

Practice Guidance for Missing Children and Young People

Dorset Children's Services

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1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 This guidance sits alongside the Pan Dorset Safeguarding Procedures to provide a framework for a co-ordinated, standardised, and effective response by the local authority, police, and partner agencies in Dorset when children go missing. It also includes steps that should be taken to try to prevent them going missing again.
- 1.2 When a child goes missing or runs away from home, care, or school, they are at risk. The first part of this guidance therefore refers to protecting all children from the risks associated with going missing, whether they are looked after children or children who live within their family home. Later sections set out the additional steps to be taken regarding children missing from care or other settings.
- 1.3 Many children will exhibit normal adolescent behaviour in testing boundaries, and it is **not** helpful to consider every incident of lateness or absence for all people as missing. Young people must not be reported missing as a behaviour management tool. However, some children will need to be treated as missing immediately due to their vulnerability.

2. Definitions used in this guidance

- 2.1 People go missing for a wide variety of reasons, which makes providing a single, concise definition of a 'missing person' or what it is to 'go missing' very difficult. This guidance 'has been devised to support the implementation of Department for Education statutory guidance [Children who run away or go missing from home or care](#) (2014) and the [College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice](#) (2017). Department for Education statutory guidance is issued under Section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970, which requires local authorities in exercising their social services function to act under the general guidance of the Secretary of State. Local authorities must comply with this guidance when exercising these functions, unless local circumstances indicate exceptional reasons that justify a variation.
- 2.2 The College of Policing has issued Authorised Professional Practice (APP) [guidance](#) for missing persons (2017). Police officers and staff are expected to have regard to APP in discharging their responsibilities. There may, however, be circumstances when it is perfectly legitimate to deviate, provided there is clear rationale for doing so. APP states that: *“going missing should be treated as an indicator that the individual may be at risk of harm. The safeguarding of vulnerable people is paramount, and a missing person report should be recognised as an opportunity to identify and address risks. The reasons for a person deciding to go missing may be complex and linked to a variety of social or family issues.*

- 2.3 Three key factors should be considered in a missing person investigation:
- protecting those at risk of harm;
 - minimising distress and ensuring high quality of service to the families and carers of missing persons;
 - prosecuting those who perpetrate harm or pose a risk of harm when this is appropriate and supported by evidence.
- 2.4 This guidance complements Working Together to Safeguard Children and related statutory guidance (2018) and the Children Act (1989) guidance and regulation volumes in respect of care planning and review, and The Statutory Guidance on Children who run away from Home or Care (2014).
- 2.5 Children running away and going missing from care, home and education poses a significant operational challenge for the children's partnership, with Children's Society identifying that 100,000 children run away from home or care in the UK every year, equating to 144 children going missing or running away each day. When children run away, they are at risk of physical abuse, sexual exploitation and are forced to use risky survival strategies. Inspections have told us that the multi-agency response to missing children requires further development.
- 2.6 This procedure gives a high-level overview of our responsibilities to children missing from home, care, and education. Given the different needs, risks, service availability and implementation of the statutory guidance in each of our local police force and local authority areas, it is imperative that local processes, pathways, and expectations are well understood.

3. Action to be taken when a Child Goes Missing

3.1 Contacting Police

Information to give the police should be gathered before the call is made. This includes a check of their room to see what might be missing, what the child was wearing when last seen, time and place last seen, any other contact they have or information from a friend or school about where they were last seen, with whom, and what they think they were doing. Other important information to give to police is about risk of harm – e.g., is the child known to be exploited? by whom? Where? When? Is it likely this is happening now? Police also need the following to support with risk grading – what has changed if anything for the young person, what is your concern/worry on this occasion?

3.2 Risk Assessment / Investigation

- 3.2.1 Dorset Police receive a call reporting a child missing, the call handler will conduct an initial risk assessment to determine the appropriate status. The police will prioritise all episodes of children 'missing' from home or care to

investigate the disappearance and attempt to locate the child prior to them suffering any harm. The Police investigation and all resulting actions will be proportionate to the risk level and recorded on police recording system – ‘NICHE’.

High	The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the subject is in danger through their own vulnerability or may have been a victim of a serious crime; or the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger. If the child is known or believed to be at risk of exploitation, they must initially be categorised as ‘high’ risk missing.
Medium	The risk posed is likely to place the subject in danger, or they are a threat to themselves or others.
Low	In line with NPCC (National Police Chiefs’ Council) guidance it is no longer appropriate to classify children aged 18 years or under as low risk missing persons.

3.2.2 Once a case is generated on the NICHE system as “MISSING”, an Officer in Charge (OIC) will be appointed. The OIC and all subsequent officers will carry out a thorough investigation in line with the Dorset Police Policy on “Missing Persons”. It is at this point the OIC will contact the parent/carer to complete an OIC 1. This is to go to the home address of the child to gather as much information as possible and to complete a search. When the NICHE report is generated, the missing notification is sent to Children’s Advice & Duty (ChAD) Service.

3.2.3 Children Missing from Home and Care Flowchart (appendix 1) details actions to be taken following a Missing Notification being received by ChAD.

3.2.4 If the child is placed in Dorset by another local authority, ChAD will (if needed) create a new record for the child and record the information from the Missing Notification on MOSAIC. ChAD will then send the Missing Notification to the placing authority for them to arrange completion of a Return Home Interview. CHAD will co-ordinate a joint Strategy Discussion/Meeting if needed, inviting any professionals involved with the child.

4. For a Child in Care who is away from placement without authorisation, but whose location is known

4.1 Being away from their placement without authorisation but in a known location will not normally constitute a missing episode. Examples include where a child

is staying at a known location with a friend or having unauthorised family contact in a known location. The responsibility for managing this type of absence lies with the staff of the residential home or carer. If the carer has concerns for the child's safety, then the usual safeguarding procedures should be followed.

- 4.2 If the assessment of the carer is that there is no apparent risk for the child's immediate safety it is nonetheless important that staff/carers record these incidences as "away from their placement without authorisation" in the child's record, starting a dated/timed record of their contacts, risk assessment and decisions throughout the episode from the point that they are first aware of the child being away. They should notify the child's Social Worker or out of hours service within a timeframe consistent with the placement plan or missing plan for that child; no child should be away from placement without authorisation for more than 6 hours maximum, without the Social Worker or Out of Hours service being informed and consulted as to appropriate action.
- 4.3 Where the child remains absent in a known location, the local authority staff need to do an assessment of the risks, create a plan to mitigate those risks, and if manageable decide whether to allow the child to temporarily remain at that location, whilst they arrange for their return. Please note that any decisions need to be made in accordance with [guidance on unregulated placements](#).
- 4.4 If at any point a child's location becomes unknown, this becomes a missing episode and should be reported to the Police as at 3.1 above.

5. Daily Missing Meeting

- 5.1 This daily meeting is held to review all children who have been reported missing, and all children who have returned from missing within the past 24 hours (or during weekend if meeting is on a Monday).
- 5.2 Membership:
 - Police – Missing Team representative
 - ChAD Consultant Social Worker/ChAD Manager (Chair)
 - The Harbour Portfolio Lead Risk
 - Return Home Interviewers
 - ChAD Co-ordinator (business support)
- 5.3 The review will consider:
 - Risks and harm disclosed or observed when the child returned to family or carers;
 - Risks and harm identified by police whilst child was missing;
 - Risks and harm identified in circumstances that led to a child going missing;
 - Significant harm incidents that happened whilst missing;
 - Risks particular to the needs of any Looked After Children that went missing, including looked after children placed out of county

- Vulnerability to and risk of harm from exploitation; and
 - Perpetrators of serious harm
 - Other children who may have been with the child who was missing – either named by them or known via intelligence
- 5.4 Dorset Police Strategic Missing Persons Co-Ordinator will present a report of children who have been reported missing or found in last 24 hours (or weekend if meeting is on a Monday) or who are still missing. This summary will include the time the child went missing and was found; the place they were missing from and found and significant places they went whilst missing. The meeting will focus on intelligence sharing to find and locate missing persons and identify risk.
- 5.5 Dorset Police Strategic Missing Lead will identify any young person who has been missing 3 times in 90 days (as per College of Policing, Approved Professional Practice (APP)). They will enquire whether a Strategy discussion is required at this stage. If a Strategy discussion is not required, then a rationale will be provided from Children’s Services to Police Missing Team for their records. Please note, if a child is missing 3 times in 3 months, then a statutory response from Children’s Services is required based on the level of risk and need, as per the missing guidance.
- 5.6 The decision made in respect of the Police enquiry will depend on a number of factors, such as the young person receiving support under the MACE process, a recent Strategy discussion having been held or the level of need/risks identified can be managed via support that does not require a Strategy discussion (this is not an exhaustive list and any decision must be based on level of need and risks identified for the young person).
- 5.7 The Harbour Portfolio Lead Risk/ and Return Home Interview Lead will add information from social work and return home interviews, including name of social worker.
- 5.8 The summaries will be individually saved onto Mosaic and emailed to the Missing Team Strategic Co-Ordinator, child’s social worker or early help worker, their Team Managers and Locality CE and Missing Champions, including CE and Missing Champion Service Managers. It is the expectation that lead professionals notify the schools. For our children in care, it is expected that the Quality Assurance and Reviewing Officer is also notified.
- 5.9 All children who meet the criteria below will be timetabled for discussion at the following weekly IMPACT meeting by the CE and Missing Champion Service Manager.
- Child is being exploited and harmed
 - There are significant indicators of exploitation and harm
 - The child is perpetrating serious harm to others

- 5.10 A child who has, or is believed to have, suffered significant harm whilst missing will have notification for the need for a referral for a strategy meeting sent to allocated Social Worker and Team Manager or ChAD.
- 5.11 For all children who have suffered or at risk of serious and significant harm, or who have caused serious harm, a Need to Know Report will be started by the Service Manager. A Need to Know Report must be started where a child known to Children's Services who are missing overnight, or for more than four hours if the child is aged under 12. See the full [Need to Know Guidance](#) for more details.
- 5.12 When a child in care has been missing for 24 hours, or a child not in care has been missing for 72 hours and are still missing, an alert will be sent to the relevant Team Manager and Service Manager notifying them of the need to convene a Strategy discussion. It is important to note, that we do not wait until the 24 hours or 72 hours to convene a Strategy discussion if we believe that level of need and risk for this child is significant and therefore requires a Strategy discussion before this time. All strategy requests are sent to MASH – Police to co-ordinate the strategy discussion and include IMPACT Team as participants for children who are still missing.

6. Weekly Missing Meeting

- 6.1 This meeting will focus on children who have had more than one missing episode in the previous week and/or where significant safeguarding risks have been identified. This is to discuss the current level of risk/need, share new information and information from the Return Home Interview completed and inform care and support plans moving forward. This weekly meeting will also enable Police Strategic Missing Lead to update Police trigger plans. The allocated worker/carer should ensure the Philomena Protocol is being utilised and that the live document is updated accordingly.
- 6.2 Attendance at Weekly Missing Meeting:
Allocated Social Worker/Team Manager
ChAD Manager/ChAD Consultant Social Worker
Police Strategic Missing Lead
ChAD Co-Ordinator

7. Escalated and Urgent Intervention

- 7.1 Some children will need to be treated as high risk missing immediately due to their vulnerability. It may be that this has already been decided as part of the child's plan. However, the circumstances may differ and will require a judgement to be made by the person receiving the initial notification. If in doubt, this should be discussed through the line management chain – without delay.

7.2 Risk factors demanding escalated and urgent interventions include:

- Any child where the risk of significant harm in even a single future missing episode is very high;
- Where it has been identified that immediate action is necessary to ensure the safety of the child

7.3 If significant risk is identified immediately:

- **Social Worker:** to inform Team Manager, QARO if the child is looked after or subject to a CP Plan. If the child is looked after and placed outside of Dorset, the social worker must inform the Locality Service Manager or Head of Locality. Social worker to put a case note summary on mosaic.
- **Team Manager:** to take lead role of coordinating immediate safety plan with Missing Police Team. Team Manager to add a Case Note Summary including plan on MOSAIC.
- **Team Manager:** to arrange and Chair Strategy Meeting with Missing Police Team as soon as practicable to agree further action that is required to locate and see the child, and plan for when child is found. If high level of complexity or risk **Service Manager** should Chair the Strategy Meeting
- **Team Manager:** to inform Service Manager and if particularly high levels of risk indicating a significant level of harm or reputational risk complete 'Need to Know'.
- **Service Manager** to sign off 'Need to Know' and send Head of Locality. Service Manager to add a Case Note Summary including oversight of plan on MOSAIC.

8. Strategy Meetings for Missing Children

- 8.1 A strategy meeting when a child in care has been missing for 24 hours, or a child not in care has been missing for 72 hours, or when any child has been missing three or more times within a four-week period. The purpose is to ascertain the current level of risk/vulnerability and to formulate the strategy to find the child. It will also determine where the child is to be returned upon being located (note, this is not a forum for care planning).

Do not wait 24 or 72 hours to convene a strategy discussion if the risk is immediate

- 8.2 In considering the strategy to locate a missing child, discussions should consider what information each agency holds, both historical and current, in relation to **this** specific episode:
- **Harm;** what is the nature of harm? What is the evidence for this harm? Is the risk posed immediate, is it significant? Are there any additional complicating factors –age, communication, learning needs etc

- **Patterns**; is there a pattern of missing episodes that indicates either the nature of harm, specific or particular activity or locations?
- **Network**; what is the child's network? Family, friends, peers, and associates – any known names, young people and/or adults the child may be in contact with/going to and associated risks or protective factors?
- **Travel**; what means of travel has the child used – foot, bike, car, taxi, bus, train? How has this been facilitated (money, people, organisation)?
- **Accommodation**; Any known places the child may be/travelling to/likely to visit, any known addresses of friends/family.

8.3 *It is important to distinguish between that which is fact, that which is opinion and that which is hypothesis. This is particularly important when considering 'risk factors', for example a child who is missing can be considered at risk of Child Exploitation – on what basis, the fact they are missing and vulnerable does not necessarily equate to an active risk of Child Exploitation and it is important that we work on a proportionate balance of probabilities basis.*

8.4 **Actions must be drawn up with clear timescales, with clarity of who is doing what and when:**

- **Agency Checks**; who will contact Health, Education, Police, Probation, Community Safety, Anti-Social Behaviour Teams, other Local Authorities, Business Crime Reduction Partnership (as required)
- **Network**; who will contact identified persons including the child? How will they do so and when/at what intervals?
- **Travel**; dependent upon the pattern and mode of behaviours, have discussions been had with British Transport Police/local train and bus companies? Have images been shared with relevant agencies?
- **Other partners**; does the young person frequent local places/restaurants, e.g., McDonalds/Subway etc. Does contact need to be made? CCTV for example?
- **Publicity**; is publicity required? If the child is Looked After by the Local Authority, this should be agreed by the Corporate Director for Care and Protection. The family should be informed.

NB A strategy discussion can be a sit-down meeting or a series of phone discussions – the key determinant is urgency.

8.5 Outcome of Strategy Discussion

8.5.1 'The discussion should be used to:

- share available information
- agree the conduct and timing of any criminal investigation
- decide whether enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 must be undertaken

Where there are grounds to initiate an enquiry under section 47 of the Children Act 1989, decisions should be made as to:

- what further information is needed if an assessment is already underway and how it will be obtained and recorded
- what immediate and short-term action is required to support the child, and who will do what by when
- whether legal action is required'¹

8.5.2 It is the responsibility of the Chair to make a provisional arrangement for a reconvened strategy discussion in the event of the child continuing to be missing, or upon return, if there is evidence, they have experienced harm.

9. Notification of Missing Children according to specific circumstances

9.1 For children known to Children's Services who are missing overnight, a decision will be made based on level of need and risks present, as to whether a strategy discussion is required at this stage. If we believe the child is suffering or at risk of significant harm, then a strategy discussion should be convened at the earliest opportunity.

9.2 For any child aged under 12 who has been missing for more than 4 hours, a decision will be made based on level of need and risks present, as to whether a strategy discussion is required at this stage. If we believe the child is suffering or at risk of significant harm, then a Strategy discussion should be convened at the earliest opportunity.

9.3 For any Child in Care a strategy discussion must be held not more than 24 hours after they were reported missing.

9.4 For any other child a strategy discussion must be held not more than 72 hours after they were reported missing.

9.5 In each of the circumstances described at 8.1 to 8.4, the following procedure for notification and authorisation should be followed:

- **Team Manager** to inform the Service Manager, who will commence a Need to Know Report. using the 'Need to Know' template with the summary of missing circumstances, background, identified vulnerabilities, length of this missing episode and missing history, actions agreed at any strategy meeting with dates, risk assessment and plan for when child is located.
- **Service Manager** to add Case Note Summary to mosaic.
- **The Police will direct any media release.** If a request for media release is received from the Police, the Head of Locality will pass this to the Corporate Director Care and Protection and to the Executive Director. The Executive Director must authorise the media release. Out of Hours, the

¹ [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#), p.42, viewed June 2023

Senior Manager on Call will notify the Executive Director of the request and seek agreement.

- **Corporate Director** Care and Protection to review Need to Know document regularly, seeking assurance regarding any actions as required and advising Executive Director of any further concerns. They will also ensure that the relevant Head of Service or Service Manager adds a case note to Mosaic.

9.6 If a child in care has been missing for more than 72 hours, and any other child for more than 7 days, a second Strategy discussion should be held.

These are the maximum time limits; the second Strategy discussion should be held earlier where risks or other circumstances dictate.

- **Service Manager:** to Chair second strategy discussion to include cross local authority police teams involved, social worker and social care support staff, school Head of Year or Safeguarding Lead, foster carers or Registered Manager of children's home and other relevant professionals working with child and family. Ensure note taker is booked for the meeting.
- Review vulnerabilities and risk assessment, actions taken and outcomes of those actions, and ensure that all possible steps are being taken to locate and return the child; update Head of Locality.
- Any contact with the media must have the prior approval of the Executive Director as set out at 8.5.
- Agree steps to be taken when child is found, for those subject to Child Protection Plan liaise with QARO (consider Review Child Protection Conference) and liaise with IRO for CLA.
- **Service Manager:** to add Case Note Summary to mosaic
- **Service Manager** to provide summary of missing circumstances (updating Need to Know document) and actions being taken for Head of Locality to share with Corporate Director Care and Protection. Case note to be added by Service Manager to Mosaic. They will also update the Need to Know report
- **Executive Director:** To advise Chief Executive and Cabinet Members if required. They will add a case note where this happens

9.7 If a Child Remains Missing for a longer period:

- The Head of Locality will formally review all cases each week until the child is found.
- **Corporate Director Care and Protection and Executive Director of Children's Services** should formally review plan at monthly intervals – case must always remain open.

10. Action to be taken once a child has been found (to be read in conjunction with 10 and 11)

10.1 Listening to young people who have been missing, childcare agencies have heard the following statements:

- Be understanding, calm and relaxed with us
- Help us trust you and don't judge us
- Be straightforward and honest with us
- Listen to us and take us seriously
- Explain things to us
- Give us choices and don't force us into making decisions we don't understand
- Show us respect.

11. Safe and Well Checks (SWC)

11.1 All missing children should have a police or professional 'Safe and Well Check' upon return. (This is sometimes referred to as a 'prevention interview'). The purpose of a SWC is to:

- Check for any indications that the child has suffered - or is suffering - harm and follow normal Child Protection Procedures if relevant, including consideration of a referral to CHAD for this young person and / or others in the household
- Give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by, or against, them.

11.2 The Safe and Well Check will:

- Consider and record appearance and demeanour as well as verbal information
- Be recorded on the Police record on NICHE.

11.3 The information from the SWC is to be sent through to ChAD on a PPN notification/Missing Person return report and will be forwarded to the Return Home Interviewer to pick up on any observations made by the officer or disclosures and other important information provided by the child.

12. Return Home Interview (RHI)

12.1 When a child is found, in addition to the police Safe & Well Check, the child must be offered an independent Return Home Interview (RHI). This will be arranged and/or completed by Dorset Council's Harbour Return Home Interviewer for children who have a Dorset Council allocated social worker. The Targeted Youth Practitioners will undertake Return Home Interviews for all Dorset children who may be known to Early Help or not currently receiving a service from Dorset Children's Services. RHI's provide an opportunity for professionals to understand why the young person ran away, to uncover information that can be used to reduce the likelihood of the child going missing

again; to address the risks or incidents they may have been exposed to while missing and the risk factors in their home and social life.

- 12.2 The purpose of the Return Home Interview is to build up a comprehensive picture of why the child went missing and address this; specifically, to try to listen to the child and understand:
- What happened whilst they were missing?
 - Who they were with when they were missing and where they were found?
 - What support they require upon returning to home or their care placement in accordance with the 'Working Together' guidance?
- 12.3 Return Home Interview Guidance and an *aide memoire* are attached below. The Return Interviewer will ascertain whether another professional already has an established and positive relationship with the child and may request them to complete the RHI. Evidence shows that children and young people are more likely to disclose information regarding what happened to a trusted professional after they have been missing.
- 12.4 For a Looked after child who is away from placement without authorisation (please see Section 3 above) but *not reported as Missing* from a registered children's home or foster care, the carer must check that the child did not come to harm whilst away and that the child has the opportunity to talk about what happened, and to create a plan to reduce likelihood will happen again. The carer should contact the child's Social Worker if there are any concerns arising from the period they have been away.
- 12.5 A Return Home Interview must always be a priority when the child has:
- has been hurt or harmed while they have been missing;
 - is at known or suspected risk of sexual exploitation or trafficking;
 - is at known or suspected risk of involvement in criminal activity or drugs;
 - has contact with people posing risk to children; and/or
 - has been engaged (or is believed to have engaged) in criminal activities while missing.
 - have been reported missing on two or more occasions or who are frequently away from placement (or their home) without authorisation
- 12.6 The assessment of whether a child might run away again should be based on information about:
- their individual circumstances, including family circumstances;
 - their motivation for running away;
 - their potential destinations and associates;
 - their recent pattern of absences;
 - the circumstances in which the child was found or returned; and

- their individual characteristics and risk factors such as whether a child has learning difficulties, mental health issues, depression, and other vulnerabilities.

12.7 Prior to any interview conducted with a child, the interviewer should inform the young person who this information will be shared with, when and why, and gain consent before sharing. If they are unwilling to accept an interview for fear of confidentiality issues they should be encouraged to call the 'Missing People' confidential Freephone helpline on 116 000 or 'Childline' on 0800 1111.

12.8 The Interviewer needs to provide the child with information about what a return interview is about before they take part so they can fully contribute. By the end of the interview the interviewer should have made it clear to the young child what they are worried about and what steps they may take to address this. The RHI will be an opportunity to share information with the child on how to stay safe, including helpful numbers to call if they choose to run away again. Local community support services will also be discussed with the child, and appropriate referrals can be made from the RHI. Information gained through this interview is fed back to the child's social worker or lead professional and Locality CE and Missing Champions and to Police using the completed Return Home Interview Form. Themes or areas/persons of concern are identified and inform into the monthly CE and Missing Champions Meeting and the monthly CAROLE Group.

12.9 Where children do not engage with the independent interviewer, parents and carers should be offered the opportunity to provide any relevant information and intelligence of which they may be aware. This should help to prevent further instances of the child running away and identify early the support needed for them. Any information or support available to parents should also be considered.

12.10 If a child returns and discloses significant harm or there is evidence of harm having taken place or an ongoing risk of harm likely, a further strategy discussion is required for that specific incident/allegation.

13. Weekly IMPACT Partnership Meeting

13.1 Children who are identified by the Daily Missing Meeting as having come to harm or where there are indicators of harm or exploitation will be notified to the Locality Service Manager or Head of Locality and scheduled for discussion at weekly IMPACT Meeting by The Harbour Manager.

13.2 The IMPACT Partnership Meeting is a tactical group that sits beneath FTM and MOCU. The overarching aim of this meeting is to identify opportunities to investigate criminal offences, safeguard children and pursue and disrupt those

who seek to exploit them. The tactical delivery overseen by the IMPACT Partnership Meeting focuses on the following:

- Safeguarding children at risk of exploitation
- Identifying problem locations for Child Exploitation
- Identifying peer groups linked to Child Exploitation
- Intelligence collection and development opportunities.
- Identifying suspects who are criminally or sexually exploiting children.
- Reducing repeat missing episodes for children.
- Accountability and ownership of both children at risk and of suspects.
- Partnership and cross command working.
- Reflecting the voice of the child (behaviour and demeanour).

13.3 The priority areas for this group will be:

- Child Sexual Exploitation
- Child Criminal Exploitation
- Missing
- Safeguarding
- Human Trafficking

13.4 Group Members:

- **Chair** – DI IMPACT
- IMPACT DS
- Children’s Social Care
- Police Intelligence Directorate
- Youth Offending Service
- Safer Schools
- BCP ASB Team
- NPT Representative – As required

13.5 Agenda

- Actions from last meeting
- Children at Risk
- Locations of Concern
- Missing Children
- Priorities for the week ahead

13.6 The agenda will include a short summary of why the child is at heightened vulnerability.

13.7 The Harbour Manager/Risk Lead will also attend to represent children placed in The Harbour Residential Homes in Dorset or by other local authorities. The information shared at the weekly IMPACT Meeting will feed into the monthly CE Champions Meeting and the monthly CAROLE Group.

14. Additional Considerations for Children Missing from Care - The Care Plan

14.1 Prior to each accommodation arrangement for a child in care, the social worker must consider within the care planning process all potential risks to the child including an assessment of the potential for them to go missing. The child and their parent/carer should be involved in the planning process and it should be related to that individual's needs, previous history, and views. Missing episodes prior to the child becoming looked after must be considered.

14.2 When placing outside Dorset, it is even more critical to properly assess the above issues. If there is a need to discuss specific risks or issues, the child's social worker will speak to the Safeguarding Unit in the Authority in which the child would live. When a placement is confirmed, the Dorset Placement Team **must always** follow the Formal Notification Process to inform the new Authority that a Child in Care is being placed in their area. The child's social worker will inform the authority of the Safety / Trigger Plan.

14.3 The initial Placement Plan is an opportunity for the care provider/foster carer and the social worker to discuss with the young person issues around going missing and absent and to explain the rules and responsibilities of all involved. It is also the opportunity to provide the carer with details of the young person and their family and history. This will help carers to understand any risks to the young person or themselves if they go missing and it may help to locate the young person. The Placement Plan should cover:

- Trigger points for absence or missing episodes;
- Risks to themselves, the public and/or the carer before, during or after a missing episode including when being picked up;
- What steps can be taken to reduce the likelihood of the child going missing and coming to any harm or harming others.
- Friends and family details and contact numbers as well as addresses commonly found at;
- Expectations of the young person: e.g., curfew; when and how to make contact; consequences of lateness etc.
- Expectations of the care provider / foster carer:
 - at what point the Police will be notified, the information the police will need, what processes will follow an incident, who will collect a child if they are missing, details of who conducts immediate assessments on their return and support arrangements for full return interviews etc.

- to immediately inform social worker / Out of Hours and keep them constantly up to date
 - to attend Strategy Meetings where appropriate
- 14.4 All these elements should be reviewed during the care planning process. (More detailed and specific guidance can be found at the end of this document).
- 14.5 For children who are placed in residential care there is further guidance in the NMS & Children's Homes Regulations.
- 14.6 In addition, when a young person who is looked after goes missing their QARO must be informed.**

15. The Philomena Protocol

- 15.1 The Philomena Protocol is nationally recognised by all Police forces as good practice for children who go missing from home or care. The Philomena protocol is an information sharing form that supports parents and carers to consider what actions should be taken prior to reporting a child as missing to the police, as well as having a regularly updated record of important information about the child that will support the missing investigation once reported to Police.
- 15.2 The Philomena Protocol form should be completed by the carers of all children in care where there is an identified risk of a child going missing or they regularly go missing from placement and parents who have children who are at risk or regularly go missing from home. The Philomena Protocol form should be retained by the carer and be accessible for sharing with Police if a child needs to be reported missing. Parents and Carers should be encouraged to follow the recommended steps including making attempts to contact the child, contacting friends or family members to locate the child and room checks prior to contacting Police.
- 15.3 The Philomena Protocol form should be transferrable to all Police forces across the country and therefore should move with any child in care who has to move placements out of area.

16. Police Trigger Plans

- 16.1 Trigger Plans are used by police as a single source of information that enables them to locate a missing person quickly and efficiently. Police have a lot of separate pieces of information on each person, and control room, or the officers dealing with the missing person, must ensure that they have all the vital information needed, this could be anything from important/lifesaving medication to, for example, the fact that a person will not speak to female officers. This information is easy to find via the use of a trigger plan.

16.2 It is important that Children's Services support the creation of accurate trigger plans by ensuring information are up to date. This will promote information sharing and agency contact, to ensure the missing episode is appropriately graded on risk and enquiries can commence as a priority. Police colleagues recognise that Children's Services workers will often know the child better than they do, as of course, will parents and carers. Therefore, supporting the completion of this document and ensuring updates are provided when requested, will support in a greater understanding of the missing child's needs, risks, and circumstances.

17. Parental Responsibility

17.1 When a child or young person is reported 'Missing', the carer(s), Local Authority with Parental Responsibility (PR) and the police have **joint** responsibility for protecting the wellbeing of the individual. Whilst the police are the lead professionals for the investigation of 'Missing' people, any child who is Looked After by the Local Authority remains the responsibility of that Local Authority at all times.

17.2 Equally, the act of reporting a child or young person MISSING (or Absent) by staff at the residential home or foster home does not absolve the carers from their 'duty of care' to the individual and of continued duty to do what a 'reasonable parent' would do. It is good practice for the care provider to record all incidents of absence to build a picture of behaviour.

18. Publicity concerning Looked After Children who are missing

18.1 Police will discuss any prospective publicity concerning a child or young person missing from care with the child's care provider, and social worker.

18.2 Any media release concerning a child in care must have the prior approval of the Executive Director.

18.3 Children's Services will notify a child's parents/next of kin prior to the release of any publicity.

18.4 In a situation of immediate risk of harm, the police will risk assess publicity for High Risk missing children and will notify social worker and care provider as soon as practicable of the decision.

19. Looked After Children Placed outside of Dorset

19.1 Carers have responsibility for notifying missing incidents to:

- The local missing police team in the Local Authority in which the child is residing
- MASH in the Local Authority in which the child is residing,
- The Local Authority which has Parental Responsibility – i.e., Dorset via CHAD and the child's social worker.

- 19.2 The child's social worker will be responsible for:
- Arranging a joint strategy meeting with the placing authority MASH; with IMPACT (if significant risk of CE) or MASH in Dorset and the local Missing Police Team in the local authority where the child is placed, if this is outside of Dorset
 - Reviewing the safety plan and take steps to prevent the child from missing again.

20. Children Missing from School or their Educational setting

- 20.1 If a young person under 16 (or 18 if in care) is found to be missing from a school or educational facility (College / University), the educational authorities must inform the person or organisation with parental responsibility. It is the parent's / carer's responsibility then to notify the police of the missing child. If the individual is aged over 16 years (over 18 years if in care), the educational authorities may decide to report the individual missing directly to the Police.
- 20.2 The only exceptions to the provisions of 19.1 are:
- When manager or Head makes a professional judgement that circumstances indicate too high a risk so any delay must be avoided, such as for very young children or people with Special Educational Needs or disabilities;
 - Those resident at the school or educational facility (i.e., Boarding school) when staff may decide to report the individual missing directly to the police;
 - In cases where the educational establishment cannot get in contact with the person with parental responsibility;
 - If the school has concerns about compromised parenting and / or believes the parents will not report the young person missing in a timely manner. Schools should follow their usual Safeguarding procedures and report to Social Care where they have concerns for the child's safety and welfare during or following a missing or any absent episode.
- 20.3 UK Visas and Immigration can support partner agencies with information on children who are, or who are suspected to be, subject to immigration control who are missing from education.
- 20.4 Missing from school or an educational setting should not be confused with "Missing from Education" which is about an individual's access, or lack of access, to education rather than their physical location.

21. Children missing with their families

- 21.1 Where children are believed to be missing with their families, Police may make use of information as follows:
- The local DWP office should be asked to search local and national records for information;
 - The Child Benefit Agency on **0845 302 1444**, for any information they can supply;
 - UK Visas and Immigration can be contacted if it is suspected the child may be being taken out of the country without permission. Police have established procedures to obtain exit information from the UKVI National Border Targeting Centre (NBTC). This unit has access to electronic records of all passengers leaving the UK. In association with UKVI and Special Branch, arrangements could be put in place for the child and any accompanying persons to be potentially stopped at the airport / port.
- 21.2 Consideration should also be made of any vulnerable adults within the family or any possibility that the family are running away from a threat due to Domestic Abuse or 'Honour-based violence' etc. These elements should be shared by Social Care with the Police.

22. Child Exploitation

- 22.1 There is a strong link between young people going missing from home or care and their being at risk of exploitation. Statistics from Missing People and from Catch22's Services show that:
- 1 in 7 of the children who completed return home interviews [had been sexually exploited](#).
 - 1 in 5 children who completed return home interviews [disclosed information about mental health issues](#).
 - 1 in 10 children who completed return home interviews had been a victim of criminal exploitation.²
- 22.2 Concerns around suspected exploitation could include:
- The child is repeatedly reported missing from home;
 - The child is known to be visiting locations or addresses which raise suspicions around sexual or criminal exploitation;
 - The child has unexplained money, gifts, mobile phones etc;
 - The child has additional vulnerability; this is linked to the age of the child.
- 22.3 If child exploitation is suspected or a risk then the Pan Dorset CE procedures should be referred to.

23. Further Guidance/Information

² Source, *Missing People* website, July 2022

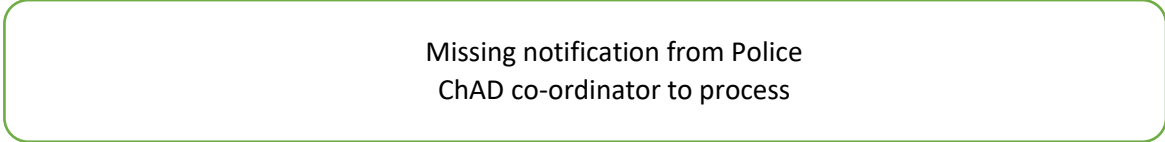
[DoE Statutory Guidance Missing from care published 2014](#)

[The Childrens Society APPG Report for runaway and missing children 2012](#)

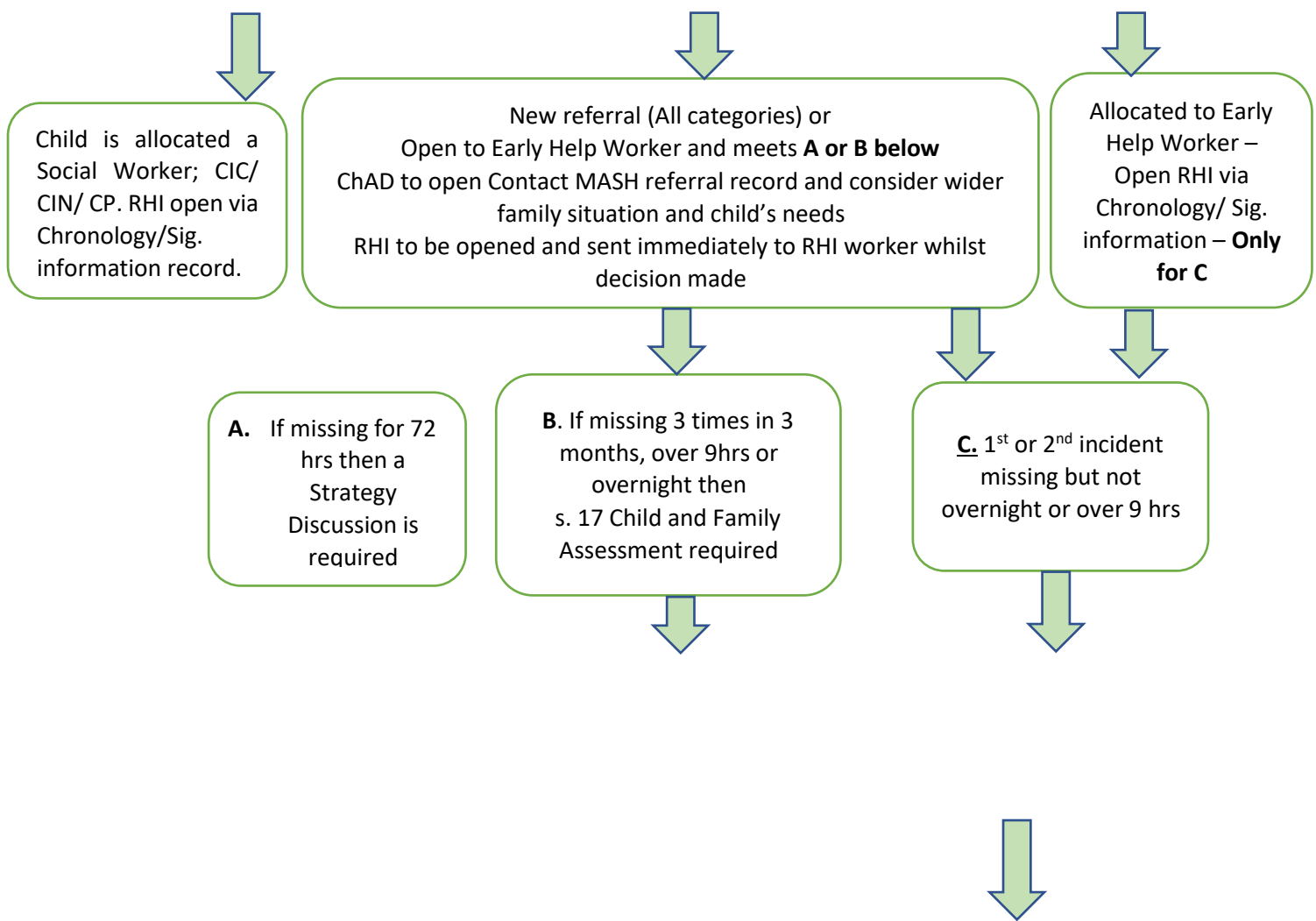
[Still in harm's way Report 2018 from ECPAT and Missing People Charity](#)

[Govt Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018](#)

Appendix 1 Children missing from home or care flow chart

A rectangular box with rounded corners and a thin green border. It contains two lines of text: "Missing notification from Police" and "ChAD co-ordinator to process".

Missing notification from Police
ChAD co-ordinator to process



Appendix 2 Notifications – CE and Missing Champions

CE Lead – Paula Golding (Social Care),

Contextual Safeguarding Lead Simon Fraiz-Brown (Targeted Youth Support)

Missing Lead – Emma Pleece (Social Care)

CE and Missing Champion Service Manager – Karen Wardle

North

Inclusion Team Manager – Stuart Gosney
Targeted Youth Worker – Samuel Lawrence
North locality team Service Manager – Amanda Conolly

East

Inclusion Team Manager – Rachel Knights
Targeted Youth Worker – Jo Hutson
East Locality team Service Manager – Ben Parker

Purbeck

Inclusion Team Manager – Jenny Eldridge
Targeted Youth Worker – Anne-Marie Burr
Purbeck Locality Team Service Manager – Ben Parker

Dorchester

Inclusion Team Manager – David Alderson
Targeted Youth Worker – Josh Why
Dorchester Locality Team Service Manager – Louisa Swabey-Payne

West

Inclusion Team Manager – Nicola Shoemark
Targeted Youth Worker – Louise Donovan
West Locality Team Service Manager – Louisa Swabey-Payne

Chesil

Inclusion Team Manager – Natasha Scully
Targeted Youth Worker – Rachel Janaway
Chesil Locality Team Service Manager – John Twigg

The Harbour

Service Manager – Paula Bates
Manager – Claire Cootes
Portfolio Lead Risk – Suzanne Pinney

Appendix 3 Philomena Protocol



There may be important pieces of information that you are able to provide the Police in the event that the person you are caring for has gone missing. Try and have several copies of recent, close-up photographs of the person, this may help your staff and the Police when searching for them.

This form is interactive and must be completed electronically. Upon completion, it must be stored as its own version electronically. It should be updated regularly electronically and part 2 fully completed following a missing report. This form should only ever be printed on the request of a representative of Dorset Police following the young person being reported missing.

In the event of any concerns that the missing episode is linked to a criminal offence, please call Dorset Police asap with all the information you hold.

Part 1 - (to be completed when it has been identified the individual is at risk of going missing)

Name:				
Preferred/known as:				
Date of birth:		Age:		
Ethnicity:				
Male/Female:				
Current address:				
Postcode:				
Parents details and address if different to the above:				

GP name and address:	
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Health condition(s) (Please include any mental health conditions known):	
Medication required – if so, what:	

General description:	
Height:	
Weight:	
Build:	
Hair Colour:	
Eyes:	
Jewellery:	
General Appearance:	
Distinguishing features – tattoos/ birth marks/ piercings broken down <i>Feature/what it is/and where it is (i.e., ear pierced/wears a gold stud/both ears OR Tattoo/dragon with heart/top of left leg)</i>	
Associates (with contact details if known):	
Favourite places:	

Is the young person looked after by the Local Authority. If so, is this under Section 20 or a Care Order to the Local Authority:	
Social Worker name & contact Details:	
Professionals working with the child:	

Has a CE assessment been completed with Social Services and the Police?	
Are there any know individuals they are not to associate with?	
Are there any locations they are not allowed to go to?	

Are there any current bail conditions/YOS/ASBI's?	
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Previous home addresses:	1.	
	2.	
	3.	

School/Educational Establishment attended:	1.	
	2.	
	3.	

Previous Missing Episodes:	
Previous locations found: (Provide all recent information – List all locations)	
Any Significant dates, birthdays of parents/deaths etc.:	
Significant places of interest:	
Habits:	
Hobbies:	
Drugs (Please include any known addictions or alcohol misuse):	
Any suicidal thoughts/attempts (Please include and self-harm or thoughts to harm others):	

Has the person got any money?	Yes/No	If so, How much?	
Has the person Got a Bank Account:	Yes/No	Have you got access to this account? (If not, who has)	Yes/No

Name of bank:		Sort Code:		-		-	
Account Number:		Do you hold the Password to access this account?	Yes/No				

Has the person got a mobile phone?		Yes/No	
Number:		Network:	
Make:		Model:	
IMEI Number:		Mac Address:	

Does the person have a bus pass?	Yes/No	Provide details E.g. Pass number and Issuer.	
Does the person have access to vehicle(s)?	Yes/No	Provide details e.g. Registration Number/ Driver etc.	

Does the person have a social Media Accounts (Provide Details)?			Yes/No	
Social media site:		Username:		Please let us know the password if known:
Social media site:		Username:		Please let us know the password if known:
Social media site:		Username:		Please let us know the password if known:
Social media site:		Username:		Please let us know the password if known:
Social media site:		Username:		Please let us know the password if known:

What is the current policy in place around a person going missing:	
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What multi-agency discussions have taken place to prevent the young person going missing and are those agencies aware of the need to assist to look for the young person in the event of a missing episode?	
What discussions have taken place with the young person to prevent them going missing and what have you put in place to reduce the likelihood of this happening?	

Part 2 – To be completed when the person goes missing, BEFORE contacting the Police:

Call the missing person – record times attempts made:	
Call any know associates or family members and record attempts made:	
Complete bed checks and record the time the calls were made: RBGH – 01202 704169 PGH – 01202 442369 DCH – 01305 255541 YDH – 01935 384355 SDH – 01722 429163	

Description of what the person was last seen wearing. Include colour, designer labels/brands:

Shirt/Sweater:	
Trousers/Skirt:	
Outerwear, e.g., coat, jacket:	
Headwear:	
Gloves:	
Scarf:	
Footwear:	
Jewellery, e.g., watch, rings:	
Other:	

Time, date, and location last seen:	
Does anyone pose a risk to YP (Please provide evidence):	
Does the YP pose risk to anyone (Please provide evidence):	

Media release?	Yes/No	On-call manager aware?	Yes/No
Persons informed of child missing (example Parent, EDT, Social Worker, Professionals involved etc.):			
Details of other staff on duty at the time of missing report:			
Any other information that may be of help to the Police including why you feel the person is missing or what has changed:			
This section should be completed in conjunction with the premises searched Form.			
Have you searched the address the young person is missing from?		Yes/No	
Have you completed and marked off the areas searched as per premises plan?		Yes/No	
Name and position of person searching:			
Signature of person searching and completing plan:			
Have you searched the young person's bedroom?		Yes/No	
Name and position of person searching:			
Signature of person searching:			
Please detail any information or items located:			
Please detail any information or items missing:			

This should be completed in conjunction with the <i>Risk assessed locations & contacts to assist to locate a missing child form</i> .
What enquiries have already been completed to try and locate missing person prior to reporting to the police:

What enquiries will you continue to do whilst the young person is missing (include how often you will complete these):
How will you record this and notify the police that you have done these enquiries:
What arrangements have been made to collect the young person when located:

If the person is still missing call 101 to report the missing incident and include all the details from part 2.

Completed by:	
Relationship to the person:	
Date:	
Police informed:	

It is the responsibility of the agency completing and the recipient to protect the information from theft and compromise. The information on this form is restricted and therefore must be securely stored.

Appendix 4 Return Home Interviews Guidance

A good Return Home Interview can help understand and address the reasons why a child has run away; it can identify harm; help the child feel safe; provide them with information on how to stay safe; and allow professionals to identify actions to help them.

The purpose of the interview is to understand the reasons a young person has run away or gone missing, looking at what else might be going on in their life. The Return Home Interview is an opportunity to speak to an independent professional that is a different adult to those already working with the young person. This independent adult can provide appropriate follow up with referrals or signposting. The interview is an opportunity for children to speak to an independent professional who can provide appropriate follow up with referrals or signposting.

The initial contact with the child will create the opportunity for a successful interview. If you are making contact by phone, you have a very short amount of time to engage the child – they need to understand all that you are saying (no jargon), who you are and why you are calling, and they need to hear that you are friendly, trustworthy, and fair.

If they don't engage from the phone call, a letter can allow you to clearly explain to the young person why they should talk to you, so they have time to digest the information before you call them.

Before you go to undertake a Return Home Interview, look at the information from the missing report and return report and at any relevant information on Mosaic.

Discuss confidentiality at the beginning

Make sure they understand what information will need to be shared with other services and what information will always be kept confidential. When discussing consent, limits to confidentiality and safeguarding it is best practice to make some of the following considerations prior to the interview:

How will the information be used?

Will this information be shared directly with professionals already involved with the child?

Does the child understand and consent with full knowledge of the limitations of confidentiality?

The child must feel safe and comfortable with the interviewer to be able to share difficult information with them.

Arrange to hold the interview in a neutral place where the child feels safe, if possible. If you have to conduct the interview at home, it is important that you speak to the young person alone, but also make sure you give parents or carers space to talk about their concerns.

Turn up on time - you said you cared when you phoned – but don't be surprised if they have forgotten they are meeting you or don't want to talk to you now.

Your conversation needs to be caring, creative, conversational and courageous to develop a sharing culture and relationship - use child friendly discussion techniques.

Be friendly and listen to how they want to proceed. It is important to ensure that they feel they can talk to you in the future; some young people run away frequently and may be referred to your service again.

Have a problem free conversation with them first before you start taking notes - you need to form a trusting relationship.

Try to identify the reasons the child gives for going missing or running away

- Was this the first time the child went missing or has it happened before?
- Did the child go alone or with others? Were they persuaded to go by someone else?
- Did they try to resolve the problem before it caused them to run away and if so, why didn't this work?
- Does the problem/trigger still exist?

Where did the child go or stay - How did they get access to food, money, transport, clothing, etc? Did they get involved in criminal activity? Did they seek or need medical help?

Did they get help from anyone while they were missing – did they enter into any relationship, particularly if it made them feel uncomfortable? Were they harmed or at risk of harm from other people?

How did they feel – did they feel physically and mentally healthy? Did they feel bullied or pressured? Were there signs of stress, depression or self-harm? Were they involved in substance misuse?

What led them to return or be found? How did they feel about returning?

What Next?

A return interview is only effective if appropriate follow up support is offered to the young person to help them deal with the issues that caused them to run away or they experienced while they ran away.

Do the things that caused the child to go missing still exist? What does the child see as the risk involved with running away again? What alternatives to running away might there be? What does the child think might be done to prevent them from running away again?

Potential Push Factors to look out for:

- Problems at home – ranging from arguments with parents to longer term abuse or maltreatment.
- Family break up – young people drawn into their parents’ conflicts are less likely to do well at school and more likely to truant or run away from home.
- Mental Health – a disproportionate number of young people who run away from home have poor mental health.
- Bullying – children who are being severely bullied are more likely to run away from home or care.
- Teenage pregnancy – some young women run away because they have become or fear they may be pregnant.
- Emotional health – children who are struggling with their self-esteem, emotional well-being or sexual identity are more likely to run away from home or care.

Potential Pull Factors to look out for:

- Running to be with or near friends or family – especially when a child is in care and there are problems with contact arrangements with family and friends.
- Grooming for potential child exploitation or child trafficking –children do not usually recognise they are being groomed but respond to the initial affection or perceived kindness of an adult who is seeking to exploit them. They may see that adult as one who has promised to ‘look after’ them.

Put a plan in place to address any issues identified during the return interview. Always tell the child what you plan to do with what they have told you.

Assess whether they might run away again and identify any immediate or long-term follow-up support such as counselling or a police referral.

Tell them what you will do and agree what you will feed back to professionals, or their parents/ carers, if it isn't a safeguarding concern.

Confidentiality - If a young person has disclosed something, they need to be reminded that you will pass this on if it is a concern. Do not break confidentiality without agreement. Talk through any consequences of sharing information with you and get agreement.

Be clear to the young person about the limitations of your support from now on, while also being clear on how they can reach you if they need to.

Your aim is to ensure that action by the relevant agencies is taken to reduce the risks the young person faces when running away and that intelligence is passed on.

Follow up with the young person and any professional within a week to see what action has taken place.

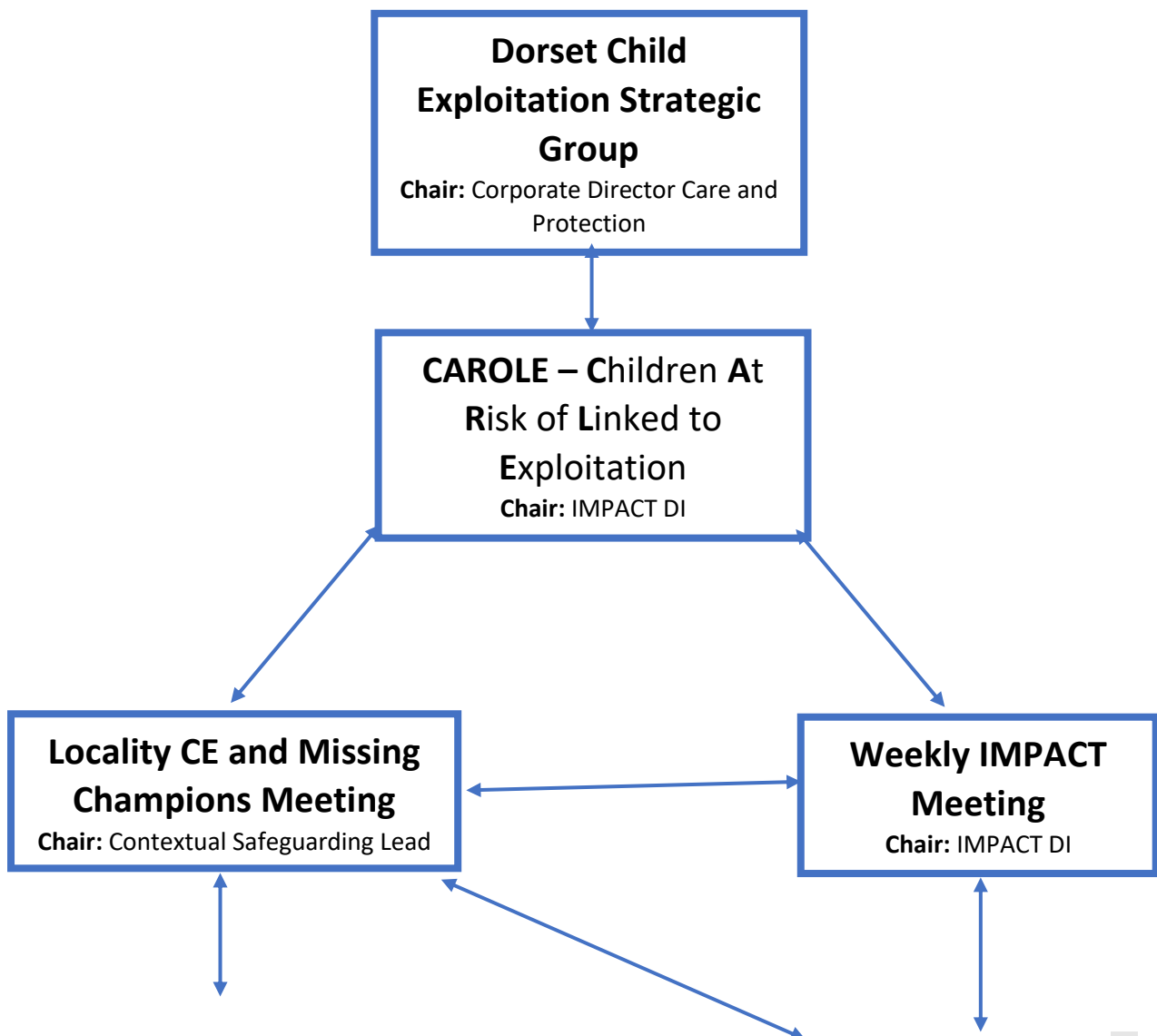
Recording information

Information disclosed by the young person in a return interview should be collected onto the Child's record on Mosaic using the Missing Child Episode e.g., where they were, who they were with and what happened while they were away (see template below).

The information given by the child must be shared with the social worker or lead professional at the earliest opportunity, along with any plan you have made with the child for follow on support or referrals to other agencies.

Let the IMPACT Team and Locality CE and Missing Champions know of any 'hot spots', areas where children are going missing to, and individuals who target children for sexual exploitation. This evidence can help the police with their investigations and targeted services to be aimed at problem areas.

Appendix 5 Governance



**Locality Youth at Risk
Meeting in each
Locality**

**Daily Missing
Meeting**
Chair: ChAD
Manager/Consultant Social
Worker

Appendix 6 Resources

[Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care](#), Department for Education (2014)

[Working Together to Safeguard Children](#), HM Government (Draft, 2018)

[Conducting good return interviews for young people who run away](#), The Children's Society

[The value of Return Home Interviews and follow-up support when young people go missing](#), Railway Children (2015)