

# LONDON BOROUGH OF HILLINGDON



## CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME AND CARE PROTOCOL

### *Version Control:*

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Children missing from home or Looked After Children (also referred to as ‘our children’) missing from care are vulnerable to risk of harm. This protocol enables practitioners across relevant agencies to appropriately respond to children who are missing.
- 1.2 This protocol sets the minimum standards for a consistent and effective approach in working with children at risk of going missing. It is expected that all agencies working with Hillingdon children who are considered at risk of going missing or are missing from home or care will implement this protocol and ensure their colleagues are aware of it.

## 2. Scope of this protocol

- 2.1 This protocol applies to **all children living in the London Borough of Hillingdon (LBH)** whether they are at home with their parents/carers or Looked After Children by the Local Authority. LBH retains responsibility for Looked After Children who are placed outside the Local Authority area. For those children, LBH will require the placement provider to comply with the protocols for their local area supplemented by this protocol.
- 2.2 **External local authorities placing children in care** within the London Borough of Hillingdon will be required to comply with this protocol.
- 2.3 This protocol will also apply to all children and young people aged 18 and under within the London Borough of Hillingdon and for whom the authority has continuing responsibilities for under the **Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000**.

## 3. Definitions

- 3.1 There are a range of definitions used to describe missing children across agencies for the purposes of referrals, risk assessment and recording of data. The level of risk will be determined by the age, understanding and vulnerability of the individual child. All missing episodes should be reviewed within 72 hours to determine the level of seriousness that should

be attached to any absence. In Hillingdon, to ensure good practice and a swift safeguarding response to our children the lead practitioner should review the missing period within 48 hours. Additional details of definitions used in the various agencies can be found in Appendix 2.

**Missing:** *'In 2016, the College of Policing issued new Authorised Professional Practice, and this altered the definition of 'missing'. The definition of missing is '**Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed.**' (Pan-London Exploitation, 2021).*

**3.2 The Philomena Protocol:** This protocol was devised by the Police, with aims to safeguard and problem solve as a professional network for Our Children. For children who regularly go missing the Placement should have a document which outlines all risks and concerns when the child moves into that placement. This needs to be regularly updated by the placement.

## 4. Strategic leads – key functions and contacts

The Director for Safeguarding, Partnership and Quality Assurance is the local authority's designated lead for children missing from home or care. The Detective Sergeant of the Missing Team in the local Business Command Unit (BCU) is the Metropolitan Police designated lead for missing children.

### 4.1 Local Authority Missing Person's Lead Role and Responsibility

- Effective use of performance data on missing children, return to home interviews, and advocacy services to better understand the needs of the children who go missing and provide a coordinated response to cases of missing children.
- Strengthen partnership working to ensure consistent and robust information sharing, collaborative working, and pooling of resources to provide support to children at risk of going missing and their families.
- Strengthen strategic planning and preventative work to inform practice and reduce the number of missing children.
- Work with the Learning and Development team to ensure training for Social Workers, their managers and support staff in recording systems and developing good consistent practice approach to all missing children.

## 4.2 Police Missing Person's Lead Role and Responsibility

- Identify vulnerable children who go missing on more than one occasion, and who may be vulnerable or victims of crime whilst they are missing.
- Notify London Borough of Hillingdon of all reported incidents of missing children via MERLIN reports sent to Stronger Families Hub.
- Collate and disseminate intelligence on identified problematic persons or locations and make any safeguarding referrals as required.
- Monitor incidents of missing children and identify children in need of protective measures, and work with the Local Authority Missing Person's Lead and Children and Young People services.
- Identify children where multi-agency intervention is required to respond to repeat absences or missing episodes.
- Assist in the development and delivery of training packages in relation to missing children.

## Key Contacts

- Hillingdon Stronger Families Hub; Tel: 01895 556 006
- Police; Tel: 101 or 999
- Youth Justice Service (YJS); Tel: 01895 558 203
- UK Border Agency; Tel: 0843 515 8453
- Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP); Tel: 0870 000 3344
- Rescue and Response; Tel: 0208 937 5765 / For out of hours 0203 911 9391 (St Giles Trust); enquiries@rescue-response.com or complete the [referral form](#)
- AXIS; Email: [axis@hillington.gov.uk](mailto:axis@hillington.gov.uk)
- UK Borders Agency; Tel: 0843 515 8453
- Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP); Tel: 0870 000 3344

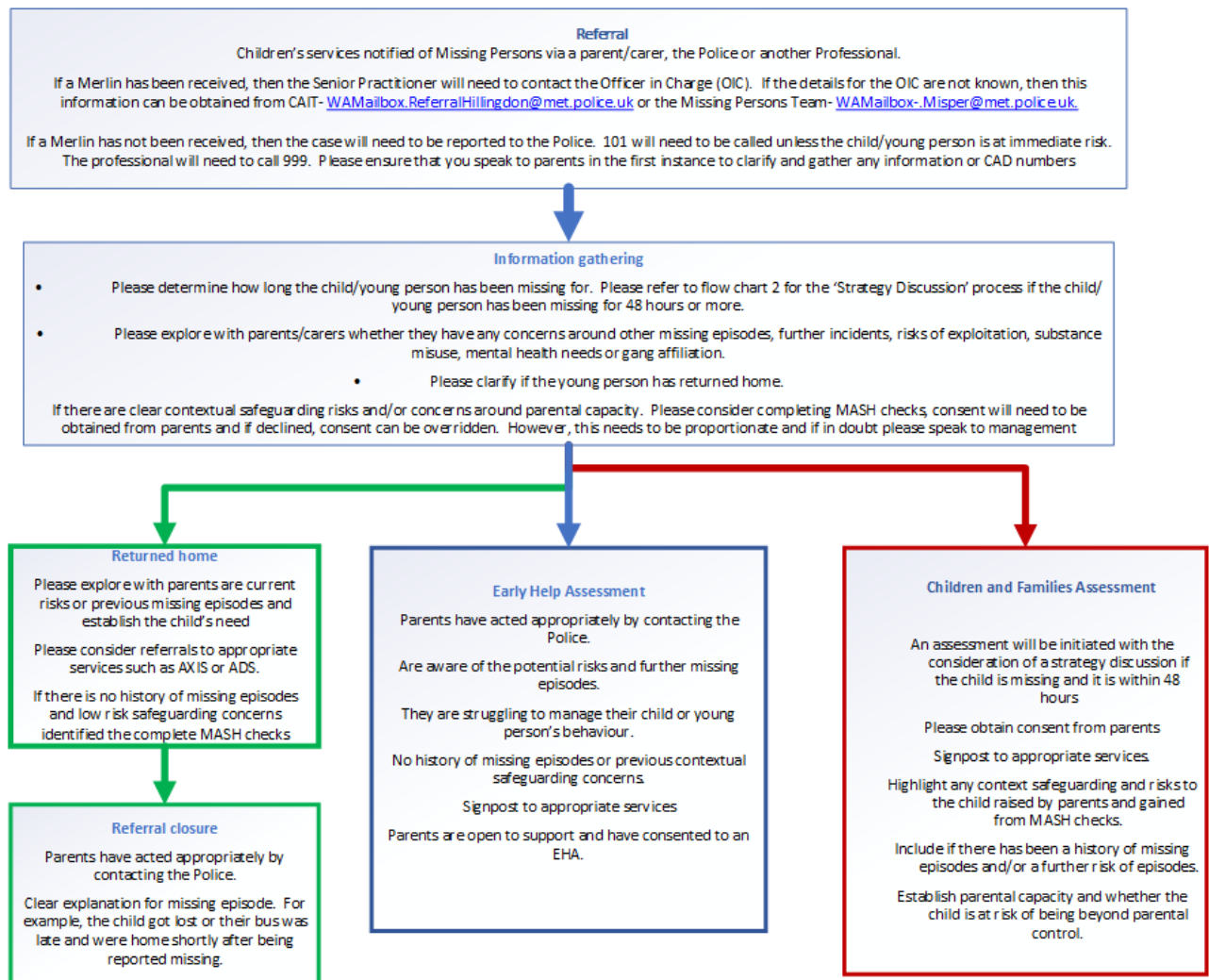
## 5. Responding to children missing from home

All practitioner's working with children at risk of going missing should discuss the dangers of being missing with the child and their family. Parents and young people should be informed of support services and helplines available. Please see [Appendix 3](#) for associated resources for children / young people and their parents / carers.

Professionals to review section 5.3 of this Protocol for a step-by-step guide for the Missing Persons Process.

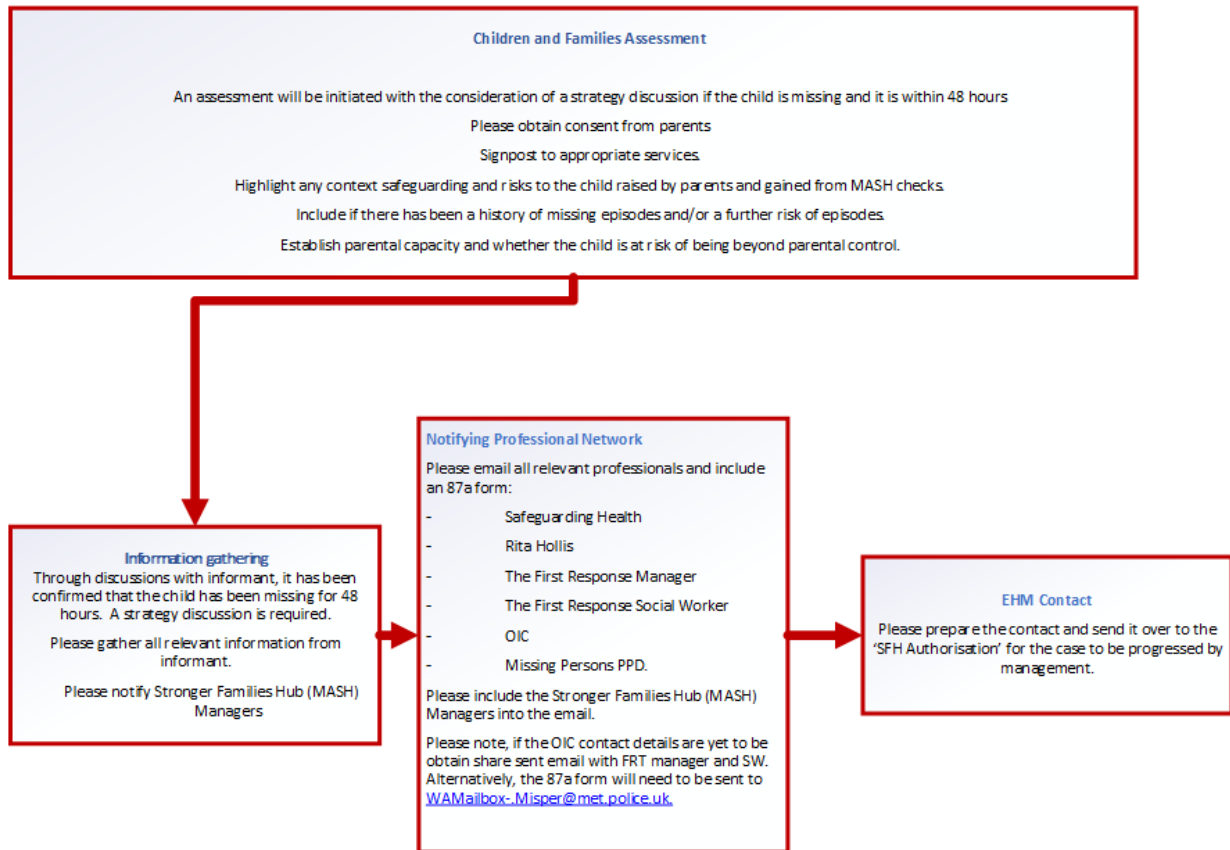
## 5.1 Flow chart for Stronger Families Hub- Missing Persons

(For low risk (Green) and medium risk (Amber) episodes)



## 5.2 Flow chart for Stronger Families Hub- Missing Persons

(for High Risk episodes - Red)





## Response to a missing episode by frontline Children's Services

### Step one - Key information

- **Missing:** In 2016, the College of Policing issued new Authorised Professional Practice, and this altered the definition of 'missing'. The definition of missing is *'Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed.'* (Pan-London Exploitation, 2021).
- The Metropolitan Service has devised a new protocol for Children who are Looked After. The aim is to avoid delays with sharing information and improve partnership working. Placement staff are responsible for reporting children missing through an online portal. All relevant information can be shared online to prevent delays via 101 (The Philomena Protocol, Pan-London Exploitation 2021). The online portal can be found via this [link](#)
- **The Philomena Protocol:** Please see section three and appendix 13.11 for more details.

### Step Two - Child/Young Person is reported missing by parent/care givers or a professional.

- A professional or a parent/carer will notify children's services that the child/young person is missing by contacting the allocated Social Worker or the Stronger Families Hub
- The individual with care responsibility has a duty to make their own enquiries for example: attempted to contact the child/young person on numerous occasions, contact known family members/friends and check if the child/young person has been active on social media.
- The assigned Social Worker will need to gather all information from the contacting party including what the child/young person was wearing, how long the child/young person has been missing for, the context of missing episode and the CAD / Police report numbers.
- The Social Worker will establish if the person reporting the child missing has reported the child/young person missing to the Police. If not, then this will need to be actioned by a professional immediately. 101 will need to be called unless the child is at immediate risk in which case the professional will call 999.

### Step Three - A Grab Pack and Missing Person Trigger Plan to be considered and shared with the Police.

- The Social Worker is required to complete a Grab Pack for our Children who have re-occurring missing episodes. This includes a photo of the child/young person along with all appropriate

information. This document can be found in **Appendix 5**. This document is to be completed and shared with the Police to help locate the child/young person.

- The Missing Person Trigger Plan purpose is to outline the agreed multi-agency response for individuals who are at risk of going missing, and where there is a significant risk of harm to the subject or the volume of times, they are repeatedly missing (MET, 2022).

#### **Step Four- Social Worker to initiate missing episode on child's electronic file (LCS).**

- To do this, use the 'Personal' tab in young person's record.
- On the right-hand side, under important information - you click 'Add Missing Person Record'.
- Add all relevant information into the 'Missing' tab. This will need to include the time, location, context of missing episodes.
- The 'Found' tab will need to be completed if/when the child/young person has returned home.

#### **Step Five - Arranging a strategy discussion**

- If the child/young person has been missing for 48 hours or if the risk is imminent, then the social worker will need to request a strategy discussion with the Police, Health and other appropriate professionals.
- Request for police to attend a strategy meeting will be submitted by partners using **Form 87a (a copy of this can be found in Appendix 6)** to CAIT referrals. No request to attend a strategy meeting will be actioned without submission of this form.
- CAIT referrals will acknowledge receipt of the 87a and will review to ensure threshold is met. CAIT referrals will identify any pre-existing police investigation and will also review any up to date intelligence relating to the child/young person and their wider family (where relevant).
- CAIT referrals will take all requests for non CAIT strategy meetings to the daily Public Protection meeting (0845 hours Mon-Fri). This could mean that a request that has come in late on a Thursday for example, will not necessarily be reviewed or actioned until the following morning. The Duty Detective Inspector will then have responsibility.
- If the child/young person remains missing, then strategy discussions will need to continue to take place weekly. Please set a further date for the next strategy discussion during the initial meeting if, the child/young person does return home then it can always be cancelled.

- Invite the professionals below to the strategy discussions:
  - [WAMailbox-Misper@met.Police .uk](mailto:WAMailbox-Misper@met.Police.uk)
  - [wamailbox-referralhillington@met.Police .uk](mailto:wamailbox-referralhillington@met.Police.uk)
  - [cnw-tr.hillingdonchildrencc@nhs.net](mailto:cnw-tr.hillingdonchildrencc@nhs.net)
  - [cnw-tr.safeguardingteam@nhs.net](mailto:cnw-tr.safeguardingteam@nhs.net)
  - [Axis@hillington.gov.uk](mailto:Axis@hillington.gov.uk)
  - Allocated GP
- More detailed guidance regarding Strategy Discussions is available in **section 8.5** of this Protocol.

#### Step Six- If/when the child is found

- The Police will need to be informed if the social worker has been advised that the child/young person has returned home.
- For 'Our Children' a professional will need to update the online portal and share information with the Police. This will need to be shared with the notification.

#### Step Seven - Return Home Interview

- A Return Home Interview needs to be completed by the assigned social worker within 72 hours of the child/young person returning home. The 'Return Home Interview Form' can be opened once the Missing Episode has been initiated. There will be an option on the right-hand side in 'Forms' where you will be able to access the 'Return Home Interview' document. **Please note, this form cannot be opened once the missing episode has been closed.** A template for a Return Home interview can be found in **Appendix 7**.
- A child/young person has the right to accept or decline this interview. It may be that the child/young person has a preference to speak to a specific professional regarding the missing period. This is useful when thinking about gathering information and assessing the risk. The child/young person should always be offered the option of speaking to an independent professional, an AXIS Prevention Case Worker. AXIS can be contacted via email address on: [axis@hillington.gov.uk](mailto:axis@hillington.gov.uk).

#### Step Eight - Updating the Missing Episode

- Once the child/young person has returned and the RHI has been completed. The 'Found' section in the Missing Episode will need to be updated. Please include all relevant information.

### Step Nine - Vulnerability Risk Assessment

- Following a missing episode being reported, a risk assessment document will need to be updated during and following the missing period. This should reflect any changes or if situation escalates. This assessment should include all identified risks, for example, concerns around gang affiliation, child sexual or criminal exploitation. A copy of the Hillingdon Risk Assessment template can be found in **Appendix 8**

### Step Ten - Meetings

- In line with the risk assessment, please re-consider the threshold of need and social work involvement. This can be reviewed with a manager.
- If a child is subject to a Child in Need Plan, then please consider rescheduling in a review meeting with the professional network.
- If a young person is subject to a Child Protection Plan, then the Social Worker shares and discusses information with the Child Protection Chair.
- For 'Our Children' the Independent Reviewing Officer will need to be updated so they can determine whether they wish to hold an 'Our Children' Review. This will ensure that the Care Plan is updated.
- Please consider appropriate referrals to support services for example, AXIS or St Giles' Trust.

### Eleven - Operational High-Risk Panel

- Child to be discussed at Operational High-Risk Panel if deemed as at high risk of further missing episodes, exploitation, and gang affiliation.

## 5.3 Parents or Carers response

If a child is at immediate risk this should be reported without delay to Metropolitan Police on **999**, otherwise the Police should be informed by phoning the Police Hub on **101**. Police will share the information through a single point of contact, the Stronger Families Hub-

Parents and those with parental responsibility are expected to try to locate the child. Anyone else who has care of a child without parental responsibility should try to locate the child and ascertain their safety.

Professionals working with families will support parents and carers in taking the following steps (as appropriate):

- Attempt to contact child/young person on numerous occasions.
- Search bedroom /accommodation, outbuildings, and vehicles.
- Contact known friends, associates, and relatives where a child may be.
- Contact local hospitals.
- Speak to other children in the family home to obtain relevant information about the missing child.
- Visit locations that the child is known to frequent or was known to be attending, if it is possible e.g., a friend's house or party.
- Call or text any mobile phone held by the child and leave a message asking them to make contact.
- Search the home for important leads (e.g. mobile phones, diaries, letters, notes explaining absence, emails and website activity) which may inform or assist the investigation in protecting and locating the child. Check to see if any items are missing from the home.
- Check social media accounts.
- Oyster Card (it can be viewed online or by a social worker, parent, or carers with access)
- Check 'Our Children' P-cards via finance or debits cards e.g., Monzo or Go Henry.
- Contact the child's school or school friends to gather any available information regarding the child's whereabouts.
- Social worker to liaise with AXIS.

For children missing from home, it is expected that the parent / carer will inform the Police without delay. If parents/carers fail to report this to the Police , the lead professional will need to do this [online](#) or via 101. When referring to the Police, any relevant information that might help to find or support the child should be shared, including:

- Description of the child including their clothing.
- Details of where the child was last seen and with whom.
- Recent photograph.
- Relevant addresses, known associates and addresses frequented.
- Previous history of absenteeism and circumstances of where found.
- Circumstances under which the child is absent; and
- Any factors that increase the risk to the child, including health\_needs or medication, change of behaviours, substance misuse and/or negative peer influences.

If it comes to the attention of any agency that a child is missing, they should check that the parents / carer has taken steps outlined above to try and locate the child. They must advise the parent / carer of their need to report this matter to the Police and they also need to check that the child has been reported to the Police, if necessary, by contacting the Police to verify the information shared.

## 5.4 Police response

The Police will risk assess all reports of missing children and will respond in accordance with the College of Policing Missing Persons' policy. Other partner agencies will work collaboratively to assist them with their duties. For further information see the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice guidance following this [link](#).

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. They will work under the presumption that all missing children are vulnerable unless a risk assessment determines otherwise. The Police have lead responsibility for determining the action that needs to be taken and when it needs to be escalated. All children 'missing' from home or care will be categorised as medium or high risk.

On receipt of a missing report, the Police will:

- Enter the details onto the database (missing person case management system)
- Check whether there is intelligence relating to the missing child and follow internal procedures
- Forward details to the responsible local authority; and where a situation appears to the Police to be urgent, they will also immediately contact Children's Services to make a referral or to ask for assistance.

The Police will allocate the report for a response:

- Wherever possible, the responsible officer will contact the person who has made the report for further information; and the call taker / supervisor or officer will undertake an assessment of the risk a missing child may be exposed to and will take account of information available to them from partner agencies, particularly Children's Services.

Police will be alert to the potential significance of repeated missing episodes and will consider:

- The age of the child
- Previous behaviour, risk taking history
- 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.
- Behaviour of the child as influenced by peer groups or others.
- Whether the child is perceived as running to / running from someone / something.
- The risk of offending
- The risk that the child may be targeted for economic, criminal or sexual exploitation.

Police Risk Assessment should be guided by the College of Policing [Risk principles](#), the [National Decision Model](#) and Police [Code of Ethics](#). An appropriate level of Police response based on initial and on-going risk assessment in each case. Police Risk Assessment should be guided by the College of Policing [Risk principles](#), the [National Decision Model](#) and Police [Code of Ethics](#). An appropriate level of Police response based on initial and on-going risk assessment for each child.

## 6. Responding to children missing from care

Each looked after child has a care plan based on a full assessment of their current and future needs, including potential risk to self and others.

The care plan will consider any previous, current, or future information that is relevant and any factors which may increase the risk to the child should they go missing. Children's residential, fostering and placement services should be included in placement and care planning. As part of assessing risk, it may be appropriate for the Local Authority to consult with the child's family, Police, and any other partners to share information that may be of relevance.

A recent photograph of the child should be made available to the Police to support their efforts in locating them and a copy should be uploaded to LCS. In very serious situations where the child is believed to be at significant risk, the Police and Local Authority's Head of Service may decide to use the photograph more widely and even involve publishing the photograph to national, local, and social media. Where possible the consent of a person with parental responsibility will be sought for a photograph to be used in any missing person investigation.

## 7. Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

There are many additional factors to consider when UAS children are reported missing and further practice guidance should be sought to ensure there is a coordinated approach to full information sharing. Close cooperation with UK Visas and Immigration services and the Police will be important. After the full implementation of Op Innerste (please refer to section 7 for more information), a photo and fingerprints will be available in the Police database. The assessment of need to inform the care plan may be critical in these circumstances and an assessment should seek to establish:

Relevant details about the child's background before they came to the UK

- An understanding of the reasons that the child came to the UK
- An analysis of the child's vulnerability, such as trafficking
- A risk assessment as to the likelihood of the child going missing and
- The appropriateness of information being divulged as to the whereabouts of the child and to whom.

When UASC are reported missing, they will retain their status of Looked After unless one or more of the criteria are met:

- They return to a birth parent/someone with parental responsibility and cease to be Looked After
- They are in another country
- Their care is transferred to another Local Authority OR
- They are age assessed as being over 18 years.

In these instances, the Home Office should be informed of the change in circumstances.

Additional practice guidance on safeguarding UASC can be found in [Safeguarding Children who may have been trafficked](#) 2011. Where it is suspected that a child has been trafficked, they should be referred by the Local Authority or the Police when they arrive as part of the OP Innerste into the UK's victim identification framework, the [National Referral Mechanism](#) (NRM). The Trafficked Children Toolkit, developed by the London Safeguarding Children Partnership has been made available to all local authorities to help professionals assess the needs of these children and to refer them to the National Referral Mechanism. See also [Care of unaccompanied migrant children and child victims of modern slavery- Statutory guidance for local authorities, November 2017.](#)



## 8. Children in particular circumstances

### 8.1 Children looked after by another responsible Local Authority

Where a child is looked after by another responsible Local Authority placed in Hillingdon and is reported missing, Hillingdon Children's Services will notify the responsible Local Authority as necessary.

### 8.2 Operation Innerste

OPERATION INNERSTE is a joint national initiative by Immigration Enforcement (IE) and Police to improve the multi-agency safeguarding response to complex issues surrounding children from abroad. The operation has strategic support of both National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) and Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) who both consider it to be a good practice model and urge all local authorities and Police forces to adopt the process to achieve better outcomes for children and young people.

The process focuses on building early rapport with children from abroad at the point of first contact with authorities - most often Police – to build a relationship of trust between professionals and the child/ren, to provide a safe environment for them to express their needs and concerns and the opportunity for authorities to explain the support, services, and protection they are entitled to.

The first 72 hours following the initial encounter with a child from abroad is critical to significantly reduce the influence of the traffickers on the child and to reduce the risk of them being re-trafficked or going missing after being in a place of safety.

In addition to a relationship of trust, the identity (fingerprint & photograph) of the child is lawfully captured under routine Immigration powers with the following benefits:

- Better partnership working to improve safeguarding of vulnerable children.
- Better outcomes for children reducing the risk of children going missing from care/home.

- Greater chance of early recovery from missing episodes reducing risk and enhancing safeguarding.
- Reduced multi-agency investigation time in the event of a missing episode.

### **8.3 Child failing to attend Court**

If a child fails to attend court for no known reason, it is likely that a warrant with or without bail will be issued. Nevertheless, if a worker has been advised that the child is not or has not been at home and their whereabouts are unknown, then the Missing Children's Procedure should also be followed.

The allocated Social Worker and the Police's Missing Team Sergeant will discuss each such instance to make explicit decisions and plan for the child who is missing and wanted.

The Police need to be aware should the child be picked up on a warrant that he or she has also been missing from home and that there may be safeguarding concerns which will inform the criminal justice process. This child will be awarded a dual status as 'missing' and 'wanted'. However, their welfare is paramount.

### **8.4 Children placed outside the Local Authority**

Where a child who is missing from one Local Authority area presents themselves in another Local Authority area, it is important for the two authorities to coordinate the safe return of the child.

If any child protection concerns have arisen whilst the child was missing, the responsibility for making Section 47 enquiries for immediate safeguarding concerns is with the Local Authority where the alleged abuse took place, but this should be done in liaison with the "home" Local Authority.

If a child is placed by LBH into another Local Authority, LBH will require the placement provider to comply with the protocols for their local area supplemented by this protocol and in regular communication with the host authority.

The placing authority and the placement provider should liaise regularly and take all reasonable and practical steps to establish the whereabouts of any missing child.

This will include contacting any persons whom the child is likely to be associating with and arranging for those places to be checked. If the location of the child is known or suspected, the placing authority and placement provider must liaise to agree responsibility for locating and returning the child. However, if there are thought to be specific issues of personal or public safety-difficulties, action should be agreed between the Police and Children's Services in securing the safe recovery of the child.

## 8.5 Strategy meetings and discussions

Throughout the missing episode, the Police are responsible for ongoing enquiries, risk assessment and proportionate actions. A strategy meeting should be convened dependent on the risks associated with the missing episode and the age and vulnerability of the child/ young person.

Depending on the level of assessed risk, it may be necessary to convene an immediate strategy meeting following the notification of a missing child where the circumstances give rise to concern of significant harm. These meetings are particularly important to collate and share information with Police, Health, Education and other partners and should include mapping of known associates.

Multi-agency Strategy Meetings should be held at a minimum of fortnightly intervals; or more frequently depending on the level of presenting risk to monitor and respond to missing episodes. This is to ensure all that should be done is being done until there is confidence that the issue has been resolved.

Strategy Meetings/Discussions should also consider:

The need to initiate a missing child health alert which will notify all local health providers of the missing child and any vulnerabilities. This will be particularly important if the child/young person has identified needs such as a mental health condition, substance misuse or a health condition. The Named Professionals within all NHS provider organisations can initiate these alerts:

- Alerting the National missing persons desk (parental consent required where child is not CLA).
- National Referral Mechanism where the child is missing and likely to be subject to exploitation, trafficking or modern slavery.

- Agreements on communication between agencies, other local authorities and with the parents / carers.
- Action required and agreed to locate the child.
- Updates to the Risk Assessment; and Agreements in relation to a Media Strategy.

Missing children assessed to be a high risk should also be referred to The Operational High Risk Panel to ensure multi agency intelligence is being gathered; and all possible powers and options available to agencies are being utilised to ensure locating and returning the child to a safe environment. All agencies involved in the Panel should put alerts in their own electronic recording systems in relation to high risk missing children and young people and notify Police and Children's services immediately; in the event the child or young person comes to their attention.

The reports detailing all the missing children are sent on a daily basis to senior management.

The Director of Children's Services or deputy will formally review all cases where children/young people have been missing for more than 3 months to satisfy themselves on the actions taken to recover the child/young person. For Our Children, a decision as to whether to end the accommodation placement could be an outcome of the review. If the decision outcome is to end the placement, then it will be recorded in the child's record.

If a young person has not been found by their 18th birthday, formal Missing Child Meeting should be held to determine whether the referral should be closed. Any decision to close the referral should be on the proviso that it is reopened if the young person is located and found to need services as an eligible, relevant, or former relevant child.

## 8.6 Once a child has been found

### Response from Police

When the Police locate a child, who is reported as missing they will normally return the child to the parent/carer/placement and undertake a Safe and Well Check.

However, there may be occasions when it is appropriate or necessary for agencies and the family to discuss who will be responsible for returning the child. If there are specific and identified issues of safety or public associated with returning that child, then a coordinated approach should be agreed with the Police. In some instances, it may be inappropriate to return a child to their home and in such incidents, Police will liaise with Children's Services or the Out of Hours Team to review their safety.

Where there is reasonable cause to believe that a child could suffer significant harm, particularly if returned home, the Police can invoke Police Powers of Protection and liaise with the Local Authority who will decide where is safe and suitable for that child to reside for up to 72 hours. The decision to determine where the child is safe, sits with Social Care and could include the home from which the child originally went missing (Section 46 of the Children Act 1989).

The Police are not given the power to use force in implementing Police Power of Protection but "reasonable force" may be used to prevent a child suffering significant harm. For full information on managing safeguarding concerns, refer to the pan [London Children Protection Procedures](#).

Once a child has returned home, the Police will carry out a Safe and Well Check as soon as possible. The aim of this is to check for any indications that the young person has suffered harm, establish the reasons for going missing, find out where and with whom they have been, and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by, or against, them. If during the Safe and Well Check the Police identify that there are immediate safeguarding concerns, the allocated Social Worker will be contacted or a referral will be made via the Stronger Families Hub.

### **Response from the Local Authority**

For all Looked After Children, Hillingdon Children's Services will be responsible for returning them to their home, unless the child is located by Police. In some instances, it may be inappropriate to return a child to their home or placement and in such cases the Police will contact Children Social Care or the Emergency Duty Team (out of hours) for an evaluation of their safety.

When another professional/associate has located the child, Children's Services will be responsible for planning for their return to the Child's Home / placement. Where possible, residential staff/foster carers will transport the child themselves, however where this is not practical, arrangements will be agreed between the residential staff/foster carer and the social worker/OOH. There may be occasions

where it is appropriate for the Police to assist. This will be subject to discussion and agreement by a Head of Service on a case-by-case basis.

## 9. Independent Return Home Interviews

### 9.1 Offering a Return Home Interview to a child who was missing.

The Return Home Interview (RHI) is used as the template to establish the 'push factors' which drove a child/young person to run away or go missing e.g. disputes with parent(s) or carer(s) and/or 'pull factors' which are those factors outside the home or care setting that drew a child/young person to run away or go missing e.g. family conflict or the influences of a negative peer group. The information gathering during the interview also assesses the risk of harm and the likelihood of any future episodes of 'missing'. It is an expectation of this protocol that within 72 hours of the child returning, a return home interview (RHI) must take place.

The child will be given a choice of speaking to their allocated worker or speaking to an independent person, and thought should be given as to who is best placed to undertake this interview, as it could provide valuable information for future risk assessment, safeguarding and care planning.

If the child wishes to talk to an independent person, a return home interviewer will be appointed. This independent person will be provided by AXIS.

If in the course of the safe and well check or RHI, information has been provided by the child that they have been trafficked or exploited, the Social Worker and Team Manager should give consideration as to whether or not a strategy discussion should be convened. If a missing child strategy meeting has taken place, all attendees must be informed that the child has returned home. The social worker is responsible for ensuring this task is completed.

If a child returns home after a short period of Unauthorised Absence the social worker and their team manager should decide whether a return interview should be undertaken, depending upon the assessed risks for the child. If a RHI is being done, the steps above (2 to 6) will apply. If the young person missing is a **care leaver**, the same approach will be taken: The Personal Advisor (PA) and the Team Manager will consider whether a return interview should be undertaken, depending on the assessed risks for the young person.

## 9.2 Completing the Return Home Interview

The RHI will be completed as often as possible face to face. In some instances, it may be more appropriate to be completed over the phone/ video call. However, these will be kept to a minimum and the reason for not completing a face to face interview will be recorded and agreed with the Line Manager.

The return home interview template is located in child's electronic record and it should be used for capturing all return home interviews.

## 9.3 Recording a Return Home Interview

When a child is reported as missing, Children's Services will be notified by parents/carers or the Police, once the notification is received the missing episode will be recorded in the child's electronic record. This section of the record will remain active until the child has returned.

When the child returns, the allocated worker will update the section "found" of the child's electronic record. The same process will be followed for the children who have periods of unauthorised absence.

Upon receiving the workflow for the completion of the RHI, the allocated worker will start the RHI form.

If the allocated worker is not going to be the professional completing the RHI, they will transfer the workflow and the completion of the form to:

- the Task Tray of the identified worker after having discussed and agreed who will complete the RHI
- the team Task Tray for AXIS when the interview is completed by an independent person.

In the event that the child refuses to engage with the RHI, the person identified to complete the RHI will close the RHI form in child's electronic record indicating in the "Form closure reason" section that: "child refuses to participate in the Interview".

Once the RHI is completed and episode closed in the child's electronic record, and automatic

notification will be sent to:

- Team Manager
- Allocated Child Protection Advisor (if one allocated)
- The Independent Reviewing Officer (if one allocated)

## 9.4 Multi -Agency Response

Following the safe and well check and independent return home interview, Local Authority Children Young People's Services, Police and other agencies including voluntary services should work together and provide a multi-agency response to:

- Build up a comprehensive picture of why the child went missing
- Understand what happened while they were missing
- Understand who they were with when they were missing and where they were found.
- Decide what support they require upon returning to home or their care placement. See the Continuum of Help and Support (Threshold Document)
- Ensure that there is a multi-agency plan to reduce repeat missing incidents.

## 10. Role of other agencies

If any agency is made aware that a child is missing, they must advise the parent/carer of their need to report this matter to the Police immediately. They also need to advise the parent of the agency's duty to ensure that the matter is reported to the Police. If necessary, the professional will need to follow this up by contacting the Police to verify that the child has been reported missing.

### 10.1 Education

For children missing education, Hillingdon has identified key stakeholders both statutory and non-statutory to provide relevant information through the Hillingdon Children's Safeguarding Partnership.

Hillingdon has published notification routes for all stakeholders nationally through DfE and locally through the West London Children Missing Education (CME) network. CME may become known to partner agencies that then have a duty to share this intelligence with the Participation Service.



For further information please see London Borough of Hillingdon's "Children Missing Education Policy".



CME Policy Updated  
Jan 2023.pdf

Children Looked After by Hillingdon are closely monitored by the Virtual School utilising the support of an external provider, Welfare Call, who collect and collate attendance and exclusions of all those in the care of the local authority. Every Hillingdon Looked After Child also has an allocated Virtual School Officer who maintains regular contact with schools, social workers and foster carers to ensure that key information is shared; and the necessary strategies are implemented to address any concerns. This work is ongoing through telephone and email correspondence and formally through the termly PEP process.

If a child is reported missing, please ensure that their education provision (school, college, alternative or specialist provisions) are kept updated and are invited to strategy discussions as key safeguarding professionals in a child's life.

## 10.2 Healthcare Professionals

The need to inform other health services of the missing child and any vulnerabilities will be particularly important if the child/young person has identified needs such as a mental health condition, substance misuse or underlying health conditions. The Named Professionals within all NHS provider organisations can initiate these alerts across systems and via email following multi-agency discussions. Any issues regarding the ability to notify across all health services will be raised and discussed as part of the strategy discussion.

Healthcare professionals have a key role in identifying and reporting children who may be missing from care, home and school. Missing children access a number of services in a range of NHS settings, for example:

- Urgent Care Units
- Accident and Emergency Department
- Genito-Urinary Medicine Clinics (GUM)
- Community Sexual Health Services
- Pharmacy Services.

Health professionals should have an understanding of the vulnerabilities and risks associated with children that go missing. Staff working in NHS provider settings should be aware of their professional responsibilities and the responses undertaken by the multi-agency partnership. Risks include but are not limited to sexual exploitation, radicalisation, trafficking, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

The NHS provides a comprehensive service for Looked After Children. A Designated Nurse and Doctor for Child Looked After are located in each Integrated Care Board (ICB). They are responsible for the commissioning and delivery of appropriate healthcare, assessments and services. Designated health professionals for Looked After Children should share relevant information and intelligence relating to high-risk individuals or emerging themes and patterns indicative of organised and targeted abuse, to the NHS Patch Safeguarding Children Forum. They should also ensure that NHS staff within their locality knows how to identify, report and respond to a child who is missing from care.

## 11. Strategic oversight & intelligence gathering

The Operational High-Risk Panel contains a core membership (e.g., Police, Youth Justice Service, AXIS, Missing Persons Unit, Gangs Unit, Community Safety, Education, Health, Prevent Programme, Probation, Housing etc.) able to commit resources and make decisions to safeguard children that are affected by exploitation.

The panel will consider cases where vulnerable young people who are at risk as a result of contextual safeguarding and extra familiar harm factors and/or who pose a risk to others where this risk is deemed to be **high or very high and a multi-agency plan is required** to reduce/manage that risk.

The **Strategic Risk and Vulnerability Panel** is mandated to develop a collaborative strategic response to children at risk of contextual risk factors. The group collates information from safeguarding partners and community intelligence to understand the risk factors children and young people face outside of the family home. This Panel has oversight of the arrangements in place and the activity of the operational panel in safeguarding children missing from home and care and review and approve this protocol annually to ensure it is fit for purpose.

The Panel will scrutinise regular reports received from the Local Authority and partners analysing data on children missing from home and from care within the Local Authority area, and on the effectiveness

of their measures to prevent missing episodes.

## 12. Collecting, Sharing and Analysing Data

Section 4 of this protocol outlined the two Missing Leads who are responsible for specifically identifying vulnerable missing persons and to "co-ordinate" a response to reduce long-term risk. Both roles will identify and share best practice in relation to all missing person's investigations. The two nominated leads should work together to risk assess cases of children missing from home or care and analyse data for patterns that indicate particular concerns and risks. This includes children placed in Hillingdon by other local authorities and Hillingdon's looked after children placed out of the area.

Relevant data collated by Hillingdon Children's Services jointly with the Police and partner agencies includes missing episodes for children from home or care (duration and frequency), Police safe and well checks, information from return home interviews and identification of specific trends and risks such as child sexual exploitation. AXIS is used as the vehicle in which to collate and share this information at both Operational and Strategic Risk and Vulnerability Panels. Any intelligence and actions obtained from the panel should be shared by the social worker with the child's placement and should form a part of risk assessment.

## 13. Appendixes

### 13.1 Appendix 1: Related Guidance

- [Working together to safeguard children - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)
- [Statutory Guidance on Children who Run Away or go Missing from Home or Care, 2014.](#)
- [Children Missing Education - Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities, 2016.](#)
- [London Borough of Hillingdon's Children Missing Education Policy 2019](#)
- [London Child Protection Procedures - Children Missing from Care, Home and Education.](#)
- [College of Policing Missing Person's Policy, March 2020](#)
- [Safeguarding children who may have been trafficked - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- [Care of unaccompanied migrant children and child victims of modern slavery - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- [Hillingdon Children and Families Procedures Manual](#)
- [Missing children: who cares? The Police response to missing and absent children.](#)

- [The Ethnicity of Missing People](#)

## 13.2 Appendix 2: Definitions

- **Child:** anyone who has not yet reached their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. ‘Children’ therefore means ‘children and young people’ throughout this guidance.
- **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.
- **Care leaver:** an eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by 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.
- **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
- **Missing:** Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed.
- **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 are not known.
- **Young runaway:** a child who has run away from their home or care placement or feels they have been forced or lured to leave.

## 13.3 Appendix 3: Resources for Parents/Carers and Young People

- [Missing People – how we can help you](#)
- [Children Society – Children missing from homeChildren Missing From Home | The Children's Society \(childrenssociety.org.uk\)](#)
- [Safelives - Safety Plan for Young People.](#)
- [The risks of running away](#)
- [What to do if your child goes missing](#) (Practical advice for parents and carers).
- [Parents against child sexual exploitation.](#)
- [It's not okay.](#)

## 13.4 Appendix: 4 Practice guidance for Trigger Plans

The Trigger Plan should be agreed by all relevant parties including the Local Authority, Police and placement provider in the event that a child goes missing. This should be clearly recorded on a LCS case note and emailed to Out of Hours Service. The list below, whilst not exhaustive, acts as a guide for these discussions.



Missing Person  
Trigger Plan.docx

### **TRIGGER PLAN:**

#### **History of Missing Episodes:**

*Identify what the history of reported missing episodes and frequency?*

#### **Triggers for Missing Episodes:**

*Identify any known triggers for the child/young person going missing, including push and pull factors?*

#### **Risks and Vulnerabilities**

Are there risks of:

- CSE

- *gang involvement, ? If so what is the name of the gang?*
- *Do they have any medical health needs?*
- *Do they need essential medication that is not available to them?*
- *Is the person known to use any drugs or alcohol?*
- *Is the person involved in any crime?*
- *Is there any history of self-harm, suicidal thoughts or attempts*

**Friends/Associates:**

*Identify known friends/associates*

**Places frequented:**

*Is the child/young person known to go to certain places if so where and with whom?*

**Family members that the child/young person may go to when missing?**

*Who are they? (to include name, relationship and contact details)*

**Friends/associates that the child/young person may go to when missing?**

*Identify known friends/associates who the child/young person may go to when missing? (to include name, relationship and contact details)*

**What is the legal status of the child?**

*Is the child looked after under a full care order?*

**What is the plan when the child/young person goes missing?**

*What action needs to be taken, when, how and by who?*

**What address should the child be returned to?**

*Is this parents home/placement, please specify*

## 13.5 Appendix 5 - The Grab Pack



Grab Pack

## 13.6 Appendix 6 - Request for Strategy Discussion Form (87A)



87a Template.docx

## 13.7 Appendix 7 - Return Home Interview Template



RHI 2023

## 13.8 Appendix 8 – Hillingdon Risk Assessment Template



Vulnerability Risk  
Assessment - Template

## 13.9 Appendix 9 - Op Innerste Process Map



Innerste Process Map V2.pub

## 13.10 Appendix 10 – Philomena Protocol



Philomena  
Protocol.ppt