

Runaway and Missing from Home or Care (RMFHC) Protocol

May 2019

Version Control

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

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1. Introduction

This 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*
- *Guidance on the Management Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons 2010 2nd Ed* which sets out the role and actions for the Police and partners.

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

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 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
- Children who are looked after by Derby or Derbyshire local authorities who are placed in children's homes, foster care or with family outside of the local authority area

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 co-operate 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 CRE and Missing Tasking Meeting is held on a monthly basis. This is a collaborative arrangement between the Police, Derby City/Derbyshire Childrens Services and other partner agencies including Health and Community Safety.

The Police CRE and Missing Tasking meetings are chaired and organised by Derbyshire Constabulary. The focus of the group is on the multi-agency responses to complex cases. It is acknowledged that each case will be case managed within CP or CRE Strategy processes. The role of this meeting is to identify the most high risk/complex cases and offer additional support to respond to the complex nature of the case.

In Derbyshire: each Childrens Service locality holds a monthly **Childrens at Risk of Exploitation and Missing meeting**. This is a monthly multi-agency meeting that is designed to share information and intelligence around emerging needs within a community and in respect of escalating vulnerabilities for particular children. Cases may be identified by any participant following the outcome of a CRE Risk Assessment Toolkit and/or missing occurrence. The panel will also ensure that there is an exchange of information with the Police CRE & Missing Tasking Meeting in relation to alleged perpetrators, unsafe areas and emerging themes

In the City: **The Missing Persons Monitoring Group (MPMG)** The Missing Persons Monitoring Group is a multi-agency forum. 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 intelligence
- Agreeing joint action
- Hold agencies to account
- Prevention of further missing episodes
- Disrupting Strategies
- Quality Assurance of Return Interviews

The Safeguarding Children Boards

Both Derbyshire and Derby City's Safeguarding Children Boards monitor responses to missing children to ensure children are safe. Boards receive regular reports from the Local Authority

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.

3. Assessment of Risk where Children are ‘Missing’

3.1 Definitions

Police guidance has the following definitions:

- **Missing, No Apparent Risk:** There is no apparent risk of harm to either the subject or the public. Actions to locate the subject and/or gather information should be agreed with the informant and a latest review time set to reassess the risk.
- **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.

Derbyshire Constabulary will not treat any child as low risk.

DfE guidance to Local Authorities has the following definitions:

- *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.

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.

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?
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, 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 this should be followed at every subsequent occasion (being reviewed and updated when necessary). This applies equally to children at home or in care.

3.2 Assessment of risk where children are “missing”

The police will prioritise all incidents of children categorised as ‘missing’ from home or care as medium or high risk.

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

- the risk of serious harm to the subject or the public is assessed as very likely

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 to:

- 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 or sexual exploitation
- 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 DSCB’s 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](#).

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 First Contact 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.

4.1.1 Concerns that a child is missing from home

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.

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.

4.1.2 Children who have not been reported missing

Some missing children, who have not been reported as missing to the police, may come to the attention of agencies. Agencies should check that the parents / carer have taken steps to try and locate the child. They must advise the parent / carer that they have a responsibility to report this matter to the police. If appropriate the agency should check that this has been reported to the police.

4.1.3 Concerns that a child is missing from care

When a child in care goes missing it is the responsibility of the carer (Residential Care Staff or Foster Carer) to undertake the steps outlined above. 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 (it is the call takers / supervisors' decision as to whether a child is recorded 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.

Where a missing looked after child has been risk assessed by the local authority as requiring 1 to 1 or more care, a carer has a responsibility to complete proactive checks as to the whereabouts of the missing person and maybe asked to assist in the searching for and checks required for that missing person. This would assist the police to help find the missing child sooner. (In Derbyshire please refer to [Derbyshire Childrens' Homes Procedures](#) and in Derby please refer to [Derby Childrens Home Procedures](#) for further guidance.)

4.1.4 Away from placement without authorisation (children in care)

Where a child's location is not known, this should be reported to the Police who will determine the level of "missing" as above.

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 apparent 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.

Where a child has been away without authorisation from a registered children's home, the responsible local authority must provide an opportunity for the child to have an independent return

home interview (see section 6.8). The home staff should offer this to the child and contact the child's Social Worker if requested by the child or if there are any concerns arising from the period they have been away. The return interview should then be held within 72 hours of the child's return. (In Derbyshire please refer to [Derbyshire Childrens' Homes Procedures](#) and in Derby please refer to [Derby Childrens Home Procedures](#) for further guidance.)

4.1.5 Concerns that a child who may be trafficked has gone missing

Children who may be trafficked are at very high risk of going missing. There should be a proactive plan agreed in the event they go missing, for each child, and this should be put into effect immediately their whereabouts are unknown. Please refer to Derbyshire and Derby City Safeguarding Children Procedures, [Safeguarding Children who may be victims of modern slavery](#) (have been trafficked). As a minimum this should be for immediate contact with Police and Social Care. Within Derbyshire there is a police unit, Operation Wilberforce who work with Trafficked individuals and need to be included in any plan and advice around referral to the National Referral Mechanism, NRM.

4.1.6 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 Derbyshire and [Derby](#) City Pre-Birth Protocol.

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.

Where a child or unborn baby is subject to a child protection plan, or is believed to be at risk of significant harm, any concern they may be missing should be reported immediately to Police and Social Care. Senior Managers should be made aware in relation to child protection cases that are missing where consideration can be given to a national alert if the family cannot be located.

4.1.7 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 CME please visit [Schoolsnet](#) and in Derby City for CME please visit [SIP](#).

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](#).

4.1.8 Responsibility of anyone who has care of a child without parental knowledge or agreement

Anyone who has care of a child without parental knowledge or agreement should also do what is reasonable to safeguard and promote the child's welfare. In these circumstances, they should inform the police, Children's Services and the parents of their whereabouts and safety.

Children under the age of 16 years old are not legally considered as being able to live independently. For children 16-18 years living semi-independently, their placement providers should report them to the police as missing when it is evident they are missing.

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.

Where a child is categorised as 'Missing, No Apparent Risk' within the police definition, the details will be recorded by the police, who will also agree review times and any on-going actions with child's family, carer or responsible local authority. The case will remain the subject of constant review, particularly in the light of new information and changes in circumstances. No child will be classified as "Missing, No Apparent Risk" for more than 24 hours.

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. Partner agencies are required to assist them to carry out this role, as well as meeting any practice requirements internally. The Police will investigate all cases of missing children and respond in accordance with the College of Policing Missing Persons' policy. 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. Police guidance makes clear that a member of the senior management team or similar command level must be involved in the examination of initial enquiry lines and approval of appropriate staffing levels. Such cases should lead to the appointment of an Investigating Officer and possibly a Senior Investigating Officer and a Police Search Advisor (PoISA). There should be a media strategy and close contact with other agencies. Family support should be put in place. The UK Missing Persons Bureau should be notified of the case immediately. CEOP and relevant Local Authority children's services should also be notified.

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, No Apparent Risk: There is no apparent risk of harm to either the subject or the public. Actions to locate the subject and/or gather information should be agreed with the informant and a latest review time set to reassess the risk.

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.

The Police have an identified Neighbourhood Safeguarding Team whose role is to oversee investigations, advise investigating officers, liaise with partner agencies as well as offer a strategic perspective in this area.

The investigation will include making enquiries of carers, friends and contacts and checking locations known to be frequented by the young person. For a child in care, contact will usually be made with family.

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 Trafficking procedures.

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. Authorisation should be by Senior Investigating Officer, ratified by Duty Gold Commander.

If the case falls within the criteria for 'Child Rescue Alert' then any decision to publicise the case is likely to be urgent and will rest with the police, in accordance with nationally agreed procedures by the appointed Senior Investigation Officer (SIO) and then ratified by a Chief 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.

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 be 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 Multi Agency team (MAT) or the Youth Offending 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

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 under the categories of high or medium, they will be allocated to a worker in a MAT (in Derby to a Runaways Worker based in the MATs). 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.

Where the child is unknown or a closed case, and has been classified as “Missing No Apparent Risk”, the Police will make an informed decision based on the intelligence available to them as to the most appropriate further action such as a home visit/prevention visit or referral to children’s social care.

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 and Social Care /MAT workers must keep a full record of actions taken, messages received and given. 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), this 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 co-operate with 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 should be notified that the child or family are missing, so in the event of any contact the Police can be alerted. This particularly applies to health drop-in centres, maternity units etc. Where appropriate an alert may be sent out to the respective agency in another area, or nationally.

5.4 Ongoing Assessment

Throughout the missing episode, carers, the Local Authority and the Police will continually review the case. If the child is missing for three days, or earlier if deemed appropriate, the local authority will convene an emergency professionals / “missing” meeting. This will involve the police, carers, the child’s Social Worker, and any other professional 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

Further such reviews will take place at least every five days thereafter or earlier, if deemed appropriate.

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 DSCB 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.

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

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.

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. In exceptional circumstances, in the interests of the safe and speedy return of the child, the police **may** agree to requests from parents or carers to assist.

6.2 Return of the missing looked after child

If the whereabouts of a looked after child are known or suspected, it is the responsibility of the local authority to arrange for the child's return. There will be circumstances when, in the interests of the safe return of the child, the police **may** agree to requests from the local authority to assist.

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

6.3 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 a court order such as a Recovery Order should be considered where an assessment of risk and urgency allow.

Under the Children Act 1989, where there is reasonable cause to believe that the child is at risk of suffer significant harm the police can take the child into Police Protection and remove to suitable accommodation which could include the home from which the child originally went missing. The use of any police powers should be lawful, necessary and proportionate. Where less intrusive options to return a child are available they should be the first consideration. Coercive police powers should be used where risk and urgency make such use necessary.

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.

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

6.4 Children who are being held 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 'takes or detains' a runaway under 16 years old (18 if there is a full Care Order in place) 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.

6.5 Reporting that a missing child is found / returned

When a child is found or returns home parents / carers must inform the police and, if possible, Children's Services.

When a looked after child returns to their placement it is the responsibility of the carers to notify the police, child's Social Worker and Children's Social Care.

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.

If it is apparent, on the return of the child, that they have been the victim of a crime whilst missing, or that they may be in danger or at risk from any person arising out of circumstances that has occurred whilst they were missing, then the police will instigate further enquiries. This is vital for the protection of the child and for the speedy recovery of evidence. In such circumstances, the missing child's clothing, mobile phone and trace evidence from their body, fingernails or hair may be crucial. In cases of sexual abuse the child should be discouraged from washing and immediate advice sought from the police.

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

- 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 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.

6.6 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.

The purpose is to check for any indications that the child has suffered harm; where and with whom they have been; and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by, or against them. This will lead to the police closing the missing person report on COMPACT and the case being cancelled on the PNC. This is not a return interview.

Where a child goes missing frequently, it may not be practicable to see them every time they return. In these cases, a reasonable decision should be taken in agreement between the police and their child's parent or carer, or their Social Worker, with regard to the frequency of such checks. Consideration must be given to the link between frequent missing episodes and serious

harm. The reason for the decision not to conduct a prevention visit should be recorded on the case file. A Strategy meeting will be requested within Childrens Services on children who go missing three or more times in a 30 day period, the trigger for review within the Police is 3 times within a 90 day period.

If the prevention visit raises concerns, the police will report this to Starting Point /First Response, Derby Police Referral Unit 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. The Police Neighbourhood Safeguarding Team will review all missing persons investigations recorded on COMPACT for them to determine whether or not any further action is needed.

6.7 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 within 72 hours (i.e. three calendar days) of the child returning to their home or care setting, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

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

Consideration must be given to the completion/update of a CRE toolkit on all missing occurrences.

The interview should:

- Identify and respond to any harm the child has suffered;
- Understand and try to address the reasons why the child ran away;
- 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 running away;
- Provide them with information on how to stay safe if they choose to run away again, including helpline numbers.

Appendix 3 provides the template of questions agreed for return interviews. In Derbyshire these are incorporated into the Missing Return Interview workflow step on Mosaic and in Derby City's Missing Toolkit and recorded on Liquid logic. Further guidance for DCC' employees can be found in the Return Interview Guidance on Tri-x in the online Childrens Services Guidance, Policies and Procedures.

In Derbyshire if a child is missing 3 times or more in 30 days (or three times in less than 30 days) the team manager should review the file and record the outcome of this in the case notes.

In Derby if a child is missing 3 times or more in 30 days (or 3 times in less than 30 days) The lead practitioner is invited to the Missing Persons Monitoring Group and report on the persistent missing behaviour and the strategies to be introduced to address this.

Any subsequent interventions will be informed by the return interview so it is important it is effective, and should include separate discussions with the child and their parents / carers. A CRE

risk assessment must be considered as part of this process. See DSCB Safeguarding Children procedures, chapter [Children Abused through sexual exploitation](#).

It is the responsibility of each locality Children's Services Team Manager to ensure that the return interview is carried out to a suitable standard and signed off by the line manager. In Derby City all Return Interviews should be recorded on the appropriate form, retained on the child's file and passed to the Police Neighbourhood Safeguarding Team and locality Runaways Worker (Derby City). In Derbyshire, the Return Interview Workflow step on Mosaic should be completed (please refer to the Return Interview guidance on Tri-x online Childrens Services Guidance, Policies and Procedures). The relevant admin support will return to information to the appropriate Police Division.

6.8 Children in care return interviews

Children in care will require a return interview regardless of categorisation. This is due to the added vulnerability of a child in care. It is the responsibility of the relevant Social Worker to undertake the return interview for children missing from care within 72 hours of their return. This should include a CRE risk assessment if appropriate. (In Derbyshire please refer to [Derbyshire Childrens' Homes Procedures](#) and in Derby please refer to [Derby Childrens Home Procedures](#) for further guidance.)

For those children and young people placed with Foster Carers, the return interview must be completed by the child's Social Worker, and the foster carers must also complete the action sheet and return to their supervising Social Worker. The IRO should be notified whenever a child in care goes missing and returns, and periods of absence of any sort should be fully considered in a child's review.

In Derbyshire for children and young people in residential care, the return interview must be completed by the child's Social Worker, and the residential Childrens care worker should complete the incident report with a case note on Mosaic. The child's missing profile and their risk assessment/safe care plan will need to be assessed to include any relevant updates. The IRO and any other relevant professionals should be notified whenever a child or young person in care goes missing and returns, and periods of absence of any sort should be fully considered in a child's review.

Where a child is placed at a distance, the Social Worker should have explored arrangements for return interviews at the time of placing and this should be clear in the Placement Plan or Missing strategy for the child. If this has not been done, the Social Worker or a team member should make every effort to undertake the return interview; where this is problematic they should approach the local authority where the child is placed to seek assistance.

The Placing Authority will notify the Host Authority's Missing Children lead when they are placing a child who is at risk of going missing and/or child sexual exploitation. The Placing Authority will provide the Host Authority's Missing Lead 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. In Derbyshire please also refer to the Return Interview Guidance on DCC Tri-x.

When a child who has been placed in another the Host authority goes missing, the Host authority's 'Missing from Care and Home' protocol should be followed by the carers and other professionals in that Host authority area.

A notification process for no apparent risk and Missing from placement episodes should be in place between Placing and Host local authorities. This should include the fact that that 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 Children Officer 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 Officer 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 Host Authority. Where a child is identified as being at risk of significant harm the safeguarding children procedures in the Host Authority will be followed. The placing authority will share information, including a copy of the return interview, with the host authority.

In Derbyshire, if the child is known to Derbyshire Youth Offending Service (YOS) a worker from this team should be approached to undertake the return interview on behalf of the local authority (LA) with responsibility. If however, the child / young person is not known to the YOS agreement may be made between the placing LA and Derbyshire MAT, to undertake the return interview on behalf of the placing LA. The placement provider may need to facilitate this arrangement. In Derbyshire please also refer to the Return Interview Guidance on DCC Tri-x.

In Derbyshire all looked after children and young people should be informed that if they are entitled to an Independent Advocate to help them address any issues related to their running away. This is a secondary service to be offered in addition to the return interview conducted by Children's Services. The interviewer should provide the child or young person with the relevant information and facilitate a referral if this is their wish.

Childrens Services Advocacy Service:

- Phone: 01629 532029 or 536462
- Email childrens.rights@derbyshire.gov.uk

In Derby, the placing authority and the provider will make appropriate arrangements for the return interview to be carried out.

6.9 Specific situations

Child protection – where a family or pregnant woman have been missing, return interviews are not necessary. However there should be immediate consideration of the child protection plan and if necessary legal action taken to secure the safety of the children. The Child Protection Manager must be informed and a core group meeting should be held within 5 working days and consideration given to bringing forward the review conference.

Trafficked children – immediate steps must be taken to secure their safety as necessary and their Missing Plan up-dated and shared. The UK Human Trafficking Centre must be notified of their return.

Children at Risk of Exploitation - an **Operation Liberty** form should be completed in line with DSCB Safeguarding Children procedures, **Children abused through sexual exploitation** and the Return Interview attached; the CRE risk assessment should be up-dated, the Child Protection Manager (CRE) informed and consideration given to bringing forward the next CRE meeting.

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**.

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 MAT 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 MAT 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 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.

7.3 Persistent missing behaviour

Where a child has had two or more reported missing episodes a multi-agency meeting should be convened to review the child's Care Plan (if LAC) or other plan and develop an individual missing strategy. This meeting may be contained within other meetings, e.g. LAC review, CRE meeting, etc. or maybe standalone as appropriate, and should be attended by involved professionals including the Police Liaison Officer and carers, and the child and their parents.

The strategy should include:

- Guidance on when to report the child/young person as away from placement without authorisation and when to report them as missing with time frames;
- Recommendations on the minimum enquiries to be conducted by the Local Authority;
- Recommendations on the minimum enquiries to be conducted by the Police;
- On-going arrangements for safe and well checks and return interviews;
- An intervention strategy to address the long term issues.

In Derby City: the Missing Persons Monitoring Group reviews all persistent missing situations and the lead worker is invited to report on the persistent missing behaviour and the strategies to be introduced to address this.

In Derbyshire: the Localities' Children at Risk of Exploitation and Missing Panels bring together partner agencies from across the locality to consider the individuals who persistently go missing and their circumstances. These details, along with information from the Police CRE and Missing Tasking Meeting, assist us to understand where particular threats to the safety of this vulnerable group may lie and inform our responses.

7.4 Strategic response

In Derby City: the Missing Persons Monitoring Group monitor all instances of children going missing including repeat examples, and identify any trends in terms of care arrangements, location, ages, links with CRE, etc. These are analysed and recommendations to address these at a strategic level, reporting in to the Governance bodies described in Section 2.

In Derbyshire: The strategic missing persons group meet quarterly and report annually to the respective children's and adult's safeguarding boards in both city and county. They provide strategic direction to the Tactical Missing Persons Group, produce an annual strategic problem profile which enhances existing service provision to focus on emerging needs.

8. Quality Assurance

Missing arrangements will be quality assured through Team Manager oversight of return interviews and periodic auditing of return interviews.

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.

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 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?

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