safe to do so. • Advise the police around any important ‘leads’ (i.e. mobile phones, diaries, letters, notes explaining absence, email and website activity etc), which may inform the investigation and/or assist in protecting or recovering the child.
- 8.3 All agencies/members of the public – if it comes to the notice of any agency that a child falls into the category of a missing person, they must advise the parent/carer to report this matter to the police and, if necessary, follow this up by contacting the police to verify that the child has been reported missing.
- 8.4 The Police – upon receiving a report of a child missing from home or care, the police will take the investigative lead, undertake their own risk assessment and carry out enquiries proportionate to the level of risk identified, at Section 7.1, to locate the child as soon as possible. All reports of missing or absent persons will be managed using the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice (APP) for Missing Persons, which is found in the Major Investigation & Public Protection section or via this link: <https://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigationand-public-protection/missing-persons> which outlines the tactical police responses and investigative lead. It may be the case that the lead responsibility for the missing person investigation rests with a Constabulary other than Durham Constabulary. This may occur when it is more practical for another Constabulary to take the investigative lead, as the missing person is more likely to be in that area. However, in these circumstances, Durham Constabulary will continue to maintain effective liaison with all parties.
- 8.5 If subsequent police enquiries were to identify wider safeguarding risk factors at the home or placement address, then DSCP child protection procedures will be implemented in the normal manner. If, on locating the child, the police decide it is not appropriate to return the child to the home address or placement, options should be discussed with Children and Young People’s Services to identify suitable responsible adult(s) and/or accommodation.

- 8.6 Recording – a police incident log must be opened on all occasions when a child is reported as missing, although the police may only monitor not investigate absent reports initially. The police incident log must remain open until a Red Sigma missing person report/log is opened or the child is located. Responsibility for completing a missing person report on Red Sigma lies with the officer deployed to take the initial missing person report. During the investigation if there are other safeguarding concerns highlighted then a vulnerable child referral will also be submitted
- 8.7 A multiagency approach to be taken for any young person who is reported missing. Carers and the child's social worker should continue to make appropriate enquiries. There is a responsibility on all organisations to share relevant information in a timely manner which could lead to the location of the child with the police. A strategy – Exploitation and Missing will be convened if the young person missing from home is at significant risk of harm.
- 8.8 In following these procedures, residential carers and social workers must keep a full record of all actions taken and messages received and given. Police will likewise keep a record of all aspects of their investigation.

## **9 Informing Others**

- 9.1 **Media Strategy** in some cases, where a missing child is particularly vulnerable or has been missing for a long period, it may be necessary to publicise the case via the media. Such a decision is not routine but is usually a response to very serious concerns for the child's safety. Either carers or the police may suggest such an approach. Normally, such decisions to publicise will be made jointly and, where appropriate, in consultation with parents and Children's Services. The decision to publicise a child/young person who is Looked After or known to Children's Services must be made by the Head of Service, based on a full briefing and in liaison with the police.
- 9.2 Where agreement over publicity cannot be reached between Police and the Local Authority, the ultimate decision on publicity is that of the Police. However, the Police must have clear reasons to publicise against the wishes of the Local Authority and these reasons must be recorded. This must also be escalated to HOS to ensure media team /director/lead member is aware.
- 9.3 Wherever possible there should be an appropriate timescale to enable those with parental responsibility to be informed and forewarned so that the first they hear of the young person being missing is not through the media presentation.

- 9.4 Unless absolutely necessary, the young person will not be identified as a young person in care. Guidance has been provided for officers in line with any media appeals.
- 9.5 Whenever a child goes missing from a Residential home or foster care, irrespective of whether the child's placement is arranged through Durham Local Authority or by a private or independent provider on behalf of another Local Authority, the lead person on duty, or the foster carer, must ensure that the following are informed without delay:
- The Police.
  - The parents/those who have parental responsibility (unless indicated otherwise on the care plan).
  - The social worker or the accountable team manager.
  - The Emergency Duty Team, if out of hours, and the social worker and accountable team manager the next working day.
  - The County Durham Youth Offending Service if actively involved.
- 9.6 A Strategy Meeting must be organised by the Local Authority's lead practitioner (e.g. Social Worker, Key Worker etc.) in instances:
- When a child is missing for 72hrs or over.
- 9.7 Consideration for a strategy Meeting depending on risk and reasonable cause to suspect a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm in the following cases:
- Any child who is looked after or has a child protection plan
  - additional risks/vulnerabilities
  - Any child under the age of 13
  - Children where there is a known flight risk with family
- 9.8 A Multi-agency Meeting which will focus on reducing missing episodes must be held for:
- Any child missing 3 times in a 2 month period when there is no significant risk of harm to the child.
  - Any child where we are worried about which would benefit from a multi-agency meeting.
- 9.9 The following people must be invited to a Strategy or Multi-agency Meeting (any absences must be recorded):
- A representative from the Police Child Exploitation Team
  - The Children's Services Missing Co-ordinator
  - The Social Worker Team Manager
  - The Social Worker
  - The Foster Carer / Residential Care Home Manager

- Fostering agency Manager
- Any other relevant agency representative
- Health (if appropriate, but must be present for a Strategy Meeting)
- Education
- GP (if appropriate, but must be invited for a Strategy Meeting)

9.10 If the child/young person remains missing for longer periods, then other managers must be informed as follows:

- For any child missing/absent over 24 hours, the Strategic Manager Looked after Children.
- For any missing/absent of 3 days or more, the Head of Service.

9.11 Sharing Missing Information – the police will notify the First Contact Service, acting as a single point of contact, for all missing children recorded on Red Sigma. This will be done daily via an automated email process. This information will be shared at the time the child is reported missing and simply provides a record that the police have commenced a missing person investigation. A further automated report to the First Contact Service will follow when the child has been found and the police have completed their safe and well check. There is a daily dynamic discussion between Childrens Services and the Police to screen any missing reports by the Police that are reviewed to not be a missing episode and do not require a RTHI. The information in these reports are to be retained by Police only. These are very small numbers however a log of these incidents are recorded for audit and learning purposes.

9.12 Outside of normal office hours / weekends or bank holidays / the initial police investigation and supervisory oversight raises concerns that the threshold of “significant harm” has been met, then police contact should be made with the Emergency Duty Team to discuss the referral, rather than await the return of the First Contact. Under these circumstances the Emergency Duty team will undertake appropriate enquiries in accordance with normal practice. This will not extend to the Emergency Duty Team completing a return interview, the coordination for this will follow the guidance outlined in Section 9, on the return to duty of the Missing Co-ordinator.

## **10. Once a child / young person is located & Return to Home Interviews (RTHI)**

10.1 **Police Safe and Well Checks** – once a missing child has been located, the police will carry out a Police Safe and Well. A Safe and Well check will involve the police physically meeting with and talking to the child. The purpose of the check is to assess their immediate welfare, whether the child has suffered harm, where and with whom they have been, and to give them the opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them. Any criminality or offences disclosed will be investigated by the police appropriately. This Safe and Well

Check is NOT a formal return interview which is the responsibility of Children's Services.

- 10.2 **Sharing Return Information** – the officer responsible for the safe and well check will ensure finalisation of the Red Sigma missing person record even when the check may have been conducted on behalf of the Police by a suitable individual identified by a return interview. The Red Sigma record will provide details of where/when the child was found, information surrounding the reason for absence and other general circumstances behind the missing episode. The reporting officer will also identify any risks to the child during their absence, such as the potential for the child to have been a victim or perpetrator of a crime, as well as the risk of being sexually exploited, or, of being in contact with anyone who poses a risk to children. The level of detail in the Red Sigma record will take cognisance of the criteria for undertaking a return interview. The RTHI remains the responsibility of the Local Authority.
- 10.3 Where the missing child is placed in County Durham, but is the responsibility of a Local Authority outside of County Durham, the First Contact will ensure that the information is also passed to a relevant person in that authority by the most appropriate communication channel and make a request that a return interview is actioned by that authority. The responsible LA will be requested to share the RTHI information with the Child Exploitation Team within Durham police. There are occasions when arrangements will be made for the Durham Missing Co-ordinator to complete the RTHI on behalf of the Local Authority of the child who has been placed in Durham.
- 10.4 **Cancellation of the Missing Person on Red Sigma** – once the missing child has been seen by the police, they will be cancelled by the Police as a missing person.
- 10.5 **Return Interviews** – All RTHI completed by the Local Authority will be shared with the Child Exploitation Team within Durham Police, who will review the information in order to identify any concerns around exploitation, county lines or any criminality which will be recorded in line with the National Crime Recording Standards. This will enable an appropriate and timely investigation.
- 10.6 Where a return interview identifies child protection concerns, then DSCP child protection procedures should be implemented in the normal way.
- 10.7 For Looked After Children, it is the responsibility of the Local Authority to arrange for the young person's return. However, there will be circumstances when, in the interests of the safe and speedy return of the young person, the police may agree to requests from the relevant Local Authority to assist.

10.8 If it is apparent, upon the return of a young person, that they have been the victim of a crime whilst absent, or that they may be in danger or at risk from any person, arising out of circumstances that have occurred whilst they were absent, then the police must be called and asked to attend without delay. This is vital for the protection of the child and for the speedy recovery of evidence.

10.9 In such circumstances, the missing persons clothing, mobile phone and trace evidence from their body, fingernails or hair may be crucial. In cases of sexual abuse, the child should be discouraged from washing and immediate advice sought from the police. If carers become aware of the location of the scene of any crime committed against the young person, or of the location of any crucial evidence (e.g. a used condom) they must notify the police without delay. This will enable the police to take steps to secure and preserve evidence.

In cases where there are concerns regarding sexual assault, the police have access to specially trained officers, doctors and facilities designed to care for the victim and obtain evidence.

10.10 The return interview is important in safeguarding the child for the future. It must not be viewed as a routine or administrative task. The interview is an opportunity to uncover information that can help protect children from the risk of going missing again, from risks they have been exposed to while missing or from risk factors in their home.

10.11 A return interview record has been developed and should be used for this purpose, this can be found on Liquid Logic and is a built-in form within the Missing Episode Module. This record is also used to identify the follow up action to be taken following the interview, such as assessments required, or the support required from other agencies.

10.12 It is the responsibility for the Missing Co-ordinator based within Children's Service to complete the RTHI or ensure they are completed by an independent relevant professional.

10.13 It is acknowledged that a returning child may well share aspects of their experience with different people. Children and young people run away for a variety of reasons, but whatever the reason, running away is often a sign that something is wrong in the child's or young person's life. It is the responsibility of all agencies therefore, to attend to issues of immediate safety, future support and safeguarding needs, and information-sharing in a way which respects and safeguards children and young people.

10.14 Where children refuse to engage with the interviewer, the opportunity should be taken to record any presenting behaviours, body language or presentation of the child that could be a cause for concern.

Parents and carers should be offered the opportunity to provide any relevant information and intelligence of which they may be aware.

10.15 The purpose of the interview is:

- Identify and deal with any harm the child has suffered – including harm that might not have already been disclosed as part of the “safe and well check” – either before they ran away or whilst missing.
- Understand and try to address the reasons why the child ran away
- Help the child feel safe and understand that they have options to prevent repeat instances of them running away
- Provide them with information on how to stay safe if they choose to run away again, including helpline numbers
- To gather intelligence to assist multiagency problem-solving approaches to reduce and prevent further missing episodes.
- To record any disclosed crimes in line with National Crime Recording Standards (NCRS) to enable the police to investigate proportionately.

10.16 In some circumstances the child may make extremely sensitive disclosures that the interviewer feels may need particularly careful management. If so, the person conducting the interview may record that there are sensitive matters disclosed by the child, which are not being shared on the interview record. These disclosures should be the subject of a separate record retained by the placement. In such circumstances it will usually be appropriate for the interviewer to discuss such instances with the child’s social worker and the police via 101. Such records must be kept securely, yet accessible, in the event of a future missing episode, when they may become relevant to the investigation to recover and safeguard the child.

10.17 All young people who are recorded as missing, will be considered for a return home interview by the Police and Children's Services. There will be a daily dynamic discussion between Children's Services Missing Co-ordinator and the Police Missing Co-ordinator to discuss any children where there are significant concerns to share information appropriately.

10.18 All police Red Sigma records relating to the return of children missing from home and care, will be sent to the First Contact, in the first instance. The First Contact will progress the request for a return interview within one working day.

10.19 All return interviews will be conducted within a maximum of 3 working days after the receipt of the police Red Sigma missing person report cancellation, where possible.

10.20 The Supporting Solutions Team Manager should approve and finalise the completed RTHI forms. All RTHI forms are processed

through Liquid Logic to the Police Child Exploitation Team, who will review the interview and attach it to the child's Nominal on Sigma. This is necessary as information from the interview may be useful to the police if there were to be further missing person reports. The police also require this information to make decisions on the risk classification and to progress future investigations.

- 10.21 Where a return interview leads to a disclosure that needs specific action, for example to investigate a crime against the young person, or may require measures to safeguard the child, the matter should be referred as follows:
- In urgent cases to the police, via telephone on 101.
  - The child's social worker should also be informed (if urgent and out of hours, EDT) and organise a Strategy Meeting.
  - For children who are not known to Children's Services, a referral to First Contact (if urgent and out of hours, EDT)
- 10.22 It is the responsibility of the Missing Co-ordinator to ensure completion of the return interview record, there is an additional responsibility on the child's placement to monitor that they are conducted within agreed timescales. If the return interviews are not completed within 72 hours, then the placement should alert the Supporting Solutions Team Manager within Children's Services.
- 10.23 This is necessary as information from the interview may be useful to the police if there were to be further missing person reports. The police also require this information to make decisions on the risk classification and to progress future investigations.

## 11 **Missing persons and out of area placements**

- 11.1 These procedures recognise that children and young people, placed in County Durham from another Local Authority, also feature frequently in missing episodes. These procedures are intended to ensure that "placing" Local Authorities recognise their responsibility to ensure the effective management of any placements.
- 11.2 All Local Authorities are required to formally notify Durham County Council of any Looked after child placed in County Durham, in accordance with the Arrangements for placement of children regulations 1991. Details of the placement plan, including a risk assessment, should be shared with Durham County Council at the time of placement. In those cases where a child has a history of going missing from placement, this information should also be made available to Durham County Council.
- 11.3 It is the responsibility of the placing authority to manage and implement the care plan for any child placed within County Durham. This responsibility extends to missing person episodes, with the placing authority having responsibility for the coordination of risk management meetings to address missing person episodes. Durham Constabulary's Child Exploitation Team and the Children's



Services Missing Co-ordinator should be invited to attend these meetings.

- 11.4 Where any child or young person is located in Durham, following a placement by another Local Authority and is reported missing on repeated occasions, then this child will be subject to referral and discussion at the Child Exploitation Group (CEG). Any continued concerns regarding the welfare of that child/young person will involve the Strategic Manager for Looked After Children contacting the relevant Local Authority or, in the case of serious continued concerns, the relevant Local Safeguarding Children Board.

## **12 Finding young people who are not reported as missing**

- 12.1 When young people are located in circumstances where identified risk factors are evident, but have not been reported missing to the police by their families or carers, further investigation might be warranted. It may be necessary to consider police protection and enquire into whether there are any continuing child protection concerns, or whether the young person and their family or carers should be offered family support services. Durham child protection procedures must be followed in response to this situation.

## **13 Looked after children who may have been trafficked from abroad**

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

- 13.2 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.

- 13.3 In conducting this assessment, it will be necessary for the local authority to work in close co-operation with the UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC) and immigration staff familiar with patterns of trafficking into the UK. Immigration staff who specialise in trafficking issues should be able to advise on whether information

about the individual child suggests that they fit the profile of a potentially trafficked child.

- 13.4 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.
- 13.5 It is essential that the local authority continues to share information with the police and immigration staff, concerning potential crimes against the child, the risk to other children, or other relevant immigration matters.
- 13.6 Department for Education guidance: 'Safeguarding Children Who May Have Been Trafficked' contains practical guidance for agencies.
- 13.7 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). Potential child victims do not need consent to this referral. Any subsequent decisions during the NRM do not replace or supersede established child protection processes, which should continue in tandem. Referrals made in relation to children should be made on the child NRM referral form. The [referral form and guidance notes](#), include a list of potential indicators of children who may have been trafficked. Please see below the link for the NRM form:
- [https://www.modernslaveryhelpline.org/learn-more/frontlineprofessionals/nrm-overview-and-form?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIgLbU8-2T7gIVNzkGAB1hIAFwEAAYASAAEgLyWPD\\_BwE](https://www.modernslaveryhelpline.org/learn-more/frontlineprofessionals/nrm-overview-and-form?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIgLbU8-2T7gIVNzkGAB1hIAFwEAAYASAAEgLyWPD_BwE)
- 13.8 The NSPCC Child Trafficking Advice Centre provides specialist advice and information to professionals who have concerns that a child may have been trafficked. Phone 0808 800 5000 Monday to Friday 8.00am to 10.30pm and 9.00am - 6.00pm on weekends; email [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk); or web [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)
- 13.9 The allocated Social Worker must also complete a Child Exploitation (CE) Matrix, where they have concerns about trafficking or any other form of CE. This must then be submitted to the CEVT email [CEVT@durham.pnn.police.uk](mailto:CEVT@durham.pnn.police.uk)

## 14 Prevention opportunities to address repeat missing episodes

- 14.1 Durham County Council and Durham Constabulary will monitor missing person reports of individual children, as well as the profile of missing person reports originating from residential establishments and foster care. Close monitoring will not only serve to identify what may be escalating safeguarding risks to children but will also address inefficiency for those services having to respond to repeat missing episodes.
- 14.2 Both local and more strategic meetings, described below, are intended to identify an escalating system of interventions, in an attempt to reduce missing person reports. However, practitioners who operate within these meeting structures should ensure that the business of the meeting is in line with the intended focus.
- 14.3 Strategy meeting – the term “strategy meeting” should only be used for those occasions where the threshold of risk, arising from a missing person incident(s) is considered to reach the level of “significant harm”. Where this is the case existing Section 47 DSCP child protection procedures take precedence and follow a process of referral, information sharing and the convening of a strategy meeting in line with Durham safeguarding procedures.
- 14.4 Strategy Exploitation and Missing (SEAM) and Missing Episode Reduction Meeting (MERM) – as discussed in 8.9.
- 14.5 In relation to the management of individual residential homes, it is good practice for the Registered manager to organise regular meetings with the police to maintain working relationships and address any issues in relation to young people or the community as appropriate. These meetings are not intended to replace the need for specifically arranged Care planning meetings. Durham Constabulary hold a quarterly residential homes meeting which is used as a platform for sharing best practice, new trends raising concerns and a risk to young people and continuous training for care home staff.
- 14.6 **The Strategic Child Exploitation (CEG) sub-group reporting to the DSCP** – this is a strategic forum of senior managers from relevant partners, who have been identified as the lead person for their agency for children missing from home or care. The sub group meets quarterly and is chaired by the Durham Constabulary Detective Superintendent Head of Safeguarding who is responsible for missing and exploited children. The meeting operates to a County level remit and has responsibility for monitoring the incidence of both missing children and child sexual exploitation. The functions of this sub group include:
- Consider compliance and practice issues relevant to these operating procedures.

- Consider performance management information captured for these procedures.
- Consider the profile of missing person episodes from both residential and foster care.
- Consider repeat missing person episodes for some children. In this regard, Durham Constabulary and Durham County Council routinely monitor repeat missing person reports and, where it is considered more strategic action is required, can discuss these children at this forum.
- Coordinate strategic partnership working to tackle child sexual exploitation in accordance with any DSCP action plan.
- To track and monitor young people at risk of child exploitation that come to the attention of any agency.
- Provide periodic updates to the DSCP around performance.

Appendices:

Appendix A - Misc. 283 Form Philomena Protocol  
Appendix B - Misc. 283a Form Philomena Protocol  
Appendix C – Philomena Protocol Flow Chart