
September 2014

Children Missing From Home and Care Joint Protocol

Inter-agency Practice Guidance



Nottinghamshire
SAFEGUARDING
CHILDREN Board



NOTTINGHAM CITY
Safeguarding
Children BOARD

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A INTRODUCTION

- 1 This protocol supersedes previous the NSCB joint protocol relating to 'Children Missing from Home and Care' which was revised in May 2012.
- 2 When a child goes missing they are at potential risk and therefore safeguarding children arrangements includes preventing or protecting them from going missing from their home or local authority care.
- 3 The protocol defines the roles and responsibilities of all those concerned with the processes around children who are go missing. It is derived from the Department for Education '*Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care January 2014*' and also incorporates key elements of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) guidance, as described in *Section E* which introduces the new definitions of 'missing' and 'absent'. The protocol as responds to the concept of the 'hidden' missing as outlined within the DfE guidance.

Role of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

- 4 The Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Board (NCSCB) and the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board (NSCB) expect all agencies working, or in contact with children, to implement this protocol and to ensure that all relevant staff are aware of it and how to use it. The protocol depends on good communication and a willingness by agencies to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of those children who are at risk of, or going, missing.
- 5 Both of the Safeguarding Children Boards will be responsible for ensuring an annual review of the effectiveness of the aspect of this protocol (*see paragraph 135*).

Role of partner agencies

- 6 Whilst the police and children's social care take the lead with the issue of children who go missing from home or care, there is a responsibility on all relevant agencies to work to support a young person who is going missing; for example, school, health or specialist services.

B KEY CONTACTS, ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Operational contacts

7 Where professionals believe that a child is at immediate risk this should be reported without delay to Nottinghamshire Police on the emergency number 999. Non-emergency calls can be made by calling 101.

8 Children's Services can also be contacted at Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County Council, directly to the child or young person's allocated worker where they have one or if they do not then to:

9 ***County - Children Missing Officer (CMO)***

The role of the CMO is to act as a central point of contact for all missing children notifications and to disseminate them with requests for a return interview, multi-agency meeting or referral to social care in line with the missing children protocol. The CMO also has a key role in the monitoring and tracking of compliance with key requirements.

County

Glen Scruby

Children Missing Officer

Glen.scruby@nottscs.gcsx.gov.uk

01623 433169

10 ***City - Children & Families Direct/Missing Children Officer (MCO)***

The role of the City Officer is to act as a central point of contact for all missing children notifications and to disseminate them with requests for a return interview, multi-agency meeting or referral to social care in line with the missing children protocol.

City

Andrew High

Senior Practitioner Missing Children

andrew.high@nottinghamcity.gcsx.gov.uk

0115 876 4842

11 ***Police Missing Persons Coordinators***

The Missing Persons Coordinators will assist divisional police officers in the investigation of missing person enquiries and will represent Nottinghamshire Police

in multi-agency, problem solving approaches to children who are vulnerable or frequently missing. They will play a key role in ensuring that national guidance, force procedures and this joint protocol are embedded and adhered to at a local level, thereby aiming to reduce repeated missing episodes and the associated risks.

missingpersons@nottinghamshire.pnn.police.uk

Quality Assurance Role of the Police Missing Person Coordinators

- 12 One of the functions of the police Missing Person Co-ordinators is to provide a quality assurance role in monitoring compliance with the ACPO 'missing' and 'absent' definitions within the police force. As part of this, they will collate and monitor information relating to 'absent' incidents, ensuring that records for individuals can be distinguished and reviewed. Information relating to 'absent' incidents should be shared with agreed contacts within five days.

Intelligence sharing

In the absence of any named officer dealing with a young person; child specific intelligence can be shared through missingpersons@nottinghamshire.pnn.police.uk

Strategic contacts for police and children's social care

Police

Emma Laughton
Missing Persons Manager
Crime and Justice, Public Protection
emma.laughton@nottinghamshire.pnn.police.uk
Tel: 101 extn 817 4087

Nottinghamshire County Council

Terri Johnson
Service Manager Safeguarding Children (Strategic)
Terri.johnson@nottscc.gov.uk
0115 97 73921

Nottingham City Council

TBC
Service Manager for Children & Families Direct, Missing Children and the Domestic Abuse Referral Team
0115 8765367

C LEGISLATION AND GUIDANCE

- 13 This protocol derives from the Department for Education 'Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care January 2014' which is issued under Section 7 of the Local Authority Services Act 1970. A flow chart for professionals is also available under this guidance:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/275701/Statutory_guidance_missing-children.pdf

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/271820/Flowchart_when_a_child_goes_missing_from_care.pdf

- 14 The protocol complements Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013 and links to a number of strategies, action plans and research which are listed at the conclusion of this protocol. The guidance must be complied with unless there are exceptional reasons.
- 15 The protocol should also be read in conjunction with other relevant NCSCB and NSCB procedures, for example child sexual exploitation, children missing education, child protection or children in need procedures.
<http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/caring/protecting-and-safeguarding/nscb/informationprofessionals/procedures-practice-guidance/>
- 16 The protocol is consistent with the Home Office Guidance 2013 'Working together to deal with missing children and vulnerable adults'. This covers foreign national children and vulnerable adults who may be the victims of trafficking.
<http://www.sfjuk.com/working-together-to-deal-with-missing-children-and-vulnerable-adults/>
- 17 The protocol also incorporates key information from the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Interim Guidance (2013).
<http://www.acpo.police.uk/documents/crime/2013/201303-cba-int-guid-missing-persons.pdf>

National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes and Fostering Services

- 18 As well as following this protocol children's homes and fostering services should take due regard to their relevant national minimum standards and regulations in relation to missing children. They should, also, for example have an explicit procedure in place to both prevent children going missing and detailing what action to take if they do so.

- 19 The independent visitor who monitors the effectiveness of the home's arrangements (for safeguarding children and promoting their welfare) should be satisfied with the response to children who go missing. They should routinely examine missing reports and where possible see children and staff privately.

Human Rights Act 1998

- 20 The Human Rights Act 1998 has also been considered as part of this protocol. This protocol aims to strike a fair balance between the rights of the individual and their family and the child or young person's right to be safeguarded even if this means external agencies intervening.

Data Protection Act 1998

- 21 The personal details of any individual amount to personal data including information about the missing child or young person, the person reporting, people associating with the missing child and any other person whose details have been recorded as a result of enquiries.
- 22 Additional information such as medical history or offending behaviour may amount to sensitive information and should be handled accordingly and exchanged and held securely.

Information Sharing

- 23 A multi-agency information sharing protocol has been completed and is available from the Police or City and County strategic leads.

D SAFEGUARDING PRINCIPLES

- 24 Missing children (including those deemed absent) work is a safeguarding issue and there is a responsibility on agencies to work together on the subject. The protocol should be read as guidance; it cannot anticipate every situation and therefore professional judgement should also be used and applied to cases.
- 25 The aim of the protocol is to stop or reduce the incidence of all children going missing and to prevent or reduce the risk of them being harmed. Every missing or absent episode should attract the attention of the professionals involved through a robust, coherent and consistent approach.
- 26 Going missing can be a symptom of something going wrong in a child or young person's life. They may be being 'pushed' away from their home or 'pulled' away to something outside of their home or a combination of both known as 'push/pull factors'. Issues often relate to relationship or boundary difficulties with parents or carers, placement quality or being placed too far away from home. It can be about peer and friendship relationship issues, conflict or bullying or because of difficulties within school. They may be being harmed in a number of tangible or intangible ways.
- 27 Children, who go missing for the first time, or for short periods of time, can still face a number of risks and dangers which can impact on their life. For example:
- Be sexually exploited (CSE) or become involved in gangs.
 - Become a victim or perpetrator of crime or financially exploited.
 - Homelessness.
 - Impact on education.
 - Loss of or deterioration of social and family relationships.
 - Involvement in drugs.
 - Impact on physical, emotional or mental health.
 - Trafficking.
- 28 It is important that, through an effective return interview and assessment children are listened to and the reasons why children and young people go missing are understood and the risk appreciated. This provides a basis for intervening effectively to stop or reduce the instances of missing.

E DEFINITIONS

29 There are a number of different definitions within the Department for Education (DfE) statutory guidance (2014) and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) guidance (April 2013). They cover a variety of scenarios where children go missing or runaway from, or are not where they are expected to be at their home or care placements. The different definitions are potentially confusing and they have therefore been simplified for the purpose of this protocol.

30 The definitions of the terms used within this Protocol are as follows:

- **Child:** anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people' throughout this guidance.
- **Missing child:** a child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers and whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the child may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another'. The child may be missing from home or care.
- **Absent child:** a child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers but deemed to be absent by the police as they are not at the place they are expected or required to be. The child may be missing from care or home.
- **NB:** Those in care or care leavers who are 16 and 17 years old and potentially in semi-independent accommodation should also be considered as missing or absent from their placement in the same way as younger children. They face the same if not more risks and additional vulnerability.
- **Away from placement without authorisation:** a looked after child whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be and the carer has concerns. The incident may have been notified to the local authority or the police.
- **Looked after child:** a child who is looked after by a local authority by reason of a care order, or being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.
- **Responsible local authority:** the local authority that is responsible for a looked after child's care and care planning.
- **Host local authority:** the local authority in which a looked after child is placed when placed out of the responsible local authority's area.

- **Care leaver:** an eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989.
- **Absconder:** where a child is subject to a court order such as a curfew or bail conditions and the Police **are aware** of the order and the expiry date then they can be considered as an absconder and not as a missing person. Common sense and professional judgement should apply however and if for example there is a high level of risk then the Protocol could be applied.
- **Hidden Missing:** where a child is going missing but is not reported to the police by their parents, carers or agencies that become aware.

F SCOPE

- 31 This protocol is designed for all children living within Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County boundaries that are deemed missing or are absent from home or care or other placement. It also includes the 'hidden missing' children.
- 32 It includes children looked after by other Local Authorities (**the responsible Authority**) who are placed within the City or County boundaries, in either children's homes or foster homes from the public or private sector. As the **host authorities** (City and County) there are also responsibilities on them to apply the protocol to these children. Depending on the needs of the incident, it may be appropriate for the ownership of the enquiry to be transferred to the responsible authority police force in accordance with ACPO guidance.
- 33 It also covers those children looked after by Nottinghamshire County and Nottingham City who are placed **outside** of the local authority boundaries although the local protocol of the **host authority** will also apply. In these cases the initial police response will be by the Force in the geographical area where the child was reported missing from. Depending on the needs of the incident, it may be appropriate for ownership to be transferred to Nottinghamshire Police in accordance with ACPO guidance.

The hidden missing - all agencies

- 34 It is known that a substantial number of children who go missing are not actually reported to the police. Professionals should be alert to this.
- 35 If it comes to the attention of any agency that a child is still missing and not reported to the police they should advise the parents or carers of the need to do so and that as professionals they have a duty to follow this up (which they must do). Schools, colleges, health and jobcentre plus professionals and others are in good positions to identify these children, the 'hidden' missing, and the significant number of children who would not otherwise be reported as such.
- 36 If the child has returned but was not reported as missing to the police professionals should thus ensure that the Children Missing Officer is aware of the young person and the suspected or confirmed missing incident.

Sixteen and 17 year olds

- 37 When 16 and 17 year olds go missing they are no less vulnerable than young children and are equally at serious risk including from sexual exploitation. They may present as homeless and their needs will be assessed; this may indicate they

are a child in need and requiring accommodation under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

Children with disabilities

- 38 Children with disabilities should also be recognised as being additionally vulnerable when they go missing and an appreciation of their level of understanding of risks should be considered and responded to appropriately.

G PROCESSES FOR A CHILD MISSING FROM HOME OR CARE

Child missing

Responsibility of ALL parents, carers, foster carers or residential staff

- 39 Parents, those with parental responsibility and anyone else who has care of a child should take all reasonable steps to locate the missing child and ascertain their safety before reporting the child whose whereabouts become unknown to the Police. They are expected to undertake the following basic measures to try and locate the missing child, if safe to do so.
- Make efforts to contact the child.
 - Search the child's home - including bedroom/garden/outbuildings and any vehicles the child may have access to.
 - Contact known friends or relatives where the child may be or consult with other members of the household or care staff.
 - Seek information from any social media used by the child, their friends or associates.
 - Visit locations that the child is known to frequent, or where they have previously been found, if it is possible.
- 40 Once the basic measures are completed it is expected that the police will be informed without delay. If there is any serious concerns for the safety of the child at any stage the Police should be informed immediately.
- 41 Clearly parents and carers where children are living at home will not necessarily be aware of these steps and may need educating for any future eventuality.
- 42 In accordance with the Department for Education and ACPO guidance professionals should not give parents the impression that they should not 'bother' the police or other professionals, if their child goes missing regularly. Repeatedly going missing can indicate, for example, sexual exploitation. Where parents or carers do not report the child or young person, or there is a significant delay, then this may be an indicator of concern and their parenting or caring capacity and ability to safeguard the child or young person may need to be considered.

Additional considerations by staff or foster carers

- 43 Residential staff or foster carers will need to make a decision about whether or not the child is missing or away from the placement without authorisation. (see section E for definitions and section K for further details). If the child's whereabouts have been verified, there is no known risk and efforts are being made to return the child to their placement then it may not be necessary to report the child as missing to the

police. If the whereabouts of the child has not been adequately verified, then following the process outlined above the child should be reported as missing to the police. The child's care plan and risk assessment should all be considered. If there are serious concerns for the safety of the child then the police should be informed immediately. Where the child has not been reported as missing to the police this should be kept under review. A written record of the incident and decision making should be maintained. For those children placed within a residential care setting the decision to report the child missing to the Police should be taken following consultation with the Registered Manager or the duty manager. Where this is not possible the senior member of staff on duty will make this decision.

Role of the Police – screening and monitoring

- 44 All reports to Nottinghamshire Police of a child whose whereabouts become unknown will be risk assessed at the point of call by a Customer Service Advisor (CSA) in the Control Room to determine whether the child is deemed to be 'missing' or 'absent' at that time.
- 45 The CSA will ask a series of questions to assist in a risk assessment and decision making process in liaison with the parent, staff member or carer. Police guidance recommends that responses to the following questions are sought although the CSA will use their discretion and judgement depending on the responses and information provided, the sensitivities of the case and the needs of the informant:
- What is the specific concern in this instance?
 - What has been done so far to trace the child?
 - Is this significantly out of character?
 - Are there any specific medical needs?
 - Are they likely to be subjected to crime?
 - Are they likely to be the victim of abuse?
 - Are they currently at risk of Sexual Exploitation?
 - Are they likely to attempt suicide?
 - Do they pose a danger to other people?
 - Is there any other information relevant to their absence?
- 46 There should be agreement between both parties regarding the appropriate status of the incident, and any disagreement should be escalated to a supervisor without delay. For those children who regularly go missing or are away from the placement without authorisation, staff should not be given the impression that they shouldn't 'bother' the police and the behaviour should not be normalised. This ethos is consistent with the approach of both Department for Education and the ACPO guidance.

- 47 Responses to these questions, and details of the incident, will be recorded on the police Vision system and an incident type of either 'Missing' or 'Absent' will be assigned.
- 48 As a reminder repeatedly going missing should not be viewed as a normal pattern of behaviour as this could, for example, indicate a risk of sexual exploitation.

Role of the Police - if the incident is categorised as 'Missing'

- 49 A police officer will be deployed to attend all incidents where a child is deemed to be 'missing'. They will commence a missing person investigation, in line with ACPO Missing Persons guidance and force procedure. The nature of the police response will be dependent on the level of risk level assigned to the missing incident (High or Medium risk – as defined in the table below).
- 50 In most cases, where an incident is classified as 'Missing' at the point of call by a CSA, a missing report will automatically be created on COMPACT, the police missing persons system. The exception to this is the small number of incidents that are deemed to be High risk, where immediate police deployment is required, prior to the completion of the required data fields on the missing report. In these situations the police officer who attends the scene is responsible for ensuring that the COMPACT missing report is completed manually as soon as possible.
- 51 In both cases (ie whether the COMPACT missing report has been generated automatically at the point of call by the CSA, or manually by a police officer at a later point) an automatic notification is sent via secure e mail to named contacts in either Nottingham City or Nottinghamshire County Council depending on the address from where the child went missing.

Role of the Police - if the incident is categorised as 'Absent'

- 52 A police officer will NOT be deployed to attend an incident where a child is deemed to be 'absent' by the police. The onus will be on multi-agency partners to respond appropriately to those children who are deemed absent and return. Absent incidents will be recorded on the police Vision system only and not on the COMPACT missing person system at this present time.
- 53 Following discussion with the informant, the CSA will agree any additional actions that the informant will take to help find the child, and agree a time frame within which the informant should call back / be contacted by the police.
- 54 In follow-up contact with the informant, the CSA should determine if there is any change to the circumstances which increases the risk; if so then escalation to

'missing' status should be considered and the advice of a supervisor sought without delay.

- 55 'Absent' cases must be subject to robust re-assessment and review by the appropriate Duty Management Inspector at six hourly intervals. An 'absent' incident may be re-classified as 'missing' as a result of these reviews, or any other time when new information comes to light that raises the level of risk of the incident. A police officer will then be deployed to take a missing person report. No child will remain categorised as 'absent' for more than 72 hours; at that point the incident will be deemed a 'missing' one.
- 56 If an incident is escalated from 'absent' to 'missing' a COMPACT missing person report will be created and the processes described above will apply. They will become the subject of a strategy discussion and multi-agency meeting if they have been absent for more than 72 hours. The strategy discussion should be between the lead police officer and the relevant LA team manager by 72 hours or earlier as appropriate. Where the child is not allocated to a service there should be a discussion with the Children Missing Officer and then a strategy discussion as appropriate with the MASH in the County of the Children's Social Care duty officer within the City. A strategy meeting may be required depending on the level of concern or risk.

Police risk assessment of missing child reports

- 57 On attending a missing child incident, a police officer will undertake a risk assessment to determine the level of police response. This will be based on their own assessment of the circumstances and on informant provided by the parent/carer or other professional who has reported the child as missing. It is important that as much information as possible is shared with the police officer. Absence of information, for whatever reason, should not lead to an assumption that the child is safe and well.
- 58 ACPO missing person guidance categorises two levels of risk for children less than 18 years: HIGH and MEDIUM. Children under 18 years should NOT be classified as LOW risk.

| RISK LEVEL | ACTION |
|--|--|
| HIGH RISK <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The risk posed 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. | This category requires the immediate deployment of police resources. |
| MEDIUM RISK <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. |
| LOW RISK | No child should be categorised as low risk |

59 Throughout the missing person investigation Nottinghamshire Police are responsible for ongoing enquiries, risk assessment and proportionate actions. They will seek good communication and close cooperation with the local authority and relevant agencies to ensure that any significant concern or information is identified and shared at an early stage. Where there are safeguarding concerns or the child has been missing or absent for 72 hours this communication should be in the form of a strategy discussion (and where appropriate a strategy meeting) between the appropriate personnel.

Role of the Police - media Strategy

60 Where appropriate a media strategy may be necessary. Whilst the police will coordinate this; where a young person is looked after, the relevant senior managers as well as those with parental responsibility will be consulted and permission sought. Liaison with the Local Authority media officer will also be important.

Role of the Police - disruption

61 Where there is no investigative role for the police (ie the child is deemed to be absent by the police or away from their placement without authorisation) but there remains concern about where the young person is going there may be an alternative role for the police in supporting and assisting in the agency planning, for example through the use of child abduction warning notices.

Return of the child

- 62 Police and relevant agencies should have a plan in place for when the child is found or returns home.
- 63 It is the responsibility of the parent or carer to contact the police as soon as possible to confirm that the missing child has returned where this occurs without police involvement. If their whereabouts are known or suspected it is the responsibility of the parents or carers to collect the child and return them home. The police would normally only assist with such transportation in exceptional circumstances, for example if the parent/carer is fearful for their own safety.
- 64 If there are concerns about abuse or harm where the young person lives then the police may not return the child to that setting and will instigate child protection procedures in cooperation with the local authority.

Emergency Accommodation

- 65 Any young person who has been missing or absent and not able to return home may be able to access emergency accommodation following an assessment of the situation by a social worker.
- 66 In circumstances where the police have taken immediate action to protect a child the local authority will need to determine what type of accommodation is appropriate and will not add to any level of risk or vulnerability. The use of bed and breakfast (B&B) is not considered suitable accommodation for any child under the age of 18 even on an emergency basis. Sixteen and 17 year olds may require an assessment of need and may need to be accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

Police safe and well check

Missing from home

- 67 Once missing child or young person has been located the Police will carry out a safe and well check in person. The purpose of this is to check for any indication that they have suffered harm, where and with whom they have been and to give them the opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them. This will result in the police closing the missing report on COMPACT and a notification being automatically generated for the Local Authority.

- 68 If the Police Officer has any safeguarding concerns at the time they conduct the safe and well check they will contact the child's social worker if they have one or make a referral to Children's Social Care (County – MASH and City – Duty and Screening team) if out of hours to the Emergency Duty Teams.

Missing from care

- 69 When a young person frequently goes missing from care in a short period of time, eg several times in **one day**, it may not be possible, or appropriate, for police officers to undertake a safe and well check on every occasion. In these cases, officers can take a full telephone debrief from the person responsible for the child's care (residential unit manager or foster carer), assure themselves that the young person has in fact returned and update the COMPACT 'found' report accordingly.
- 70 However, caution should be taken if there is any suggestion that the child is running away from something that is occurring within the care setting.
- 71 The safe and well check conducted by the police is NOT the same as a return interview which will be conducted by another appropriately trained professional.
- 72 The Local Authority is responsible for deciding whether or not a return interview is conducted in line with the protocol.

Absent or away from placement without authorisation

- 73 A safe and well check by the Police is not required for those children and young people who have been deemed to be absent but a return interview may be appropriate. This is also the case for those children who have been away from their placement without authorisation.

Welcome Home

- 74 Parents and carers should be advised of the importance of children and young people returning home to a warm and genuine welcome and being made aware that the adult has been concerned for them. Whilst making sure that there is no urgent health or other immediate needs it is not best practice to immediately start questioning the young person. Adopting a non-judgmental approach is helpful to young people. They should be offered something to eat and drink and allowed sleep and space if they wish.
- 75 If there is any concern that the young person has been the victim of a crime, or they are at risk arising from them being missing, then the police will instigate further enquiries, for example take clothing, mobile phones or trace evidence. In cases of recent sexual abuse or sexual exploitation the child or young person should be

discouraged from washing. Any evidence or intelligence should be shared with the police as a matter of urgency. Workers should clearly work to safeguarding children procedures relating to child protection and child sexual exploitation as appropriate.

H POLICE NOTIFICATIONS

Receipt of missing children notifications from the Police (via COMPACT)

- 76 The police system will generate automatic missing and found notifications to a secure e-mail account within children's social care which the CMO/MCO will process Monday-Friday. Notifications following weekends and bank holidays will be picked up on the next working day. For any urgent or child protection issues arising from a missing episode the police would make a referral directly to the emergency duty service.
- 77 Cover arrangements are in place for any absence of the CMO/MCO or the police missing coordinators.
- 78 All notifications will be processed, in a consistent manner, by the CMO/MCO within the same working day.
- 79 The CMO/MCO applies the protocol in respect of whether or not a return interview, multi-agency meeting, or a referral to CSC for a strategy discussion is required. In the first instance, the CMO/MCO checks all notifications against the relevant client record system to ascertain whether the young person is an open case to children's social care in the City and County and additionally targeted support services within the County.

Receipt of absence notifications

- 80 Absence notifications will be forwarded to the CMO/MCO within a maximum of five days by the police missing person's coordinator in line with the Information Sharing Agreement. The aim is for this information to be shared as soon as possible. Timeliness is an important factor as there is an onus on agencies other than the police to respond to the missing report deemed 'absent'.

I RETURN INTERVIEW

What is a return interview?

81 A return interview is an opportunity to discover information that can help protect the child or young person from going missing again, or reducing the instances of going missing, and from risks that they may have been exposed to while missing or from risk factors in their home.

82 The interview and actions that follow from it should:

- Identify and respond to any harm the child has suffered (this may or may not have been disclosed as part of the 'safe and well check') either before they ran away or whilst missing.
- To understand and try to address the reasons why the child ran away.
- To understand who they were with when they were missing and where they were found.
- To understand what future risk there is of going missing.
- Help the child feel safe and understand that they have options to prevent or reduce 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.
- Identify what support they require upon returning to home or their care placement in the form of a plan of action.

83 The interview should be held in a neutral place where the child feels safe.

When should a return interview be undertaken?

84 A return interview will usually be undertaken when a child or young person:

- Has been reported missing **or** absent on two or more occasions in a 90 day period.
 - Where missing more than once in any one week only one return interview is needed unless the information indicates otherwise.
- Is frequently away from placement without authorisation ie away for more than 72 hours **or** away from the placement **or** for three or more occasions in a 90 day period and then at periodic intervals if the absence continues.
 - Where away more than once in any two week period only one return interview is needed unless the information indicates otherwise.
- Has been missing **or** absent for 72 hours or more.
- Has been hurt or harmed while they have been missing.
- Is at known or suspected risk of sexual exploitation or trafficking.

- Is at known or suspected risk of involvement in criminal activity or drugs.
- Has contact with people posing risk to children; and/or
- Has been engaged (or is believed to have engaged) in criminal activities while missing.
- Has been missing **or** absent for the first time with the above concerns or risks are identified or there are particular vulnerabilities due to age, mental health, disability, etc.
- When a young person who is suspected or confirmed to have been missing or absent and not reported to the authorities ('hidden missing') comes to the attention of services.

85 In addition to the criteria outlined above; when determining whether or not a return interview or a multi-agency meeting is required, consideration should also be given to the risk of a child or young person going missing again and be based on available information about:

- Their individual circumstances.
- Their motivation for running away.
- Their potential destinations and associates.
- Their recent pattern of absences.
- The circumstances in which they were found previously.
- Their individual characteristics and risk factors such as whether a child has learning difficulties, mental health issues or other vulnerabilities.

Who should undertake the return interview?

86 Return interviews should be undertaken by an independent person who has sufficient knowledge and skill. It should not be someone involved in caring for the child. Residential care staff or foster carers should not therefore undertake the return interview.

87 Children sometimes need to build up trust with a person before they will discuss in depth the reasons why they ran away. The young person may nominate someone who they would like to talk to but it should not be someone who is involved in their day to day care. Where there is social work involvement it is hoped that the child will have a positive relationship with them and wish to engage with them. Equally that the social worker will see the opportunities that come from engaging with the young person about the reason(s) why they have gone missing to enable them to provide or co-ordinate a positive response with the aim of stopping or reducing the missing incidents.

88 Where there is a social worker or other statutory worker, they will be responsible for ensuring that the return interview is completed and for liaising with any person who may be undertaking the interview on their behalf.

89 The City and County will identify their specific arrangements for ensuring there is independence, or for when the child may need or request an independent person to undertake the return interview, within their respective practice guidance. Where children continue to go missing it may be helpful to consider using an alternative independent person to conduct the return interview.

Practice around return interviews - messages from a local safeguarding children board audit (NSCB)

90 A recent audit highlighted a number of learning points which should be borne in mind when completing return interviews:

- Ensure that all return interviews and the recording of such interviews clearly evidence the voice of the young person.
- Avoid seeing the completion of the return interview form as a 'tick box' activity.
- Adopt a freestyle discussion, covering the prompts on the return interview form, avoiding sole focus on the completion of the form in front of the child during the discussion.
- Emphasise that there ought to be discussion and agreement about who is the most appropriate person to undertake the return interview. This should take into account the views of the young person and should be someone independent of any placement.
- Actively demonstrate empathy and care towards the young person.
- Address the reasons given for going missing by ensuring that there is appropriate, and where necessary, persistent single or multi-agency support and intervention through an agreed plan which is monitored.

Sharing of information from return interviews

91 During the course of a return interview, a child may provide information that may assist in quickly locating them should they go missing again and thus help prevent future harm. For example, locations visited, whom they associated with, vehicles they travelled in, etc. The professional undertaking the return interview, whilst not sharing the whole return interview, is required to feedback key information to the relevant police missing person coordinator in a timely manner so that it is readily accessible in the event of future episodes.

92 A police secure e-mail is available to enable the sharing of relevant child specific significant information outside of this process.

missingpersons@nottinghamshire.pnn.police.uk

Timescales

- 93 Return interviews should aim to be completed within 72 hours although if this is not viable due to reluctance by the young person then the contact can be made within 72 hours and an appointment made for the next couple of days. There will be occasions when the worker will need to be persistent in engaging with the young person to undertake the return interview. The aim is that all return interviews are done within five working days unless case notes evidence persistence with the child.

Interview Refused

- 94 Where a young person has refused to participate in a return interview, as much information should be gathered during the refusal discussion as is possible and recorded appropriately. This may involve them sharing intelligence with the police. If the young person initially refused but the discussion evolved into a meaningful dialogue, allowing the return interview to be completed, then this should be done in the usual manner and explained to the young person.
- 95 Where there is a refusal by a young person to engage and there remains concern (from available intelligence or information) about the vulnerability of the young person, if there is no CSC involvement then this may need to be sought if it is believed that the threshold is met.

Parental involvement

- 96 Whilst it is important to talk to parents it is also important to speak to the young person on their own. Where they are competent young people can consent to being spoken to, perhaps at school.
- 97 Where parents refuse to engage with the process or give consent for the young person to be spoken to then this may need to be considered in terms of their capacity to safeguard their child depending on the circumstances and particularly if this resistance persists.

J THE RESPONSE - ENGAGEMENT AND PLANNING

Engagement

- 98 As a result of information or intelligence from the police or the young person there should be a plan to address the reasons for the missing, absence or away from the placement without authorisation. Where appropriate this may include child protection or children in need processes.
- 99 The plan may identify work that is needed by a variety of statutory or non-statutory agencies or organisations, including the voluntary sector. There is an onus on agencies to work together to support and safeguard the young person.

Planning

Multi-Agency Meeting (MAM)

100 A multi-agency meeting is an opportunity for agencies, including health and education to come together to try and understand why the young person has gone missing and to plan to reduce or stop the missing notifications and the level of risk.

101 A multi-agency meeting will generally be held when:

- A child has been missing or absent three times in 90 days.
- A child has been missing or absent for 72 hours but has returned.
- There is other information to suggest there is a high level of risk or professional information sharing and co-ordination is required.
- Where the young person continues to be away from their placement without authorisation.

102 These meetings would be chaired by a social worker or team manager depending on the level of concern or complexity and a brief summary of the meeting and actions required along with a record of who attended the meeting (and apologies or was invited but did not attend) should be recorded on the child's case file.

103 It is possible to incorporate the need for a MAM under this guidance into, for example a Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Meeting, EHAF/CAF Meeting, Core Group Meeting or similar. To enable there to be a clear focus on the missing issues however this should be a clear agenda item with a summary of the discussion and actions recorded on the child's file. This should be made available to the children missing officer within children's social care to enable compliance to be recorded.

104 Where the young person is not open to children's social care and multi-agency information shared suggests that the CSC threshold has been reached then the case should be referred to CSC in the usual manner.

105 Where there is non-engagement from agencies or disagreement regarding planned actions and responsibilities this should be escalated.

Persistent or Lengthy Missing or absent episodes

Missing 72 hours or more

106 When a child has been missing or absent for 72 hours from the time reported to the police, the team manager for the young person will need to have a strategy discussion with the Police Officer supervising the case, or their nominee.

107 Where the young person is not open to children's social care a strategy discussion with the MASH or CITY duty should be held to determine if the threshold for CSC involvement is met.

108 The police will drive the enquiries in relation to finding the child but there will need to be active engagement with the workers involved and with professionals from other agencies.

109 The situation may also warrant a Strategy Meeting between the police, the appropriate social worker or case workers (and relevant managers) and with other agencies. The purpose of this meeting would be to establish the ongoing level of risk and coordinate efforts to locate the child or young person and put in place robust plans for their return.

110 Within Children's Social Care, where the child is either subject to a Child Protection Plan or Looked After by the Local Authority, the Group Manager and Service Director in the County and the Head of Children's Social Care and the Director of Social Care in the City should be notified that the young person is missing or absent at the latest by 24 hours with a subsequent update at 72 hours or earlier as determined by professional judgment.

111 Where a child has been missing for 28 days the Divisional Detective Chief Inspector responsible for the case (or their nominee) will meet with senior managers from relevant agencies.

112 The Group Manager for CSC in the County and the Head of Service (CSC) in the City should also be made aware of any Child in Need (CiN) young person who remains missing after 72 hours at the latest or earlier as determined by professional judgment.

113 For those children and young people, who are open to services other than CSC who are still missing after 72 hours, the relevant senior manager should be informed.

Ongoing Monitoring for Persistent Missing or Absence

114 There should be regular MAMs to review the plan of intervention. The frequency will need to be agreed but six weekly may be appropriate. These types of cases are also likely to come to the attention of the 'multiple missing and hot spots' meeting.

115 For looked after children who are persistently going missing it is important that the missing behaviour is discussed at LAC reviews and with the Independent Reviewing Officer as appropriate.

Recording of activity

116 All agencies are responsible for recording information on their agency records, including any management decisions.

Police Powers

117 The Police have certain powers to protect vulnerable children which include powers to enter premises, to recover children and to take them into Police Protection.

Child Abduction Warning Notices

118 The Police can issue a Child Abduction Warning Notice (CAWN) on an adult who is associating with a child and who may pose a risk to them, as an effective means of disrupting the relationship. The consent of the person who has parental responsibility for the child is required.

119 The use of child abduction warning notices will be monitored through the missing children steering groups.

K ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Looked after Children - Away from placement without authorisation

120 Staff should inform the child's social worker and the children missing officer of a child away from placement without authorisation. The IRO should also be made aware of the event by the social worker.

121 A return interview may also be required. Please see paragraph 82.

122 Children's homes and foster carers should keep a record of the names of the children and the dates and times that they were away from the placement without authorisation. Children's homes and Independent Fostering Agencies will share this summary information with the children missing officer on a monthly basis.

123 Incidents of children being away from their placement without authorisation do NOT need to be reported to the police. In exceptional circumstances if police assistance is needed to recover the child i.e. where there are concerns for the safety of staff or the young person then police assistance can be sought. The police will record this incident as 'assist other agencies' as opposed to recording the matter as linked to the child going missing.

Prevention and Planning

124 The quality of care provided by care staff or fosters carers, and the stability of the placement, is key to preventing a child or young person from going missing. Planning in advance of placements being made is also a key aim where possible. Children should be placed in the most appropriate placement available which should be in their local area unless this is not compatible with their needs. Distance from home is a key factor in preventing looked after children running away. One of the most important factors for children and young people is having a sense that they are listened to, taken seriously and cared for and that their carers are not 'just doing their job'.

125 In addition to the above points; the following points should be borne in mind:

- The care plan should assess the potential risks of going missing and record the degree and level of risk, the young person's and the parent's view.
- An initial risk assessment should be completed and held on the young person's file, considering their age, vulnerability, legal status etc. This should be reviewed and/or updated regularly following each missing episode.
- Carers should agree how they and others will respond to particular behaviour and how to be pro-active in managing a young person.

- Carers should have copies of photographs of the young person, preferably in electronic format.
- Relevant information about the young person should be held by the carer to enable a missing report to be completed i.e. medical information.
- Carers should have the potential names and addresses of where the child may go missing to or where they have previously been found.
- Patterns of going missing should be considered.
- An understanding of why they are going missing is important in trying to address the reasons or problems.
- It is vital to plan for the young person's return during the time that they are missing / absent.
- At each CSC meeting, for example LAC review, there should be a discussion about missing issues. A review of a care plan is an opportunity to address the reasons why a young person is going missing and the suitability of the placement etc.
- Independent Reviewing Officers should be informed of missing, absences and away from placement without authorisation events.
- Other agencies should have an opportunity to contribute to the planning around missing, absent or away from placement without authorisation instances.

LAC trafficked from abroad

126 Some looked after children are unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) or other migrant children and some may have been trafficked into the UK and still under the influence of their traffickers. Trafficked children remain at high risk of going missing, most within one week of becoming LAC. Those UASC or migrant children who do go missing in this way should be treated as potential victims of trafficking. See the NSCB procedure for safeguarding children who may have been trafficked (2011) <http://nottinghamshirescb.proceduresonline.com/index.htm> as well as the Home Office guidance.

127 Cooperation with the UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHCT) will be necessary and the NSPVV Child Trafficking Centre also provides specialist advice. Phone 0808 800 5000 or e-mail help@nspcc.org.uk or web http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/ctail/ctail_wda84866.html

128 A referral should also be made to the UK's victim identification framework, the National Referral Mechanism (NRM).

16 and 17 year old children

129 Those 16 and 17 year olds who remain in care or are care leavers should be recognised as being equally vulnerable to going missing and prevention or

response strategies are needed. They should be placed in suitable and safe accommodation and the protocol will still apply; this includes for those in supported accommodation.

Out of area Looked After Child (LAC) placements

130 For Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County Council looked after children (LAC) who are placed in other local authority areas; the host local authority protocol should also be followed in conjunction with this NSCB/NCSCB protocol. Further details around the responsibilities relating to looked after children can be found in Section K.

131 Where Nottingham City or Nottinghamshire County LAC are placed out of the area there is a requirement in the contracts that their placement provider will notify the responsible authority CMO/MCO with details of children who are missing or absent because most, if not all, police forces do not have the facility to send automatic notifications to local authorities other than within their own police force boundaries. There is also a requirement that those children's social workers will also ensure that the CMO/MCO is aware of the missing or absent event as soon as possible.

County

132 At the point at which children are placed in out of county placements the Placements Team will notify the CMO who will also liaise with the placement provider (where the children are of an appropriate age) to ensure that they know to make the CMO aware of any missing or absent events). The Placements Team also monitor the quality of the provision incorporating missing issues.

City

133 The Placements Team quality assures the requirement that placement providers inform relevant parties of 'missing episodes'.

Other Local Authority (OLA) Looked After Children

134 Other LA LAC missing notifications will be monitored by the CMO in the same manner as City or County children and notifications will be forwarded on to their respective placing authority.

135 In both the County and the City, where it is not practical for the placing authority social worker to complete the return interview, the services of a worker from within the City or County will be approached. The return interview form or any other information resulting will then be shared with the placing authority who will retain

case management responsibility for all aspects of the case. The placing authority will also be responsible for arranging any multi-agency meetings needed.

136 If any child protection processes need to be followed these should be discussed with the MASH or the City duty point if the possible abuse took place within the City or County boundaries.

L STRATEGIC ISSUES

137 A strategy and action plan for identifying and responding to missing children should be in place in both the City and the County.

Accountability and Governance

The role of the LSCB

138 As part of their statutory role the LSCB should give due consideration to the safeguarding risks and issues associated with children missing from home or care. This will involve seeing that partners are working effectively together to prevent children from going missing and to act when they do so. Both Nottinghamshire County and Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Boards will receive and scrutinise regular reports from the local authority on the data and analysis of children missing from home and care. They should also review regular reports from children's homes used by the local authority or within the local authority area on the effectiveness of their measures to prevent children going missing.

Within the County

139 The strategic safeguarding lead for Missing Children is with the Service Manager, Safeguarding Children (Strategic). Work is managed through a multi-agency steering group. An annual report goes to the NSCB with additional reporting on a quarterly basis to the NSCB Executive. An annual report is also presented to the Children & Young Person's Committee and to the Corporate Parenting Group. There is also a contribution to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA).

Within the City

140 The strategic safeguarding lead for missing children work is with the Head of Children's Social Care and chair of the LSCB missing subgroup. The work is managed through the NCSCB multi-agency sub-group which feeds into the OMG which reports to the Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Board.

Prevention strategy

141 The premise of the strategy is that the robust implementation of this protocol will prevent or reduce the number of children who go missing (or are deemed absent) including the frequency of missing. It is also anticipated that by definition this will also reduce the level of risk for these children. The key features of this approach are that children who go missing will be spoken to and the reasons why they go missing sought and understood. In turn this will attract a robust response from

relevant agencies. For looked after children a critical part of this will include work around care planning and placement strategy and practice.

142 This prevention strategy also includes a vigorous and thorough response to those children who are deemed to have been absent or away from their placement without authorisation.

Repeat strategy

143 It is similarly intended that adherence to this protocol will ensure a robust and timely response to those children who continue to go missing (including those deemed absent and those away from their placement without authorisation). The response will be multi-agency for example with a looked after child, including those who are involved in making placements, Independent Reviewing Officers, health colleagues etc. The multiple missing and hot spots meeting will also contribute to the challenge and scrutiny around the whole area of repeat missing children. It is anticipated that this approach will have an impact on the instances (and risks) of children going repeatedly missing, absent or away from their placement without authorisation.

Monitoring and Data Analysis

The County

144 The CMO and the Service Manager, Safeguarding Children (Strategic) will collate monthly/quarterly/annual data in relation to all missing episodes, return interviews and multi-agency meetings. The data will also be shared with the missing children steering group and the NSCB Executive on a quarterly basis and with relevant colleagues as required. .

The City

145 The Missing Children Officer and administrator will collate monthly/quarterly/annual data in relation to all missing episodes, return interviews and multi-agency meetings. The data will also be shared with the steering group and the NCSCB. The Missing Children Officer and administrator will collate monthly performance data about direct work undertaken by the Missing Children Officer (& FSW).

Monitoring hot spots and multiple missing young persons

146 A monthly multi-agency meeting between the City, County, Police, Health and other invitees as appropriate, will meet to consider the young people who are repeatedly going missing or causing concern in relation to their level of missing and also to consider particular hot spots.

Department for Education returns

147 There is a requirement to collate data for children missing or away from their placement without authorisation by the responsible authority. This includes those children deemed absent by the police.

Hidden Missing

148 Agencies will also consider those children who have not been reported to the police but come to their attention; these may be trafficked children for example or children that go missing from education.

149 The local authority and the police will aim to be pro-active in identifying where under-reporting may be happening.

M RESOURCES AND GUIDANCE

Home Office (2011) Missing Children and Adults: A Cross Government Strategy

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/117793/missing-persons-strategy.pdf

All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) Inquiry on Children Who Go Missing from Care (2012)

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175563/Report - children who go missing from care.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175563/Report_-_children_who_go_missing_from_care.pdf)

The Children's Society – Lessons to Learn 2012

Exploring the links between running away and absence from school

http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/lessons-to-learn_final.pdf

CEOP resource area for child sexual exploitation

<http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>

Children's Society – 'Still Running' report

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

Ofsted report on CSE and missing

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/good-practice-resource-children-and-young-people-who-go-missing-and-child-sexual-exploitation-partne>

Ofsted thematic inspection (2013)

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/missing-children>

Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations volumes on care planning and review