

Children and Young People Missing from Home or Care (MFHC) Protocol

May 2023

Policy to be read in conjunction with the Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Procedures (NB : this document replaces all other Derby City or Derbyshire missing children protocols)				
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Version Control

Please note this protocol is subject to review and will be updated In line with statutory guidance.

Contents	Page
1. Introduction, aim & statutory basis for the protocol	3
2. Governance arrangements and strategic response	4
3. Assessment of risk where children are ‘missing’ from home or care	
3.1 Definitions of missing	6
3.2 Assessment of risk where children are ‘missing’	7
4. Initial Reporting	
4.1 Reporting a missing child	8
4.1.1 Concerns that a child is missing from home/care or from s17 accommodated	
4.1.2 Away from placement without authorisation (children in care)	
4.1.3 Unaccompanied Migrant Children and Child Victims of Trafficking and Modern Slavery	
4.1.4 Concerns that a child or unborn baby has gone missing with their family	
4.1.5 Child Protection	
4.1.6 Children at Risk of Exploitation	
4.1.7 Children missing from education and EHE	
4.1.8 Children missing education	
4.2 Police Response	12
5. Action to locate a missing child	
5.1 Role of the Police	12
5.2 Role of the Local Authority	14
5.3 Role of other agencies	15
5.4 Multi-agency response to a missing episode - flowchart	16
6. Management of return	
6.1 Return of a missing child	18
6.2 Missing children who are found but do not wish to return	18
6.3 Children who are being detained or encouraged to stay by others	18
6.4 Reporting that a missing child is found/returned	18
6.5 Police Prevention Visits/Checks	19
6.6 Return interviews	19
7. Prevention and Intervention	
7.1 Actions following a return interview	21
7.2 Preventing missing episodes – Children in Care	22
Appendices	
1. Glossary	23
2. Why children go missing	24
3. Template of Return Interview Questions	25
4. Details of Local Authority and Police lead person for children missing from home or care	27

1. Introduction

The purpose of this protocol is to ensure the adequate safeguarding of children and families normally resident in Derby and Derbyshire, or those using services in the area. It should be read and implemented by all practitioners and managers working with children or young people who are currently missing or are at risk of going missing.

The protocol has been developed in accordance with:

- *Statutory Guidance Children who Run Away or go Missing from Home or Care (2014)* which sets out the steps local authorities and their partners should take to prevent children from going missing and to protect them when they do go missing;
- *Interim Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons (2013)*; and
- *College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice – Missing Person Investigations (7th January 2021)*

Every missing episode should attract an appropriate and proportionate response from the professionals involved, who must collaborate to ensure a consistent response is given to find the child and on his / her return.

The aim of the protocol is:

- To reduce the incidence of all children going missing and the risks associated with children who go missing
- To prevent the missing child suffering from harm and to recover the child to safety as soon as possible
- Going missing should be treated as an indicator that the individual may be at risk of harm. The safeguarding of vulnerable children is paramount and a missing person report should be recognised as an opportunity to identify and address risks. The reasons for a child deciding to go missing may be complex and linked to a variety of social or family issues.

Three key factors should be considered in a missing person investigation:

- Protecting those at risk of harm
- Minimising distress and ensuring high quality of service to the families and carers of missing persons
- Investigating those who perpetrate harm or pose a risk of harm when this is appropriate and supported by evidence.

This will be achieved by providing effective support and interventions, including good information sharing, multi-agency assessment and planning and performance management. Interventions will include a consideration of risks for each individual child and a focus on reducing repeat missing episodes.

The protocol covers all children:

- Living in the boundaries of Derby and Derbyshire local authority
- Children looked after by Derby or Derbyshire local authorities placed in children's homes, foster homes (either local authority or independent) or living with parents or relatives within and outside of the local authority boundaries
- Children looked after by other local authorities and placed in Derby or Derbyshire in residential children's homes, foster homes or with family

It applies in the following situations:

- Children missing from home
- Children missing from care
- Trafficked children
- Children missing with their families, including unborn babies
- Children missing education

2. Governance Arrangements

The Police are the lead agency in relation to missing children and are accountable to the Chief Constable and the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC).

Local Authorities also have statutory responsibilities with regard to missing children and are required to work in partnership with the Police. Other partner agencies, notably schools and health providers, also have a critical role to play.

Derbyshire Police, Derbyshire County Council and Derby City Council each have named leads who are responsible for children missing from home or care (see Appendix 4).

Strategic Response

The Police Serious Organised Crime and Exploitation (SocEx) CRE and Missing tasking meetings are chaired and organised by Derbyshire Constabulary. The purpose of the meeting is to identify areas of current or emerging threat and risk in relation to the exploitation of children, in order to provide a multi-agency response to the factors contributing to that exploitation or risk of exploitation. This is a collaborative arrangement between the Police, Derby City/Derbyshire Childrens Services and other partner agencies including Health and Community Safety.

In **Derbyshire County**: missing risks to children are managed by the following 3 panels who exchange information and review the partnership response to ensure there is effective disruption and safety measures in place.

- The Children in Care Missing Review Panel
- The Children Missing from Home Review Panel
- Locality Children at Risk of Exploitation Panel

The aim of these meetings is to review the multi-agency response and risk management of cases where missing and exploitation are present. This also includes capturing the themes and intelligence to inform interventions.

Derbyshire also has a missing and return interview workflow for practitioners to ensure a robust and timely response to missing incidents. In Derbyshire please also refer to the Return Interview Guidance on DCC Tri-x - under **Childrens Social Care Assessment and Planning**.

In the City: The Missing Persons Monitoring Group (MPMG) is a multi-agency forum, which is held monthly. This is chaired by the Local Authority, which monitors agencies' responses to prevent

children from going missing and takes effective joint action where a child is missing and may be at risk. The aim is to secure the safety or reduce the risks to the young person by:

- Sharing and mapping of intelligence
- Agreeing joint action
- Hold agencies to account
- Prevention of further missing episodes
- Disrupting Strategies

Enhanced Care Planning Meeting for children in care and the aim of these meetings are to prevent the deterioration of situations that could lead to an increase in a young person's risk and/or placement breakdown and this can include missing episodes.

Missing and Runaways Task Group will act as a conduit between the operational practice of the delivery of Missing and Runaways work on the ground, including the Missing Persons Monitoring Group and the strategic scrutiny provided by the Derby Safeguarding Children's Partnership (DDSCP), via the Vulnerable Young Persons Group (EVYP).

Missing arrangements will be quality assured through Team Manager oversight of return interviews. In Derby City please refer to the return Interview guidance on Page 18

In Derby City quarterly audits are completed on return interviews.

The Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Partnership

The Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Partnership monitors responses to missing children to ensure children are safe. The Partnership receives regular updates from the Local Authority through the EVYP sub-group analysing data on children missing from home or care. They also review this protocol through the joint Policies and Procedures sub-group, to ensure that it is adequate and up to date.

Missing arrangements are subject to an improvement plan which will be monitored by the Derby and Derbyshire SCBs and the Strategic Missing Persons' group. The latter will review performance of the partnership relative to operational delivery against current policy, guidance and best practice, and will share and disseminate best practice.

3. Assessment of Risk where Children are ‘Missing’ from Home and Care

3.1 Definitions

DfE guidance to Local Authorities has the following definitions:

- *Missing child*: a child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers
- *Missing from care*: a looked after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (e.g. school) and their whereabouts is not known.

Police guidance has the following definitions:

- **Missing, Medium Risk**: The risk of harm to the subject 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.
- **Missing, High Risk**: The risk of serious harm to the subject or the public is assessed as very likely. This category almost always requires the immediate deployment of police resources.

No Apparent Risk

Whilst an additional risk assessment of No Apparent Risk is still available for use in accordance with the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice (APP), Derbyshire Constabulary have made a clear and defined decision that as an organisation **there are no circumstances in which the assessment of No Apparent Risk will be used.**

There are specific circumstances where concerns for safety/welfare will need to be addressed and the Police Standard Operating Procedure should be followed.

The police classification of a person as ‘missing’ and at what level will be based on an on-going risk assessment. A child whose whereabouts are known would not be treated as ‘missing’ under the police definitions. Nevertheless, the Local Authority may still request Police assistance in recovering the child if they or the carer are considered to be at risk when they attempt to return the child to his or her placement. Police assistance will be available where the police can add additional value to protecting the child. The needs of the individual child will be central to that decision and the most appropriate agency will retain primacy.

A supervisor at Inspector rank will be responsible for the ratification of any risk level, utilising all the information available to them at that time. This is key so that we can ensure the correct level of response, supervision and resourcing are available to deliver our objectives.

Whilst the professional judgement of an Inspector will be used to grade the risk of an adult against the APP guidance of Risk – There are key themes which may increase the risk of an adult who has been reported missing – These include but are not limited to:

- Believed victim of a crime in action
- Believed victim of serious crime
- Believed serious risk of harm due to perceived circumstances of missing:
 - Criminal Exploitation including Modern Slavery or Human Trafficking
 - Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment
 - Force marriage and honour-based abuse
 - Organised Crime
 - Hate Crime
 - Sex work and prostitution
 - Serious sexual violence and Violence against Women and Girls

- Mental Health or identified vulnerability including Self harm

To determine the level of risk for a child who is “missing” the Police will take into account:

1. What is the specific concern in this instance?
2. What has been done so far to trace this individual?
3. Is this significantly out of character?
4. Are there any specific medical needs?
5. Are they likely to be subjected to crime?
6. Are they likely to be the victim of abuse?
7. Are they currently at risk of Sexual Exploitation or Criminal Exploitation?
8. Are they likely to attempt suicide?
9. Do they pose a danger to other people?
10. Is there any other information relevant to their absence?

NB: This should also be applied to an unborn baby, believed to be at risk, whose mother goes missing.

Specific vulnerabilities exist for some children such as those at risk of sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation, subject to a S47 investigation or with Child Protection Plans, disabled children, gang-associated children etc. Looked after children have been identified as at greater risk, and includes all of those that are within the care system, including those in children’s homes and foster placements.

Where a child is at known risk of going missing, an individual plan should have been developed and a meeting should have been held to address the presenting concerns, and subsequent meetings should be held in line with Derby city and Derbyshire’s pathways. This applies equally to children at home or in care.

3.2 Assessment of risk where children are “missing”

Children at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation, Child Criminal Exploitation and County Line’s criminality

Derbyshire Constabulary have assessed a number of children and young people to be at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation, Child Criminal Exploitation and from the risk of exploitation from County Line Drug gangs.

As part of ongoing work to identify, and protect those who are deemed vulnerable, a risk assessment is completed when Derbyshire Constabulary receive, information, intelligence or a direct referral.

As a result, an individual can be assessed as being High, Medium or Low risk of Child Sexual Exploitation or Child Criminal Exploitation.

Derbyshire Constabulary have made a clear and defined policy decision that all children and young people who are assessed as being High Risk of Child Sexual Exploitation or Child Criminal Exploitation will be classed as High-Risk missing people in the Initial report and First response stage of an investigation, until a full risk a full risk assessment has been completed, and a rationale has been recorded based on information available to the nominated Inspector.

At this time the initial assessment of High Risk will remain or a new grading of Medium risk will be given.

The mechanism of treating all children and young people who are at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation, Child Criminal Exploitation and from the risk of exploitation from County Line Drug gangs ensures that there is a clear focus on:

‘To effectively respond to missing person incidents, prioritising the safe return of the missing person, supporting loved ones or primary carers and maintaining public confidence’

A missing child incident would be prioritised as **‘medium risk’** where:

- the risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as likely but not serious

In determining the level of risk is high or medium, **in addition to the above** consideration needs to be given:

- The age of the child and any disabilities
- Previous behaviour and history
- Whether the child has been trafficked
- Any known risks of harm to the child including economic, sexual exploitation or criminal exploitation to – see note above in relation to CRE
- The emotional needs of the child, e.g., whether there has been any variation in their mood or whether they have expressed any intention to harm themselves or others
- Whether the child is perceived as running to / from someone / something
- The risk of offending
- Concerns the child has been removed for reasons of Female Genital Mutilation and/or Forced Marriage (see separate guidance on this in [DDSCP safeguarding children procedures.](#))
- There have been concerns regarding potential radicalisation in the referral. (see separate guidance on PREVENT). See also the [Safeguarding Children and Young people against Radicalisation and Violent Extremism procedure](#) and refer to the [CRE guidance](#)

If there is any disagreement about the categorisation of missing, this should be escalated to the duty police inspector as a matter of urgency.

4. Initial Reporting

4.1 Reporting a missing child

If a child or unborn baby is at immediate risk this should be reported without delay to the Derbyshire Police on 999.

In non-emergencies, the following should be informed of a missing child or pregnant woman:

- Derbyshire Police on 101
- Children’s Services
 - In Derbyshire this is via Starting Point during office hours and Call Derbyshire out of office hours and both can be contacted on 01629 533190
 - In Derby this is via the Initial Response Team 01332 641178, Mon-Fri., 9am - 5pm (out these hours the number is via Careline 01332 956606).
- Heath Services
 - In Derby this is via Derbyshire Healthcare Foundation Trust Safeguarding Children Service 01332 623700 text 31537, who will check their systems
 - In Derbyshire this is via Derbyshire Community Health Services Safeguarding Children Service 01773 599410, who will check their systems.

- The NHS Safeguarding Children Team will notify the relevant Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children.

When reporting a child missing to the police any relevant information that might help to find or support the child should be shared, including:

- If there are any specific risks;
- If they have gone missing with family members or individuals known to present a risk;
- A description of the child and the clothing they were wearing and a recent photograph;
- Any mobile phone numbers;
- Whether or not the missing child uses social media;
- If in care, details of the placing authority if outside of Derby or Derbyshire;
- Details of where the child was last seen, when and with whom;
- Relevant addresses, known associates and addresses frequented;
- Details of any previous absences – when, where, for how long, with whom, where found/when returned;
- The circumstances and any relevant information such as an argument, being bullied etc.
- Any other information that may be seen as increasing the vulnerability of the child such as learning disability, if the child has previously experienced or considered being at risk of sexual exploitation or trafficking.
- Relevant information from the Care Plan in place for the CIC
- If a child is placed from another Local Authority in our area – we would need to know which LA the child is placed by, which Police area and the details of their care plan in relation to Missing Risk and CRE Risk

4.1.1 Concerns that a child is missing from home / care or from s17 accommodated

In any other circumstance, it is expected that all reasonable steps should be taken by parents or care providers to locate the child prior to making a report to the police. This includes:

- Search bedroom / accommodation / outbuildings / vehicles;
- Contact known friends and relatives where a child may be;
- Visit locations that the child is known to frequent, if it is possible;
- Calling or texting any mobile phone held by child and leaving a message asking for contact;
- Contact with school or school friends to gather any available information regarding the child's whereabouts.
- Care providers should follow the agreed actions about missing in their safer care plan for a child

At the point where a parent / person with or without parental responsibility consider the child to be missing, they should inform the police without delay on 101.

When the carer contacts the Police, it is important that they make it clear to the police that they are reporting the child as missing. The carer should always ask for, and record, the Police Incident Number.

The local authority retains responsibility for children looked after and placed outside the local authority boundaries. In these cases, the local authority will require the placement provider to comply with this protocol and protocols local to their area. Other local authorities placing children within Derby and Derbyshire boundary will be required to comply with this protocol. In addition, this protocol applies to all young people placed within the county or local authority boundaries (including those

aged 18) for whom Derbyshire County / Derby City Councils have continuing responsibilities under The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. Starting Point or Derby City Initial Contact Team will hold the relevant information in regard to these children if they have been placed in our local area.

Derbyshire please refer to [Derbyshire Childrens' Homes Procedures](#) and in Derby please refer to [Derby Childrens Home Procedures](#) around monitoring for further guidance.)

4.1.2 Away from placement without authorisation (children in care)

Being away from their placement without authorisation, e.g. late returns, staying at a known location with a friend, unauthorised family contact, **where their location is known**, will not normally constitute a missing episode. The discretion of the residential staff and carers is necessary to decide whether or when to make a report to the police, based on the concerns they have for the child and action taken to contact them. The responsibility for managing this type of absence lies with the staff of the residential home or carer. If the carer has concerns for the child's safety, then a report should be made to the police clearly setting out what those concerns are.

If the assessment of the carer is that there is no identified risk for the child's immediate safety it is still important that staff / carers record these incidences as "away from their placement without authorisation" in the child's record, starting a dated / timed record of their contacts, risk assessment and decisions throughout the episode from the point that they are first aware of the child being away. They should notify the child's Social Worker or out of hours service within a timeframe consistent with the placement plan or missing plan for that child; no child should be away from placement without authorisation for more than 6 hours maximum, without the Social Worker or out of hour's service being informed and consulted as to appropriate action.

The local authority staff will decide whether to allow the child to remain at that location, albeit temporarily, or to arrange for their return. If the decision is to arrange their return and there is reason to believe that there may be public order difficulties, the police can be asked to assist. Police assistance in these circumstances does not mean that the child is categorised as missing.

4.1.3 Unaccompanied Migrant Children and Child Victims of Trafficking and Modern Slavery

Children who may be trafficked are at very high risk of going missing. As a minimum, immediate steps must be taken to secure their safety and their Missing Plan up-dated and shared with Police and Social Care There should be a proactive plan agreed in the event they go missing – please refer to s47 procedure, for each child, and this should be put into effect immediately their whereabouts are unknown. The UK Human Trafficking Centre must be notified of their return. **Please see the procedure in [Derby City and Derbyshire County in relation to Unaccompanied Migrant Children and Child Victims of Trafficking and Modern Slavery](#)**

4.1.4 Concerns that a child or unborn baby has gone missing with their family

On occasion children go missing with their families. This may be where families move or are forced to move and do not notify all agencies, or where they are seeking to avoid the attention or intervention of agencies. This may first come to light through non-attendance at school or appointments. Please refer to s47 procedure and [Derby and Derbyshire Multiagency Protocol for Pre-birth Assessments and Interventions](#).

Agencies should aim to maintain contact with families in receipt of their services, and if they move, aim to share information with the parents' consent with equivalent services in the area the family

moves to. If a family moves without informing the agency, attempts should be made to locate the family which are proportionate to the level of concern for the children. As a minimum the concern they may be missing should be shared with other agencies involved, to share any available information and agree if the child is missing and if they may be at risk. If so, this should be reported immediately to the Police and Social Care.

4.1.5 Child protection – where a family or pregnant woman have been missing, return interviews are not necessary but any concerns from the missing episode should be fully considered by children’s services. A family and/or pregnant woman going missing could trigger a strategy meeting and a s.47 child protection enquiry. If the family and/or pregnant woman are on a child protection plan there should be an immediate consideration of the plan in relation to children/unborn child being at risk and a strategy meeting should be held. If necessary legal action should be taken to secure the safety of the children involved in the missing episode. The Child Protection Manager must be informed and a core group meeting should be held within 5 working days of any missing episode and consideration should be given by the Child Protection Manager to bringing forward the review conference. Police and Social Care Senior Managers should consider a national alert if the family cannot be located.

4.1.7 Children at Risk of Exploitation - an **Operation Liberty** form should be completed in line with DDSCP Safeguarding Children procedures, **Children at risk of CRE** and the Return Interview attached; the CRE risk assessment should be up-dated, the relevant Child Protection Manager (CRE) informed, and consideration given to reviewing the CRE risk level and safety plan as well as bringing forward the next CRE meeting.

4.1.8 Children missing from education and EHE

Concerns may arise where children go missing from school during the course of a school day, and where children do not attend school, schools including Academies, independent and free, because they have been withdrawn, or have not been registered. All these groups are potentially at risk.

Where children are absent from school the ‘First Day Contact’ ensures that schools including Academies, independent and free, are immediately in touch with parents/carers to advise on a child missing education and schools are expected to assist parents or carers in reporting the child missing to the Police should this prove necessary. Schools should report the child missing to the police if it is believed the parents cannot or will not do this. Vulnerable children and especially looked after children should be prioritised as part of the process, and if there is any cause for concern about their safety, a referral made to Childrens Social Care following the agreed safeguarding procedure and process.

Schools including Academies, Independent and Free Schools, are expected to show evidence of every effort made to identify, report, track and monitor any child who goes missing. All these schools including Academies, Independent and Free Schools, should follow the guidance and protocols issued on children who go missing from education in Derbyshire and Derby City including the trigger points and number of days absence. Additionally, all schools including Academies, Independent and Free Schools, should adhere to the current DfE Missing from Education Statutory Guidance. For further guidance in Derbyshire on Children Missing from Education please visit **Schoolsnet** and in Derby City for CME please visit **SIP**.

In Derbyshire there is a monthly multi-agency panel which reviews the vulnerabilities for children who are missing from education.

It is known that children who are elective home educated (EHE) may be additionally vulnerable and will require professionals to be vigilant in response to children within this group who go missing. For further information and guidance in relation to EHE please see the statutory government guidance on [Elective Home Education](#).

4.1.9 Children missing education – return interviews will not normally be necessary. Refer to CME procedure for steps to be taken to secure the child's needs are assessed and an appropriate education provided. In Derbyshire on CME please visit [Schoolsnet](#) and in Derby City for CME please visit [SIP](#).

4.2 Police response

When accepting a missing person report, the police will advise the caller that they will share information about the missing child and seek assistance from partner agencies to find the child.

On categorising a child as missing, the details will be entered on the COMPACT database, and checks will be made on the system and internally whether or not there is intelligence or recent history relating to the missing young person; details will be forwarded to the local authority via secure email.

Once a child has been reported as "Missing Medium/High", the police are the lead agency in relation to finding and securing their safe return and conduct a Police Prevention Interview.

Partner agencies are required to assist them to carry out this role, as well as meeting any practice requirements internally. The police have the ultimate responsibility for determining the action that needs to be taken and when it needs to be escalated.

5. Action to locate a Missing Child

5.1 Role of the Police

The high-risk category requires the immediate deployment of police resources. The Derbyshire Police Missing Person Investigation Team Standard Operating Procedures should be followed.

The medium risk category requires an active and measured response by police and other agencies in order to trace the missing person and support the person reporting. This will involve a proactive investigation and search in accordance with the circumstances to locate the missing child as soon as possible.

Missing person enquiries will continue until the young person is found / returns and COMPACT will be updated and the local authority notified. Any child protection concern will be dealt with under child protection procedures. Police will keep a record of all aspects of the investigation on the COMPACT computerised missing person case management system.

Following the initial response from the local Policing unit the missing person investigation will be handed over to the Missing Persons Investigation Team which is a force wide response, whose role is to oversee investigations, advise investigating officers, liaise with partner agencies as well as offer a strategic perspective in this area.

Where a child is believed missing with family and there is a risk of them leaving the country, consideration will be given to border alerts. For unborn babies, alerts may be issued to maternity units in the region or nationally.

Where a child is believed to be trafficked, a referral to the UK Human Trafficking Centre through the National Referral Mechanism must be made, in line with DDSCP **Modern Slavery Guidance**.

Where there are concerns that the child is at risk of Female Genital Mutilation and/or Forced marriage appropriate action as guided within the DSCBs multi-agency safeguarding **FGM** and/or **Forced marriage procedures** should run in tandem with the RMFC Protocol in a bid to locate the child and ensure they are safe.

Throughout the course of a missing persons investigation the police should update the parents/carers and local authority of any significant developments.

In some cases, particularly where a missing child is felt to be especially vulnerable, it may be necessary to publicise via the media. Each case is to be individually assessed in respect of this. Such an approach 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 jointly made, and where appropriate, in consultation with parents and local authority Children's Services. However, for operational reasons primacy over such decisions must lie with the Police and a decision will be made by a Senior Investigating Officer.

The police may also make use of the website facility of the Missing Persons Bureau (MPB) (www.missingpersons.police.uk) to publicise the absence of the child or young person. The police will also make use of 'Text Safe' as this provides a way of proactively texting a missing person's mobile phone with a message from Missing People about services. This lets the missing person know that we care for their safety and want to help and encourages them to get in touch.

If there are concerns a child may be or have been taken abroad, consideration will be given to border alerts and liaison with Interpol or other relevant organisations.

All Police missing person's files will remain live until the person is traced or until the Area Chief Inspector (Operations) in consultation with the respective Service Director, is satisfied that all lines of enquiry have been exhausted. They will then forward the file to their appropriate line managers who will make the final decision as to whether to file or otherwise.

Where the decision to file has been made, the Missing Persons Investigations Team will be responsible for bringing forward the file on persons who remain missing for review by the appropriate senior managers, 12 months after the file date.

Police Powers

The police have powers to safeguard vulnerable children. These include powers to enter premises, to recover children and to invoke Police Protection Orders. The use of all powers are to be necessary, legal and proportionate in line with the Human Rights Act (1988). Prior to the use of coercive police powers the potential to use less intrusive tactics should be considered with partners against the presented risk and urgency. This can include the option to obtain a Recovery Order from a court.

The police priority is the safety and well-being of the child; where criminal offences are established the police will take positive action against any perpetrators, hold them accountable for their actions and bring charges where appropriate.

It is recognised that children who have been the victim of a serious offence may not always see themselves as victims or be willing to assist in the investigation. Likewise those whom others have used for criminal purposes may not be willing to assist the police.

A complaint from a victim is not required to make an arrest. Police officers are able to arrest for any offence where reasonable grounds for suspicion exist and the arrest is necessary. Such actions must also be lawful and proportionate. An officer should be prepared to justify a decision not to arrest in these circumstances.

Without prejudice to the welfare of any child, the local authority will support the police in taking appropriate action against those who commit crimes against children and/or involve children in their offending behaviour.

5.2 Role of the Local Authority

All staff should refer to Children's Services/Children's Homes procedures in relation to action they should take. This applies particularly to children in care, for whom the Local Authority is a Corporate Parent and has additional responsibilities.

On receipt of all missing children reports from police COMPACT via secure email, the local authority will check to find out whether or not a case is known to them.

Where a child (or the family) is an open case, including where they are a looked after child to a local authority service, the missing report will be sent to the case responsible worker in Social Care, the Earl Help Team in Derbyshire Multi Agency team (MAT) in the City or the Youth Justice Service. The lead worker involved with the child, or duty worker in their absence, will;

- Liaise with the police and other agencies
- Contact the family and offer support, if this is appropriate
- Take into account the circumstances relating to the missing episode (and return) in any on-going assessments and interventions
- Ensure other agencies supporting the child/family are aware of the situation
- Ensure a return interview is undertaken within 72 hours once the child has been located and the found compact received from the police.

Social Care remain responsible for the children in their care who are missing, and for children subject to child protection plans and children in need about whom there are concerns. This responsibility is not absolved when the child has been reported missing to the police; however, the police will have primacy in respect of the investigation to trace the child.

Where a child is unknown or a closed case and they are reported as missing, the missing return interview will be assigned to complete by a worker in Early Help in Derbyshire, in Derby to a Runaways Worker based in the MAT's. If there are concerns of significant harm, a Social Worker will be allocated. The worker will;

- Contact the family and offer support. The focus of this support will be on the identified missing issues.
- Determine whether or not there are wider needs to be addressed through an appropriate assessment such as the Early Help Assessment or Social Care single assessment.
- Identify if there are any safeguarding concerns and if there are follow safeguarding processes.

Where the child is in the care of another local authority but placed in Derby City or County, a record/episode will be opened / updated and details will be forwarded to that authority. The placing local authority will be responsible for liaison with the police etc. unless they specifically request assistance from Derby or Derbyshire County Council. Return interviews may incur a charge.

Residential carers/foster carers and Social Care /MAT/EH workers or any provider responsible for the child must keep a full record of actions taken, messages received and given. In residential settings a safer care plan should be updated in relation to the missing risk with actions to reduce harm to the child. Foster carers should be supported by their supervising social worker and social care to record actions and understand how to reduce missing harm with their foster child. A record of this **must** be maintained on the child's file and uploaded onto the case recording system.

In some cases permission may be granted for the Police to use media to find a missing person. For staff in Social Care services based in Derby City and within Derbyshire County Council, (including Multi-Agency Teams), for Children subject to a Care Order must be authorised by a Service Director by way of escalation up through a Head of Service in order to ensure the correct protocols in relation to use of media are followed and key senior managers and elected members are aware and kept abreast of this.

5.3 Role of other agencies

All agencies should work in partnership with the Police enquiries to locate the missing child or family. All relevant information should be shared with the Police and Local Authority, especially any intelligence on what the child or family were saying or doing before going missing. Where possible records should be checked to identify associated individuals or family members who may have information. They may also be able to assist with photos of the children or parents.

Appropriate front line staff working with the family in addition to Police and Social Care/Early Help should be notified that the child or family are missing, so in the event of any contact the Police can be alerted. Involved professionals working with the family and the Police should be invited to attend missing meetings as well as the parents and child (where appropriate). Attendees at a Missing Meeting or S47 strategy discussion (if threshold is met to include a review of the missing episode) should consider if alerts are required and consider how wide any alerts need to be for example within respective agencies, health, another area or nationally.

5.4 Multi-agency response to a missing episode

Day 1

Child/ Young Person reported as missing by parents/ carers or practitioners.
Police to decide if the missing episode is medium or high risk.
If high risk, police alert the UK Missing Persons Unit as part of the National Crime Agency.
If there are safeguarding concerns identified at the start of the missing episode to follow safeguarding procedures.
*see note below

*At 48 hours or earlier it is best practice to undertake a telephone review with the Police, if the young person is deemed high risk or significant concerns regarding the missing episode this meeting will be brought forward and if not will be at day 3.

Day 2

Undertake a missing case discussion between Children Services and Police. Alert all Early Help and Social Care line managers of missing episodes.

Day 3

Hold a Multi-Agency Missing meeting including all involved professionals (or S47 strategy discussion if threshold is met to include a review of the missing episode) chaired by the allocated children services manager
If deemed as a missing medium risk by the police and due to the amount of time missing the police will refer the case to the UK Missing Persons Unit as part of the National Crime Agency.
Escalate case via Safeguarding Procedure (which could include investigating complex abuse) if required
Alert Senior Managers in Early Help and Social Care of missing episode (especially if media appeal is to be released).

10/ 15/ 20 Days Missing

Continue to hold Multi – Agency Missing Meeting (and s47 strategy meetings where appropriate).
Escalate case via Safeguarding Procedure (which could include investigating complex abuse) if required
Inform senior leaders of any case updates.

Day 28

Detective Chief Inspector of Missing and Exploitation will review the case from a police investigation prospective and change case status and internal police procedures will be followed.
Multi – Agency S47 Strategy Meeting combined with a missing meeting should be held, chaired by Child Protection Manager for Vulnerable Children and a senior Police representative in attendance.
Escalate case via Safeguarding Procedure (which could include investigating complex abuse)

From Month 2

Continue with Multi Agency Missing Meeting if agreed at the 28-day missing meeting due to on-going police investigative leads and safeguarding concerns and agree timeframe.
Or follow safeguarding procedures.

3 Months/ 6th Months/ 12months

Hold a Locality Case Management Meeting which would include:
HOS/ DHOS/ Allocated Childrens Worker/ Childrens Legal/ Police.
No USAC case can be closed to Children Services (Derbyshire)

If a s47 Strategy discussion or missing meeting takes place the following actions could be considered to locate the child:

- Use by the Police of their powers to recover the child, for example, placing a child in Police Protection;
- An application for a Recovery Order;
- An application for a Secure Accommodation Order;
- The use of publicity.

If a child has a frequent missing pattern with an ongoing assessment i.e. missing for 3 days in a 30 day period, consideration should be made to hold a missing meeting or professionals meeting. This will depend upon the context of the missing incidents e.g. risk of exploitation, distance travelled when missing, place based risk in the community.

A missing meeting will involve the police, carers, the child's Social Worker, and any other practitioner involved in the care of the child and can take place via Skype for Business/Telephone/In Person as required. The meeting will:

- Review what action has been taken so far by the police and other professionals
- Consider any relevant information or intelligence
- Review the level of risk
- Consider if safeguarding concerns merit opening a Section 47 investigation
- Decide whether the child should return to their home or placement, or taken elsewhere, when located and plans needed to support this
- Agree what action needs to be taken next by police and other professionals

Where a child or unborn baby is subject to a child protection plan, the relevant Child Protection Manager should be informed and if they are not found within 20 working days, the next review conference should be brought forward to consider whether any other action should be taken. In the case of British children taken overseas it may be appropriate to contact the Consular Directorate at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office which offers assistance to British nationals in distress overseas. They may be able to follow up a case through their consular post(s) in the country concerned. The Hague Convention also applies in relation to safeguarding; see also DDSCP Safeguarding Children procedures, chapter **Forced Marriage**.

A child protection plan may only be ceased if all conference members agree that all steps to locate the family have been exhausted and were proportionate to the level of concern, or there is good reason to believe a foreign national family have left the country, in which case safeguarding services and/or the embassy in the relevant country should be informed and an appropriate strategy agreed.

Where a child is in care the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) should be informed and consideration may be given to bringing forward the next LAC review. Legal advice should be taken and senior managers alerted in line with internal procedures. When a child who is subject to a Care Order has been removed from the UK the Child Abduction Section at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office should be informed immediately.

In all cases, any worker with concerns about the response to the missing child or family should escalate these concerns using the **DSCBs Escalation Procedure.**

6. Management of Return

A supportive approach, actively listening and responding to a child's needs will have a greater chance of preventing the child from going missing again and safeguarding them against any risks. Working in partnership with children and their families is a key part of this process, with all views and concerns being taken seriously.

In Derby City follow the [Return Interview flowchart](#)

In Derbyshire County follow the [Missing Operational workflow in the Childrens Social Care Assessment and Planning section](#)

6.1 Return of a missing child

If the whereabouts are known or suspected, it is the responsibility of the parents or carers to arrange for the child's return.

If the child is a child in Care - (In Derbyshire please refer to [Derbyshire Childrens' Homes Procedures](#) and in Derby please refer to [Derby Childrens Home Procedures](#) for further guidance.)

6.2 Missing children who are found but do not wish to return

Difficulties can arise when missing children are found but do not want to return. Where effective communication and persuasion have failed the use of various court orders should be considered where an assessment of risk and urgency allow.

There will be occasions when a child is found in a location that may be considered unsuitable, but where there would not be legal grounds for taking them into Police Protection. In such cases, police and the accountable manager from the responsible Local Authority and parents will need to liaise to discuss what steps may be necessary in order to safeguard the child's welfare.

For children in Care please refer to (In Derbyshire please refer to [Derbyshire Childrens' Homes Procedures](#) and in Derby please refer to [Derby Childrens Home Procedures](#) for further guidance.)

Continue to risk assess and hold the relevant meeting (Derby city and Derbyshire safeguarding, CE pathways) to monitor and review.

6.3 Children who are being detained or encouraged to stay by others

If a child is found with adults who are not supporting the child's return, the police should consider advice or warning under the Child Abduction Act (1984), if it is appropriate.

Anyone who detains or encourages a child under 16 years old (18 if there is a full Care Order in place) to be away from their official place of residence without lawful authority may be prosecuted under Section 2 of the Child Abduction Act (1984). The Police may formally warn a person under the abduction legislation prior to prosecution and a subsequent marker may be placed against them on their Police National Computer (PNC) record.

6.4 Reporting that a missing child is found / returned

When a child is found or returns home/to placement parents / carers must inform the relevant agencies and involved practitioners.

The police will notify the local authority of the return of the child and any relevant information via COMPACT. They should also notify any other agency involved to reassure them of the child's safety.

Any other situation which indicates that the child may have been subject to, or at risk of, significant harm, for example:

- Where it is identified a child has been the victim of a crime;
- Where the child has been hurt or harmed whilst they have been missing (or this is believed to have been the case);
- Where there is known or suspected risk of sexual/criminal exploitation, trafficking or contact with persons posing a risk to children, a referral must be made to the local authority in accordance with local safeguarding procedures.

6.5 Police Prevention Visits/Checks

On finding a child, or on their return, a prevention visit will be undertaken by the Police Investigating Officer as soon as possible. It will not be conducted over the telephone.

If the prevention visit raises concerns, the police will report this to Starting Point /Initial Response, Derbyshire Police Safeguarding Hub and Children's Social Care. If the child makes an allegation of crime that occurred whilst they were missing or that contributed to him / her running away, the police will record this allegation and take appropriate action.

6.6 Return Interviews

Return interviews are required on **all** children reported missing who are categorised as Missing High/Medium. The return interview must be carried out by an independent person (external of their care giver) within 72 hours (i.e. three calendar days) of the child returning to their home or care setting and completed face to face, unless there are exceptional circumstances – such as:

- Being held on remand
- Is hospitalised and it is not deemed appropriate
- Is part of a police investigation being undertaken
- Gone missing with family

With previously unknown cases, the Return Interview will be carried out by a worker from a Multi-Agency Team (MAT) in the City and from a locality Early Help Team in Derbyshire. It remains the responsibility of the relevant lead worker to ensure completion of the return interview for all other missing children, within 72 hours.

The purpose of this interview is to establish whether the Missing Person has come to harm whilst missing and to establish what can be done to prevent future missing occurrences. The methodology of the Police Prevention Interview is expected to be proportionate to the level of risk apparent during the investigation. However, Derbyshire Constabulary will always ensure this is carried out face-to-face.

If the Missing Person makes an allegation of crime that occurred whilst they were missing or that contributed to them becoming missing, the police will record this allegation and take appropriate action.

An immediate interview may take place, however in order to allow for the most appropriate police officer to complete an interview – a follow up interview may take place with an officer from the Missing Person Investigation Team, Child Exploitation Investigation Team, Adult Exploitation Team.

The outcome of the prevention interview is recorded onto compact and a Public Protection Notice will be created which will be sent to relevant local authority.

If the risk of child exploitation is identified, the use of the CRE assessment will be considered.

The interview should aim to:

- Identify and respond to any harm the child has suffered;
- Understand and try to address the reasons why the child went missing;
- To understand what happened while they were missing;
- To gain an understanding of the child's associates
- Help the child feel safe and understand that they have options to prevent repeat instances of them going missing;
- Agree with the child/parent/carer to agree a safety/intervention plan to reduce the risk of further missing episodes information
- Discussion with the parent/carer around their views of the missing episode.
- Consideration must be given to the starting or updating completion/update of a CRE assessment on all missing occurrences and return interviews
- Consideration for a s47 strategy discussion or missing meeting dependant on the information provided by the child/parent/carer.

Appendix 3 provides the template of questions as a guide for good practice.

In Derby City follow the [Return Interview flowchart](#)

In Derbyshire County follow the [Missing Operational workflow in the Childrens Social Care Assessment and Planning section](#)

For children in care that are placed at a distance, and are regularly going missing the Social Worker should have explored arrangements for who completes the return interviews at the time of setting up new placements in Derbyshire and Derby City. This should be clear in the Placement Plan or Missing strategy for the child. A missing return interview will still need to take place and the relevant Derby City or Derbyshire pathway should be followed.

Looked after children placed from another authority in Derby City and Derbyshire

The Placing Authority will notify Derby city or Derbyshire's Missing Children lead when they are placing a child who is at risk of going missing and/or child sexual/criminal exploitation. The Placing Authority will provide Derby city or Derbyshire with a copy of the relevant risk assessments and a recent photograph of the young person. This information will be shared prior to the young person being placed or within 24 hours of the placement being made.

If a child / young person is a looked after child from a different local authority but placed in Derbyshire or Derby in an independent children's home or foster placement, the return interviews should be considered as below.

When a child from another authority is placed in Derby City or Derbyshire and goes missing, this 'Missing from Care and Home' protocol should be followed by the placing authority.

Derby City and Derbyshire will notify the placing authority of any missing episodes. The foster carer or the manager of the children's home is responsible for informing the local Police, the child's social worker, the Missing Strategic Lead in the placing authority and the person(s) holding parental responsibility (PR) – unless the latter is inconsistent with the child's welfare. They should also report to the local Police when the child has returned and inform the child's social worker and Missing Children Strategic Lead in the Placing Authority who should share this information with the child's Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).

Responsibility for the Return Interview rests with the Placing Authority who will work closely with the Derby and Derbyshire to reduce missing harm. Where a child is identified as being at risk of significant harm the safeguarding children procedures in Derby and Derbyshire will be followed. The placing authority will share information, including a copy of the return interview, with the host authority.

In Derby City follow the [Return Interview flowchart](#)

In Derbyshire County follow the [Missing Operational workflow in the Childrens Social Care Assessment and Planning section](#)

For children in care that are going missing they should be informed that they are entitled to an Independent Advocate to help them address any issues related to them going missing. This is a secondary service to be offered in addition to the return interview.

Derbyshire Childrens Services Advocacy Service:

- Phone: 01629 536462
- Email childrens.rights@derbyshire.gov.uk

Derby City – Childrens Advocacy Service (CGL – change Grow Live)

- Phone: 07809 587007
- DCRS.ADVOCACY@CGL.ORG.UK

7. Prevention and Intervention

7.1 Actions following a return interview

The minimum required in the event of a single missing episode, is that the incident is assessed by the responsible Social Care or Early Help worker and the Police. Where needs and vulnerabilities are identified, an appropriate assessment should be completed or up-dated and services identified or provided as required. Where a child is known to Early Help or Social Care, including children in care, their plan should be reviewed and action taken as necessary. In particular any missing plan should be up-dated.

Support and interventions may be focused on the individual child, the child's home/placement or by targeting 'push or pull' factors in the community. Support can include interventions to:

- Increase the child's awareness of the dangers of running away and the issues young runaways face;
- Build up a trusting relationship with him or her leading to opportunities to identify the issues that made them run away from home or care;
- Help the child to seek safer solutions to deal with their issues other than running away;
- Address relationship difficulties in the home;
- Use disruption strategies to address inappropriate relationships or activities.

Consideration must always be given to risk that the child is being abused at home / in their placement; this must be assessed and urgent action taken if appropriate.

7.2 Preventing missing episodes – Children in Care

On admission to the placement

Each looked after child has a care plan and a placement plan based on a full assessment of the child's current and future needs, including potential risk to self and others. The plans should take account of any risk that the child may go missing in future and of factors which may increase the risk to the child should they go missing. (In Derbyshire please refer to [Derbyshire Childrens' Homes Procedures](#) and in Derby please refer to [Derby Childrens Home Procedures](#) for further guidance.)

A recent photograph bearing a good likeness to the child will be kept on record by the Local Authority. When a child is admitted to care the consent of a person with parental responsibility will be sought for a photograph to be used in any subsequent missing person investigation. If possible the agreement of the child should also be gained.

The residential Registered Childrens Home manager/foster carer should consider the most appropriate ways to increase the child's awareness of the dangers young runaways face, and help them to seek safer solutions to deal with issues.

Following a missing incident

The child's placement plan, missing plan (risk assessment/safe care plan) and Missing Person/Philomena Profile should be reviewed and up-dated and their care plan reviewed if necessary (In Derbyshire please refer to [Derbyshire Childrens' Homes Procedures](#) and in Derby please refer to [Derby Childrens Home Procedures](#) for further guidance.) and ongoing work to keep them safe.

There are particular push and pull factors likely to affect children in care, including a wish for more contact or to return home, or due to unhappiness in placement caused by carers or other children in placement. Care must be taken to understand this and to review the child's care plan as necessary.

Appendix 1: Glossary

Child: anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people' throughout this guidance.

Young runaway: a child who has run away from their home or care placement, or feels they have been forced or lured to leave.

Missing child: a child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers.

Looked after child: a child who is looked after by a local authority by reason of a care order, or being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

Responsible local authority: the local authority that is responsible for a looked after child's care and care planning.

Host local authority: the local authority in which a looked after child is placed when placed out of the responsible local authority's area.

Care leaver: an eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989.

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

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

Appendix 2: Why children go missing

The Children's Society through its research has identified 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;
- Step parent issues.

The immediate risks are associated with going missing include:

- No means of support or legitimate income - leading to high risk activities;
- Involvement in criminal activities;
- Victim of abuse;
- Victim of crime, for example through sexual assault and exploitation;
- Alcohol/substance misuse;
- Deterioration of physical and mental health;
- Missing out on schooling and education;
- Increased vulnerability;

Longer-term risks include:

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

Appendix 3: Return Interview Questions

Staff should familiarise themselves with the return interview questions and use these as a guide. Professional knowledge and experience should allow effective engagement with the child to clarify the circumstances around the missing episode so that appropriate action can be taken to safeguard and reduce the likelihood of future missing episodes.

Childs account of missing episode:

- According to the child or young person what circumstances led to them being reported missing?
- How did you leave?
- What time did you go?
- Why did you go?
- What happened whilst you were missing?
- Where did you go?
- Who were you with?
- Who did you see/meet/speak to (full details, names, telephone numbers, email address etc?)
- Where did you stay?
- Where did you sleep? How much sleep did you have?
- What did you eat and drink, where was this and who provided it?
- Did you take drugs/alcohol? (If so what, how taken and how much?)
- Did you have any phone/social media contact with anyone? (list full details)
- What did you do for money?
- Any physical injuries when missing?
- Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend? (give details)
- What belongings/clothes did you go with?
- Have you gone missing before (when/where/why etc)
- Anyone bought or given you any gifts? (if so what, who, why, when, etc)
- Did you feel pressurised or bullied into doing things you were not happy about?
- Did you feel scared or uneasy for your own safety or safety of others?
- Did you go to any pubs, clubs, hotels with anyone? (who, what, when, where and why)
- Could you have left at any point?
- Were you taken anywhere else?
- Did you self-harm whilst missing?
- Have you ever self-harmed? (what, when, how, where, etc)

Where it is felt there are concerns about or risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) who did the Child meet and what is their relationship:

- Did you take part or see any sexual activity?
- What?
- Who with?
- When?
- How did you feel about that now?
- Contraceptive used?

Where it is felt there are concerns about or risk of Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) who did the Child meet and what is their relationship:

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Child's Description of their Return Home

- How did you get back? (full details car/public transport etc)
- Who brought you back?
- Why did you come back?
- What can anyone do to stop you going missing again?
- How have you been treated since you have come back?
- What could you or others have done differently?
- Who could you have spoken to?
- What do you do when you are unhappy, stressed, anxious or worried?
- How do you cope with these feelings?
- How do you feel now you are back?

Parent/Guardian/Carer's Description of the Missing Episode

- What were the circumstances of how the child went missing?
- What are your observations of the child?
- Have they been breaking boundaries and rules set?
- Any family breakdown?
- Anxiety of child?
- When did the behaviour change and why?
- Have they been missing before but you have not called the Police? (list full details)
- Have they stayed out overnight before?
- Do they have belongings that you have not seen before or cannot account as to how they have got it? (clothes, money, phones property, makeup, etc)
- Do they smoke, drink, take drugs to your knowledge?
- What is their attendance like at school?
- Do they spend long periods in their room?
- Do they use social media, your knowledge of it?

Appendix 4: Details of Local Authority and Police lead person for children missing from home or care

Derbyshire Children's Services

Head of Child Protection
County Hall
Matlock
DE4 3AG
Telephone 01629 538808

Derby Children's Services:

Head of Service Early Help
The Council House
Corporation Street
Derby
DE1 2FS
Telephone 01332 642205

Derbyshire Police:

Detective Chief Inspector
Public Protection Unit
Derbyshire Constabulary
Butterley Hall
Ripley
DE5 3RS
Telephone 0300 1225514