

# LONDON BOROUGH OF HILLINGDON



## CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME AND CARE PROTOCOL

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**Updated November 2020**

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Children missing from home or Looked After Children missing from care are vulnerable to risk of harm. This protocol is to enable practitioners across relevant agencies to appropriately respond to children who go missing. This includes prevention and reduction of associated risks and recovery.
- 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 children resident in Hillingdon who are considered at risk of going missing or are missing from home or care will implement this protocol and ensure their staff 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 Council. LBH retains responsibility for Looked After Children who are placed outside the local authority area. In those cases, 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. 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 Strategic Leads - Key Functions & Contacts

- 3.1 The Assistant Director Safeguarding, Partnership and Quality Assurance is the local authority's designated lead for children missing from home or care. The Detective Sergeant of the Metropolitan Police Missing Team is the Metropolitan Police designated lead for missing children.
- 3.2 **Local Authority Missing Person's Lead Role and Responsibility:**
  - Effective use of performance data on missing children, return 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 to ensure training for Social Workers, their managers and support staff in recording systems and developing good consistent practice approach to all missing children.

### **3.3 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 Children's Services.
- Collate and disseminate intelligence on identified problematic persons or locations and make any safeguarding referrals as required, to children's services and other agencies.
- Monitor incidents of missing children and identify children in need of protective measures and work with the Local Authority Missing Person's Lead and Social Work teams as required.
- Identify those cases where multi-agency intervention is required to tackle the problem of repeat absences.
- Assist in the development and delivery of training packages in relation to missing children.

### **Key Contacts**

- Hillingdon Children's Social Care Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)  
Tel: 01895 556633
- Hillingdon Children's Social Care Emergency Duty Team (EDT)  
Tel: 01895 250111 OR [edtduty@hillingsdon.gov.uk](mailto:edtduty@hillingsdon.gov.uk)
- Police  
Tel: 101 or 999
- Youth Justice Service (YJS)  
Tel: 01895 556432
- UK Borders Agency  
Tel: 0843 515 8453
- Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP)  
Tel: 0870 000 3344

## 4 Definitions

There are a range of definitions used concerning missing children across agencies for the purposes of referrals, risk assessment and recording of data. In determining the definition to apply to any form of absence, Social Care practitioners will be cognisant that some children absent themselves from home or placement for short periods with minimal risk to themselves or others, including missing curfew times. 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. Additional details of definitions used in the various agencies can be found in [Appendix 2](#).

The following definitions within this protocol apply in relation to children who go missing from home

### **“Absent children”.**

In July 2020 the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), in line with the national ‘Approved Professional Practice (APP) for Missing Persons’, published by the College of Policing, decided to remove the category of absent.

Where a child is reported as absent or missing, or there whereabouts are unknown the MPS will consider the circumstances of an incident and determine whether an individual should be investigated as a missing person. If a decision is made to treat the report as a missing person then the incident will be sent to the relevant police Borough Command Unit (BCU) where the circumstances and available information will be assessed. This will include considering all risk factors and personal vulnerabilities and the case will then be graded appropriately – either high, medium or low risk. The risk category will determine the level of police response.

### **Unauthorised Absence**

The child's whereabouts are known but the child or young person is not where they are expected or required to be.

A child cannot be categorised as missing if their whereabouts is verified and known.

Report to Police only if there is sufficient safeguarding concern for the child/young person, or another, which may require Police intervention.

### **Missing**

The whereabouts of the child / young person cannot be established.

Any child aged 12 or below whose whereabouts cannot be established would automatically be classed as missing.

A child in this category must be reported to the police who will consider the circumstances of an incident and determine whether an individual should be investigated as a missing person

The child will be considered missing until that child has been found and their wellbeing confirmed.

## 5 Responding to children missing from home

**5.1** 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.

### **5.2 Parents 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 Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) with Hillingdon Children's Services.

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)

- Search bedroom /accommodation, outbuildings and vehicles.
- Contact known friends and relatives where a child may be.
- 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.
- Contact the child's school or school friends to gather any available information regarding the child's whereabouts.

For children missing from home, it is expected that the parent / carer will inform the Police without delay. 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.

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.

### 5.3 Police response

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

Once a child has been reported as missing, the police are the lead agency in relation to finding and securing their safe return. However, all partner agencies are required to assist them to carry out this role.

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 [College of Policing \(2020\): Missing persons](#).

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 have 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.

On receipt of a missing report, the police will:

- Enter the details on to 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 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 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.

#### **5.4 Response from the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)**

All missing children that MASH becomes aware of via an electronic notification (MISPER) will contain initial information collated by Police Public Protection Desk (PPD) triage.

On new referrals and children who are NOT allocated to a social worker MASH information should be used to inform a decision to allocate for a C&F assessment, and if appropriate Risk and Vulnerability assessment and determine the agreed actions to locate and safeguard a missing child. A missing episode will be triggered by the MASH Senior Practitioner

If the child is subject to a CIN/CP plan and has an allocated social worker, the missing episode will be triggered by the allocated social worker in consultation with their manager.

A joint trigger plan should be identified by police and social care to agree the plan to find the young person, how to engage with them and what actions should be undertaken in the event of further missing episodes. This should be clearly recorded on an ICS case note and discussed with the child's parents/carers and should include detailed information about the responsibilities of all services. Independent return home interviews should be offered to the child by their allocated social worker.

## 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. Where a child has previously gone missing prior to becoming looked after, this risk should be considered and planned for as part of the child's care plan. The care plan will therefore take account of any risk that the child may go missing in the future 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 stakeholders to share information that may be of relevance.

When a child goes missing it is vital for the safe recovery of the child that a recent photograph of the child is made available. In respect of Looked After Children a recent photograph of the child will be kept on record by the local authority.

Most commonly the photograph will be used by local Police Officers to help them recognise the child whilst patrolling or when actively looking for the child at relevant locations. In very serious cases where the child is believed to be at significant risk, the police and local authority 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.

The police would be required to seek consent from the Local Authority prior to publishing the photograph in the media.

The local authority will ensure that sufficient knowledge and information about the child is recorded to enable carers to report the child as missing. When reporting a missing child to the Police, as much information as possible should be shared with the police regarding the child. The local authority should provide sufficient information to the Police to enable all risk factors to be considered. This will include the social worker's analysis of risk to the child, given what is currently known. Where a risk and vulnerability assessment has been undertaken, consideration should be given to sharing this with the police.

Where a child is looked after by the London Borough of Hillingdon, the allocated social worker will activate a Missing Child Episode on LSC recording system and a report will be produced by MIS notifying the Team Manager, IRO and HoS. The Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) will record the details of the Police report as a case note and send a notification to the allocated social worker and team manager. The missing episode should be the date the child left his or her normal placement or the date the child was last seen by a responsible adult (whichever was the latest). The allocated Social Worker will liaise with the Fostering, Placements and Independent Reviewing Officer as necessary throughout the child's missing episode.

A joint trigger plan should be identified by police and social care to agree the plan to find the young person, how to engage with them and what actions should be undertaken in the event of a missing episode. This should be clearly recorded on an ICS case note and discussed with the child's parents/carers and should include detailed information about the responsibilities of all services, the child's parents, foster carers and other adults involved in the child's network.

The Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) should address the missing episodes in statutory reviews, with consideration to bringing a review forward to address this issue. The IRO will consult with Chapter 6 of the IRO Handbook and commence the local escalation procedure in cases where the local authority's response to missing episodes is not in line with this protocol.

Following a missing episode consideration should be given to completing a risk and vulnerability assessment on ICS.

When a Child in Care (including UASC) are missing from a residential Home, the Philomena Protocol will apply, and above information will be available to the missing unit in the "Grab Pack". (Philomena Protocol should be operational in Hillingdon Residential Homes as of 1 April 2021)

## 7 Children in particular circumstances

### 7.1 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.

### 7.2 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

There are many additional factors to consider when UASC 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 and the Police will be important. After the full implementation of Op Innerste, a photo and finger prints 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 trafficking
- A risk assessment as to the likelihood of the UASC going missing and
- The appropriateness of information being divulged as to the whereabouts of the young person 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 located in another country

- The case is taken over by 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 Board, 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.

### **7.3. OP 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 migrant children. 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 migrant children at the point of first encounter 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 migrant child 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 placement in care.

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;

1. Better partnership working to improve safeguarding of vulnerable children.
2. Better outcomes for children reducing the risk of children going missing from care.
3. Greater chance of early recovery from missing episodes reducing risk and enhancing safeguarding.
4. Reduced multi-agency investigation time in the event of a missing episode.
5. Ensures all arriving migrant children's identity is captured and 'locked in' at the initial encounter.

The process map for Op Innerste is attached in Appendix 6

### 7.3 Young Person failing to attend court

If a young person 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 young person is not or has not been at home and their whereabouts are unknown, then the missing children procedure should also be followed. The police need to be aware should the young person 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.

### 7.4 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 negotiate to ensure 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 is with the Local Authority where the alleged abuse took place, but this should be done in liaison with the placing Local Authority.

If a child is placed by Hillingdon in 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.

If a child from another Local Authority is placed within Hillingdon, this practice guidance and protocol should be implemented in agreement with the child's Social Worker and with regular communication with them.

The placing authority and the placement provider should liaise regularly and take all reasonable and practical steps to establish the whereabouts of the child. This will include contacting any persons whom he/she 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 safety or public order difficulties in returning the child, then action should be agreed between the Police and Children's Services.

### 7.5 Continued Missing

Upon receiving a report of a child being missing from home, the Police will carry out enquiries (which are proportionate to the perceived risk) aimed at locating the child as soon as possible. A risk assessment will be carried out for each individual child on every separate occasion they are reported missing to the Police. This risk assessment, usually conducted by the Initial Investigating Officer, and subsequently confirmed or revised by a supervising officer will form the basis for the subsequent investigation into the child's disappearance.

### 7.6 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 dependant on the risks associated with the missing episode and the age and vulnerability of the child/ young person. **Dependant 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 and Health, Education and other partners and should include mapping of known associates.

Multi-agency Strategy Meetings should be held at a minimum of six weekly intervals or more frequently depending on the level of presenting risk to monitor and respond to missing episodes and 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 Risk and Vulnerability 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 immediately Police and Children's services in the event the child or young person comes to their attention.

The Assistant Director of Children's social care should also receive notification of all Looked after children who are missing for more than 24 hours from Heads of Service.

The Assistant Director of Children's social care will formally review all cases where children/young people have been missing for more than 3 months to satisfy him/herself on the actions taken to recover the child/young person. A decision as to whether to end the accommodation placement must be an outcome of the meeting. If the decision outcome is to end the placement, then it will be recorded within the meeting minutes that should the child/young person be found then a placement will be sought.

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

## 7.7 Once a child has been found

### 7.7.1 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 order associated with returning that child, then a coordinated approach to recover the child should be agreed with the Police. In some instances, it may be inappropriate to return a child to their home or placement and in such cases, Police will liaise with Children's Services or the Emergency Duty Team (out of hours) for an evaluation of their safety.

Where there is reasonable cause to believe that a child could suffer significant harm, particularly if returned home, the Police can take that child into Police Protection and remove them to suitable accommodation which could include the home from which the child originally went missing (Section 46 of the Children Act 1989). However, the Police are not given the power to use force to take a child into Police Protection but "reasonable force" may be used to prevent a child suffering significant harm. For full information on managing safeguarding concerns, refer to the [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 their disappearance; find out where and with whom they have been; and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by, or against, them. Even where a young person is going missing frequently, there is a requirement to undertake the Safe and Well Check and every effort should be made to visit those young people missing from home on every occasion. If during the Safe and Well Check the police identify that there are immediate safeguarding concerns, then a referral should be made to Children's Services. In addition, if a private fostering arrangement is in place, this will also need to be reported to Children's Services.

### 7.7.2 Response from the Local Authority

For all Looked After Children, Hillingdon Children's Services will be responsible for recovering the child and returning them to their home or placement, 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 making arrangements 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/EDT. 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.

## 8. Independent Return Home Interviews

### 8.1 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.

### 8.2 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 LCS and accessible by the allocated work or the independent AXIS interviewer. This should be used for capturing all return home interviews.

### 8.3 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)

### 8.4 Multi -Agency Response

Following the safe and well check and independent return home interview, local authority Children'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.

## 9. Role of other agencies

**9.1** If it comes to the attention of any agency that a child is missing, they must advise the parent/carer of their need to report this matter to the Police. They also need to advise the parent of the agency's duty to ensure that the matter is reported to the Police and if necessary, follow this up by contacting the Police to verify that the child has been reported missing.

### 9.2 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](#)".

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.

### 9.3 Healthcare Professionals

The need to inform other health services of the missing child and any particular 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 Departments
- 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 sexual exploitation, trafficking, forced marriage and female genital mutilation. Radicalisation, also is a risk factor for vulnerable young people, is managed via the national 'Prevent' strategy.

The NHS provides a comprehensive service for Looked After Children. A Designated Nurse and Doctor for Child Looked After are located in each Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). 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.

## 10 Strategic oversight & intelligence gathering

The Operational Risk and Vulnerability Panel contains a core membership (e.g. Police, Young Offending Service, AXIS, Missing Persons Unit, Gangs Unit, Education, Health, Prevent Programme, Probation, Housing etc) able to commit resources and make decisions.

The panel will consider cases where vulnerable young people who are at risk as a result of contextual safeguarding 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 & Vulnerability 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.

### 10.1 Collecting, Sharing and Analysing Data on Children who go Missing

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 in order 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.

## **Appendix 1: Related Guidance**

- Working Together to Safeguard Children (A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of Children) 2018.
- 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: Practice Guidance. 2011.
- Care of unaccompanied migrant children and child victims of modern slavery- Statutory guidance for local authorities, November 2017.
- Child Sexual Exploitation Prevention and Intervention Strategy 2015.
- Hillingdon Children and Families Procedures Manual
- Missing children: who cares? The police response to missing and absent children.

## Appendix 2: Definitions

- **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.
- **Care leaver:** an eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989.
- **Child:** anyone who has not yet reached their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people' throughout this guidance.
- **Missing:** Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed.
- **Host local authority:** the local authority in which a looked after child is placed when placed out of the responsible local authority's area.
- **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.
- **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.
- **Responsible local authority:** the local authority that is responsible for a looked after child's care and care planning.
- **Young runaway:** a child who has run away from their home or care placement or feels they have been forced or lured to leave.

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

- [Missing People – how we can help you](#)
- [Safelives - Safety Plan for Young People.](#)
- Staying safe – Information 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.](#)
- [Its not okay.](#)

## **Appendix: 4 Practice guidance for Trigger Plans**

This 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 casenote and emailed to EDT. The guidance below acts is not an exhaustive list of consideration but acts as a guide for these discussions.

### **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

## Appendix 5: Return Home Interview Template

### Return home interview

The interview should take the form of a conversation more than a formal interview.

1. Date of the interview
2. Name of the person completing the interview
3. How are you feeling today?

4. Explain the purpose of the discussion and explain confidentiality – discuss what information will need to be shared with other services and what information will always be kept confidential.

5. What has been happening recently? - Update on general life - this often leads to the discussion re where they have been/why they left

6. Where did you go when you were missing?

7. Were you with anyone/who?

8. Explore “Push Factors” which drove a child/young person to run away or go missing e.g. disputes with parent(s) or carer(s)

9. Explore “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, CSE, etc

10. Did you feel safe?

Drop down: YES/NO

11. Did anything happen that you were worried about/that we need to know about?

12. Is this going to happen again? What can we do to stop this from happening? How can we make sure you stay safe if this happens again?

13. Agree what happens next identifying as far as possible who will be doing what by when

14. Any supplementary information

15. Interviewer analysis

16. Name of the Team Manager

17. Name of the Independent Reviewing Officer (if applicable)

18. Name of the Child Protection advisor (if applicable)

19. Was the interview conducted face to face or over the phone

## Appendix 6 - Op Innerste Process Map



Innerste Process  
Map V2.pub