London Borough of Tower Hamlets Multi-Agency Protocol for Missing Children

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1. **Purpose**

This protocol explains the arrangements agreed between London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH) Children’s Services, Metropolitan Police – Central East – Basic Command Unit (CE-CU) and other partners for dealing with children who go missing. The purpose of the protocol is to assist practitioners across all agencies to develop a robust response to children who go missing. This will include preventing the child suffering harm and recovering them to a place of safety as soon as possible.

Children who are missing from home may be at greater risk of harm because of their basic need for food, safety, and shelter and/or from the people with whom they may come into contact. Risks can include but are not limited to, physical harm, sexual exploitation, drug abuse and involvement in a range of other criminal activities. Additional vulnerability due to their age, level of understanding or the significance and seriousness of the circumstances that led to the missing episode may also be present. Consideration should be given to any missing episode regarding any indication that something is not right in a child’s life.

1. **Scope**

Safeguarding children and vulnerable people is a responsibility of the police service and partner agencies [**Children Act 2004**](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/contents)

The protocol covers all children under the age of 18 who go missing, including:

• All children who go missing from their family home including those subject of a child in need or child protection plan.

• All children in the care of LBTH placed in the local area.

• All children in the care of LBTH placed outside of LBTH with a host local authority.

• All children in the care of a responsible local authority who are placed in LBTH.

• All children admitted to hospitals and mental health units in LBTH.

• Children from other Local Authority areas who are at risk of significant harm.  
  
The above outlines the responsibilities of the LBTH LA, but it is to be noted that within the MPS the responsibility for the investigation of the Missing Persons rests with the BCU where the person missing was at that time normally residing, that is the person’s home address, hotel, hostel, etc.

1. **Related procedures**

The guidance in this protocol should not be read in isolation. Additional guidance should be followed alongside this document and can be found at the Pan-London Child protection procedures and the College of Policing (CoP) APP (relevant to the police). Where there are amendments to the CoP APP, those will take precedence over this protocol regarding Police procedures.

* [(londonsafeguardingchildrenprocedures.co.uk)](https://www.londonsafeguardingchildrenprocedures.co.uk/index.html)
* the College of Policing APP (<https://www.college.police.uk/app/major-investigation-and-public-protection/missing-persons>)

This is particularly significant when working with missing children who are at additional risk/vulnerability due to:

• Child Exploitation (Criminal and or Sexual)

• Domestic abuse

• Involvement in criminal activity or drugs/County Lines/criminal exploitation

• Self-harm

• Children with disabilities

• Extra familial abuse, and/or

• Previously trafficked children

1. **Agency leads for missing children**

The CE-CU Police Missing Person Unit (MPU) Single Point of Contact (SPoC) is based within the co-located Exploitation Service and can be emailed at [CEMailbox.MissingPersonUnit@met.police.uk](mailto:CEMailbox.MissingPersonUnit@met.police.uk)

The Central Met Police Missing Coordinator supports the CE-CU MPU SPoC.

The Police CE-CU MPU Strategic Lead is the Detective Superintendent for Public Protection.

The Local Authority Missing Children Strategic Lead is the Head of Exploitation.

1. **Definitions**

**Local authority:**

**Unauthorised absence** - a child in care whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be (absent) and the carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority (usually to the allocated Social Worker, the Emergency Duty Team, or Supervising Social Worker).

**Missing child** is a child whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character, or the context suggest the child may be subject of crime or risk of harm to themselves or another and whose family or carers have reported them as missing to the police.

**Police:**

**Absent** – The CoP APP defines Absent as:  
There is no apparent risk or harm to either the subject or to the public. Actions to locate the child and/or gather further information should be agreed with the informant and a latest review time set to reassess the risk.

**Missing** – The CoP APP defines Missing as:   
Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed.   
  
Any future amendments of the CoP APP definitions will take primacy over the above definition and located on [Missing persons | College of Policing](https://www.college.police.uk/app/major-investigation-and-public-protection/missing-persons/missing-persons))

The **responsible local authority** is the local authority that is responsible for a child in care and their care planning.

The **host local authority** is the local authority in which a child in care is placed when placed out of the responsible local authority’s area.

1. **Joint response to missing children**

To achieve best working practice, and in the best interests of all children, it is necessary that the joint responsibility between the local authority, police and parents and carers (including placements), are clearly outlined, understood, and fulfilled. Police will fulfil an investigative and safeguarding role for all children reported missing, but in turn will expect relevant and appropriate support from parents and corporate parents prior to, and for the duration of, any reported incident, as well as ongoing preventative measures for such incidents. The below table outlies this:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **LA response** | **Police Response** | **Other agency response** | **Parent/carer response** |
| The allocated social worker/MASH practitioner should contact the family and ascertain further information about the circumstances of the child going missing.  Attempts should also be made to contact the child and try to ascertain their whereabouts and safety.  If the child contacts social care and provides information about their whereabouts, any potential risks, this should be communicated to the police immediately. Parents and carers should also be notified.  The Exploitation Service will discuss and review the missing child during daily morning briefing with the police and will remain in regular contact with the allocated social worker or MASH practitioner.  LA should arrange a multi-agency strategy meeting if the child has been missing for three or more days. However, a strategy meeting should be convened immediately if there are immediate safeguarding concerns for the child.  Weekly review meetings should be arranged for a missing child who has not been located. | The incident will be recorded.  A risk assessment will be conducted.  Risk assessment should be guided by the College of Policing Risk principles, the National Decision Model and Police Code of Ethics.  [Risk | College of Policing](https://www.college.police.uk/app/risk/risk#risk-principles)  [National decision model | College of Policing](https://www.college.police.uk/app/national-decision-model?s=)  [Code of Ethics | College of Policing](https://www.college.police.uk/ethics/code-of-ethics)  The Police will respond to all reports of missing children using a nationally agreed continuum of risk ranging from low through to high-risk cases that require immediate, intensive action.   The CE-CU response to any missing person investigation will be dictated by the CoP APP: [Missing person investigations | College of Policing](https://www.college.police.uk/app/major-investigation-and-public-protection/missing-persons/missing-person-investigations)  The CE-CU expectations are set out in the CoP APP: [Expectations | College of Policing](https://www.college.police.uk/app/major-investigation-and-public-protection/missing-persons/expectations) | If other agencies such as Education, Health, Youth Justice Service has contact with the missing child, they should immediately notify the police and LA. If the child has a good relationship with a particular professional, they should be involved in making enquiries to contact and establish the whereabouts of the child. | Parents and carers, including foster carers and placement staff should also make their own initial enquiries in locating the child prior to contacting the police. This may involve: fully searching the accommodation, trying to contact the child themselves, contacting friends, family, associates, appropriate locations, local hospitals and the local police custody office.  For children we care for, foster carers and placement staff should inform the child’s allocated social worker, and if out of hours, they should contact the Emergency Duty Team on **020 7364 4079.**  When reporting a child missing, parent and carers, including placement staff, should have a description of the child, and should be able to provide details such as, what was the child wearing when they were last seen, when were they last seen, whom they were with. They should also be able to provide details of social media accounts, and other significant information  Placements should following the Philomena Protocol prior to and after reporting a child missing to the police.  The Philomena Protocol is a problem solving and safeguarding process to optimise a proactive preventative partnership approach to children who go missing from care.  The process is underpinned by mutual engagement to improve outcomes.  It Aims:   * To identify high demand venues * To engage on a local level * To implement higher standards of handling and reporting in order to safeguard |

* 1. **Multi-agency Strategy Meeting**

Where a child is believed to be the victim of significant harm whilst missing or on return from being missing a multi-agency Child Protection Strategy must be called within 24 hours. This will include situations such as where it is believed that the child has been the victim of forced marriage; trafficking; or where it is believed that children have gone missing as result of abuse (including harm outside the home) or neglect. Police, health, or social care can request that children’s social care convene a child protection strategy meeting.

In these situations, the LBTH strategy guidance should be followed. Consideration should be given to involving key professionals in that child’s life for example Youth Justice Service (YJS), education, Exploitation support worker etc.

A child protection strategy will include agreeing:

- Any investigation approaches, including the creation of a `Trigger Plan’

- Steps to ensure the safety of other children at risk

- Agree a place of safety for a child upon them being found

- Review medical involvement and consider whether child protection medical is required.

-Agree legal powers to be used (Police and/or social care) for example Emergency Protection Order/Forced Marriage Prevention Order/Secure Welfare Order

- Information sharing with other Police forces and local authorities

LBTH Local Authority is responsible for convening strategy meetings for at child who is suspected of suffering significant harm in their area including children in care placed in LBTH who have gone missing in LBTH.

Where a LBTH child in care is suspected of experiencing significant harm out of area, LBTH will request the relevant local authority convenes an urgent child protection strategy meeting to which LBTH social care is invited.

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, unless they are delegated to the placing local authority. In nearly all cases it will be most appropriate for LBTH local authority to lead on section 47 enquiries for their children in care placed out of area.

The allocated social worker allocated investigating team should have a missing child discussion regularly whilst the child is missing to review new information and intelligence, agree the current assessment of risk and, where appropriate, revise the response strategy. The first strategy meeting should be held within 72 hours of the child being missing, but where risk is high, dynamic, and changing, this could be daily. This should be recorded on both the police MERLIN & Social Care system. If the child is not allocated, the police should consider discussing the child’s situations with the LA Harm Outside of the Home Service if concerns for their safety escalate following the initial notification and agree whether there are any actions that the local authority could take to support the police in locating the child or agree a joint response to their return.

* 1. **Media**

The Police have responsibility for considering whether to use or inform the media of a missing child. However, when it is a child in care discussion must take place between senior representatives from the Police and local authority to agree a media strategy before any media announcements are made. Police and the local authority should agree who will inform the child’s parents of the planned media strategy unless to do so places the child at higher risk. Unless it is absolutely necessary the child should not be identified as a child in care.

In all other cases where a child has an allocated local authority social worker, the Police should inform the child’s social worker and the child’s parents prior to any publicity.  
  
The CoP APP governs the CE-CU response when considering the use of the Media in cases of missing children: [Missing person investigations | College of Policing](https://www.college.police.uk/app/major-investigation-and-public-protection/missing-persons/missing-person-investigations#media)

1. **Once a child is located**

If a child is located by their parent/carer or returns of their own accord the person who reported them as missing should update the police as a priority.

In LBTH we advocate that a trauma-informed response to a child being reported missing to the police is most appropriate with children receiving a calm and welcoming response from parents/carers to encourage them to share why they did not feel able to return home.

There is advice for parents/carers of children who go missing on PACE website [Parents Against Child Exploitation (Pace) UK (paceuk.info)](https://paceuk.info/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwspKUBhCvARIsAB2IYuuzBRPygzyREpJr1n_9wYfXN7zUg7LuyUFSNmvPjFK21402Kg-4_WQaAvxmEALw_wcB) and the Children’s Society website [What to do if your child goes missing | The Children's Society (childrenssociety.org.uk)](https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work/children-missing-home/what-to-do-if-your-child-goes-missing)

* 1. **Management of Return**

**Police**

Police prevention interviews and return home conversations can provide an important opportunity to identify ongoing risk factors that may affect the likelihood of the individual going missing again, and should not be treated as simply administrative procedures to close a missing incident. Prevention interviews are conducted by the police and are different to return home conversations which are often provided by Local Authorities or third sector partners. Police will aim to complete a Prevention Interview within 24 hours of the Missing Person being located, but in cases of High-Risk Missing children this will be done within 1 hour.   
  
The CoP APP dictates that:  
Effectively managing the return of the missing person should be considered as part of the investigation. The investigation cannot be concluded until the full circumstances of going missing are explored and appropriate safeguarding measures put in place. Understanding the reasons why they went missing can help to reduce future missing episodes and/or provide information to assist their location, should they go missing again. Effective management of a person’s return is important because the person:

* may have been the subject of crime or otherwise been at risk of harm
* may have gone missing to harm themselves or take their own life
* may have been unsafe or at risk owing to their inability to look after themselves properly due to age, incapacity, or other reasons
* may have been the perpetrator of crime

The approach to managing the return will be determined by the risk assessment but the following points may need consideration.

* Should a multi-agency consultation or strategy meeting be held to decide what will happen next?
* What is the best engagement process when the person is found and who should talk to them?
* Where will they be accommodated?
* Are any further interventions or support needed?
* Who is the person best suited to conduct the return interview and when?

**Local Authority**

Children do not like the language of ‘Return Home Interview’ as this implies, they will be interrogated by professionals. LBTH will be referring to Return home Conversations throughout this document and when talking to children. Many children will also not view themselves as having been missing, particularly those who see themselves as having been with their friends or who have developed strategies for being away from home to manage their emotional regulation. Even when children do not perceive themselves as having been missing, this does not mean they have not been at risk whilst out of the home or have not been harmed. Many children who go missing need to build up trust with somebody before they will discuss in depth the circumstances that led to the missing episode. In LBTH we use relationship-based practice, and we should show curiosity and care when we speak to children about why they were reported missing and what can be done to reduce the risk associated with this. Practitioners should use their engagement and assessment skills to have a conversation with a child about their experiences of going missing.

The missing return conversation should be initiated and, where possible, must be completed within 72 hours of the police notifying that the child has been found. The missing return conversation should be held in a neutral place, where the child feels safe.

All children should have the opportunity to have a missing return conversation (known as an Independent Return Home Interview in statutory guidance). This is a more in-depth conversation than a Police Prevention Interview and will usually be carried out by the Exploitation Service. In some circumstances, if appropriate, it may be the allocated social worker or another professional well known to the child. It is the responsibility of the Missing Support worker (in the Exploitation Service) or the child’s allocated social worker to coordinate, write up and share the information in the Return Home Interview regardless of whether they undertake it.

Missing return conversations should explore the contributory (push/pull) factors that led to a child going missing as well as any risk and vulnerability factors which increase the risk of them going missing again. Research has shown that children who are reported missing are at increased risk of having being harmed at home and/or in the community.

Missing return conversations should include exploring with the child:

• whether they have been hurt or harmed

• any concerns around Sexual Exploitation, Trafficking, Modern Slavery

• any concerns about culturally sensitive practices (e.g., Forced Marriage, so called Honour Based Violence and /or Female Genital Mutilation)

• any harm the child may have experienced in their peer relationships

• any offending behaviour (including Criminal Exploitation) and /or substance misuse

• whether the child has had any contact with people who could be considered to pose a risk to them

• the frequency of the missing episodes

• the location and contextual circumstances of the missing episodes

• any on-going risk or vulnerability factors that may impact on the child going missing again; and

• any risk or vulnerability factors the child may be experiencing at home or in their placement or in their education and social settings.

To do this, practitioners may find tools such as the ‘Runaway Road’, a form of words and pictures which allows children to talk through their missing episode and the decisions and influences that occurred on route, or the Karen Treisman Therapeutic Treasure Deck helpful for opening conversation.

Even if a child does not feel able to share any information about what led them to be reported missing to the police, a missing return conversation provides the opportunity to explore alternative strategies to help prevent further missing occurrences and undertake risk reduction interventions on how risk can be reduced when the child is out of the home, for example identifying safe locations, peers or guardians in the community, alcohol/drug use safety strategies or supporting the child to build risk identification skills so they are able to recognise a situation that is escalating or becoming unsafe. It can also determine if any referrals for services are required. If this information is relevant, it can then be used to inform the Trigger Plan.

Missing return conversations should be written up against the relevant missing record on Mosaic. It should include intelligence such as nicknames, methods of transport, locations as well as details of any disclosures. Practitioners should always be open and honest with children about how their information will be used to try and keep them safe.

See also Appendix A: Missing Return Conversations – Question Ideas

* 1. **Information Sharing once a child has been found**

The CE-CU MPU SPoC (Police) will inform the Exploitation Service during daily morning briefing when a child has been located and returned home or to a place of safety. Social workers, other relevant professionals known to the child will be informed.

It is important that the relevant Police BCU receive any intel (i.e. locations, themes and associations) obtained from the Missing Return Conversations so they can jointly factor this into any future response and risk management. LBTH Exploitation Service should send any relevant intel or information from Missing Return Conversations to [CEMailbox-.MissingPersonUnit@met.pnn.police.uk](mailto:CEMailbox-.MissingPersonUnit@met.pnn.police.uk). For children placed out of Tower Hamlets, contact details for other relevant BCUs can be obtained from the Exploitation Service [exploitation.team@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:exploitation.team@towerhamlets.gov.uk)

If the child discloses information to their parent/carers on return, or as part of Police Prevention Interview or Return Home Interview which suggests that they have been a victim of serious crime (e.g. child sexual exploitation or trafficking) then an urgent Child Strategy Meeting should be held. Police should take steps to secure any evidence. Any indicators that the individual has come to harm or may be the victim of crime should be reported to the police.

1. **Child not known to social care**

For a child with no allocated social worker, MASH will receive a Police Merlin for a child missing from home. MASH will create a contact record on the child’s file and will assess whether a service is required using the LBTH Partnership Threshold Guidance.

If the child is not known to social care, or may only be known to Early Help, the Exploitation Service will be notified by the police during daily briefing if the child has gone missing. The Exploitation Service is responsible for recording the child’s missing episode on the case file and referring for a Missing Return Conversation, as this will be an opportunity to provide early support and identify and potential risks or concerns. If other professionals working with the child are notified that a child has been reported missing to the police, they should notify the Exploitation Service.

* 1. **Children with a child in need or with a child protection plan**

As the child has an allocated social worker, the information regarding a child going missing and returning will be shared with the social worker. The Exploitation Service is required to speak to the child about the missing episode within 72 hours of being notified of the child’s return.

If the child prefers to speak with another professional who they have a relationship with, this should be facilitated, the Exploitation Coordinators will be responsible for ensuring that the information is written up in a timely way and shared with the relevant professionals.

* 1. **Children we Care for**

The Exploitation Service is notified via the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) when a child is reported missing from their placement overnight.

The allocated social worker should email the Exploitation Service if they are notified that a child is missing from placement **(particularly if the child goes missing during the day and EDT has not been notified)** so that the relevant process can be followed through (email to exploitation.team@towerhamlets.gov.uk). The Missing Support Worker (based in the Exploitation Service) is required to undertake a Missing Return Conversation within 72 hours of the child returning home. The child may wish to undertake the Missing Return Conversation with another professional who they have a relationship with (i.e. education worker, third sector worker, YJS worker, CAMHS worker) and this should be facilitated and supported with advice and guidance given to the professional. The Exploitation coordinators will be responsible for ensuring that the information from the Missing Return Conversation is written up in a timely way and shared with relevant professionals including the Police.

It is the allocated social worker’s responsibility to inform The Independent Reviewing Officer when a child is missing and will maintain oversight of the local authority’s response and the suitability of the care plan.

Where a pattern of going missing is established, the child’s care plan should be accompanied by a Risk and Harm Assessment. A Safety plan needs to be developed that incorporates planning around risk and harm associated with missing. The child’s care plan should reflect the risk and harm assessment and the children we care for reviews regularly review the suitability of the plan and the level of risk and harm.

Where a child in care has been missing from their home for more than 48 Hours the relevant Head of Service must be informed by the relevant Manager.

The Director of Children and Culture must be informed of any child who is missing and assessed to be high risk or who has been missing for 5 days or more by the relevant Head of Service.

1. **Children with repeat missing episodes.**

It is important that professionals do not become complacent about the level of harm a child is experiencing when they are reported missing, even if this is for short periods and the child has always returned. The chronology of missing episodes should be used to inform the assessment of risk and harm and the likelihood that this is an indicator that the child is being exploited. If it is suspected that missing episodes are linked to abuse in the home, child sexual exploitation, child criminal exploitation, radicalisation or serious youth violence, a Child Protection Strategy Meeting should be held to agree the immediate action required to safeguard the child, the investigation/disruption approach, and the response to the abuse. When a child is known to be at risk of exploitation and a plan is in place to reduce this (e.g. Child in Need Plan or Child Protection Plan), but their missing episodes increase, change or sustain at a concerning pattern, a child protection strategy meeting should be called.

If a child goes missing repeatedly it is good practice for regular strategy meetings to be convened with relevant professionals, to agree a plan to work together to reduce the risks faced by the child. The plan should include who will offer the child’s missing return conversations in order that they might begin the build a trusted relationship with that person and where possible identify a lead Police officer for that child.

A strategy meeting about a child who is regularly reported missing should include at least the social worker or the lead professional and Police MPU representative to review the pattern of missing episodes, share information and intelligence to identify any people who may be harming the child in the community, and agree intervention and support to reduce the risk of the child being reported missing again.

As part of the plan the Police may agree a Trigger Plan if appropriate, if a Trigger Plan is not appropriate, this will be rationalised. The Trigger Plan will assist the police investigation to locate the child, returning them to a safe location once found and should highlight any potential evidential considerations. Trigger Plans are stored electronically on CrimInt & referenced on PNC, at the point they are implemented, with amended versions uploaded as required.

1. **Trigger Plans**

**The CoP APP defines a Trigger Plan as:**Where it is assessed that the individual is at risk of going missing again, the police officer in charge of the investigation should ensure that information gathered is used to create a plan outlining key actions to be taken if the person is subsequently reported missing. This ‘trigger plan’ may then be used to locate them as quickly as possible and ensure relevant partners are informed of the incident. Trigger plans should be reviewed following the conclusion of any subsequent missing incidents, and should be shared with other police forces if the individual moves to another area.   
its purpose is to outline the agreed multi-agency response for individuals

Trigger plans should outline the agreed multi-agency response for individuals - [Strategic responsibilities | College of Policing](https://www.college.police.uk/app/major-investigation-and-public-protection/missing-persons/strategic-responsibilities#trigger-plans)

1. **Out of Authority Placements**

An Out of Authority Placement is a placement of a child by one local authority:

• In a residential placement located in another local authority area, (the host authority); or

• With foster parents who live in another local authority area (the host authority).

Before a LBTH child is placed in an out of authority placement, the Placement Team should check with the residential / foster care agency provider that local area missing children protocols are in place and are appropriate arrangements for safeguarding LBTH children. As part of the placement planning meeting, the placement provider should be fully informed and an agreement reached regarding what actions are required to be taken if a child is reported missing or away from placement without authorisation from their placement. This must include arrangements as to who will undertake missing return conversations (Return Home Interviews). The social worker must make a record of this on the child’s electronic file.

In line with statutory requirements, the social worker must inform the host authority of a child in care moving into their area and their child in care plan.

Where a child is subject to a trigger plan, the local Police force should be informed that they are being moved into the area. CE-CU will communicate any relevant ongoing safeguarding or Trigger Plans with the new host BCU.

The placement provider /agency should contact the child’s social worker or LBTH’s Out of Hours Service and the children’s placement team as soon as it is confirmed that a child is absent, missing or away from placement without authorisation. EDT will notify the Exploitation Service via the Missing Persons mailbox. If a child goes missing in standard office hours, the placement will report this to the allocated social worker. The allocated social worker needs to notify the Exploitation Service so a return home conversation can be undertaken.

The child’s social worker must inform the child’s parent or any other person with parental responsibility within 24 hours of the child being reported as absent, missing or away from placement without authorisation.

A missing return conversation must be completed within 72 hours of the child being found /returning. The statutory guidance sets out that this should be done in person wherever possible.

1. **Children in care where LBTH is the host Local Authority.**

If a child from another Local Authority is placed within LBTH and goes missing, this practice guidance and protocol should be followed. The placing authority and the placement provider should therefore 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 in returning the child, then action should be agreed between the Police and Children’s Services.

MASH will provide the missing report from the Police to the relevant social work team for the child. The allocated social worker will be responsible for arranging the missing return conversation as they will have a relationship with the child. Should the placing authority request that LBTH undertake this conversation on their behalf and this is agreed to be appropriate, this can be arranged through MASH and will be coordinated by the Exploitation Service.

1. **Children we care for who may have been trafficked from abroad.**

Children in care who have been exploited and trafficked are at high risk of going missing, and unaccompanied migrant or asylum-seeking children whose whereabouts cannot be established after becoming a child in care should be treated as potential victims of trafficking.

Proportionate safeguarding measures should be put in place to minimise the risk of the child going missing from care, or from being contacted by those who seek to exploit them. These will need to give consideration to the child’s accommodation location only being shared on a need to know basis. Further information can be found in the Pan-London Safeguarding Procedures - [Safeguarding Trafficked and Exploited Children (londonsafeguardingchildrenprocedures.co.uk)](https://www.londonsafeguardingchildrenprocedures.co.uk/sg_trafficked_ch.html?zoom_highlight=Trafficking)

1. **Strategic oversight and governance.**

The Head of Service for the Exploitation Service provides oversight and information on Missing Children and will ensure regular reports on children who go missing are presented to senior management. Responsibility for the children missing from home and care sits with the service the child is open to.

The daily and weekly intelligence briefings in the co-located Exploitation service reviews and monitors the immediate exchange of information with regards to missing children.

The weekly intelligence partnership meetings take place with the Exploitation Service, Police, the Youth Justice Service, relevant Heads of Services and Community Safety to share and review relevant intelligence across the week and this includes missing children.

High-risk and frequently missing children are reviewed and discussed at Pre-MACE and where deemed necessary, these children will be discussed more in-depth at MACE. Children who regularly decline return to home conversations are also discussed in these meetings (where applicable) as well as the weekly oversight missing meeting between the coordinator and the missing support workers. This is to ensure that alternative plans are put in place to support the child to engage in this process and to ensure that they are receiving the necessary support to help reduce their missing episodes. The MACE has a dedicated agenda item for repeat and complex missing cases. This meeting provides governance and oversight from Local Authority senior leaders and senior leaders from partner organisations for children who are missing. The MACE reports into the Safeguarding Partnership Sub-group for Exploitation & Vulnerable Young People.

**Operational Activity**

**Missing child: Response**

Whereabouts of the child unknown. The child has been reported missing to the police. For children missing from home, this information is shared with the Exploitation Service daily by the Tower Hamlets Missing Persons Unit (Police). For Looked After Children placed out of borough, notifications are received from the Out of Hours Emergency Duty Team (EDT).

***As part of good practice, Social Workers should also alert the Exploitation Service if a child they are working with has been missing, to ensure that relevant information is shared and the correct processes are followed***

The Exploitation Service (Business Support) is responsible for recording the missing notification on the child’s file.

Child is missing from home (i.e. Tower Hamlets)

Child is missing from out of borough (i.e. child is placed in the local authority’s care out of the borough)

If the child has been missing for **three of more days** or if the child has been missing for **three or more times within the month**, a strategy meeting should be convened. The 87a referral form should be sent to the relevant BCU to ensure that the relevant police unit attends the meeting, depending on where the child is residing ***(The Exploitation Service will assist with providing the correct contact details for the BCU’s within the Met Police)***

Strategy meeting takes place. A multi-agency discussion takes place about what strategies will be put in place to locate the child. If the child is deemed to be high risk or is a regular missing child, it should be discussed and agreed if a trigger plan is necessary. Weekly strategy meetings should be convened if the risk is high and the child has not been located. If the child has been missing for **five or more days**, a notification to be sent to the Divisional Director. The social worker should also consider completing a Harm Outside of the Home Risk Assessment , as part of assessing the risk and harm to the child

**Operational Activity**

**Child Returned: Response**

The professional network has been notified that the child has been located (this notice may come from the police, family, social worker, placement or another professional)

The Exploitation Service (BSO), will update the missing notification on Mosaic to reflect that the child has been located

The Exploitation Service will assign the RHI (children missing from home will be allocated the RHI to a support worker in the Exploitation Service, unless agreed otherwise by the professional network)

Once the RHI is completed, this will be shared with the social worker and will be uploaded on the case file by the Exploitation Service. The RHIs are also quality assured by the Exploitation Co-ordinators. Any significant issues raised will be shared

The RHI should inform the child’s risk assessment and provide further information and intel to the professional network to assist with reducing the risk of harm to the child. The child’s views, wishes and feelings should be taken into consideration as part of this process

**APPENDICES**

**Appendix A: Suggested opening questions for Missing Return Conversation**

These are some questions you might use when you speak to children who have been missing. They are just some ideas, and you may just pick a few of them, always concentrating on the responses you get and building on what you know about the child and your connection with them.

**Problem Free Talking – think about connecting with the child and use what you already know about the child to start off the conversation.**

• How have things been since you got back? What have you noticed?

• Did you have any ideas about us meeting today? What did you imagine we might talk about?

• If I were to be helpful to you right now, what would I be doing?

• Have you been seeing anyone else since you got back? How’s that been?

• How would I know that our conversation was going well or not going well? What would I notice?

• What questions should I be asking you if we were going to talk about what happened? Do you want me to talk about it with you or tell you what I know first?

**Opening spaces – think about asking questions that help to open up conversation and create connections.**

• When you went missing, we were really worried about your safety – does that make sense to you?

• What do you think we were most worried about?

• What would be important for us to know about what’s happened to you whilst you were away from home?

• Who missed you the most do you think? Did this surprise you?

• What was it like for you while you were away?

• What do you think I most need to know about? Is there a way in which it’s okay for you to tell me about this?

• Who was on your mind when you were away? Did you think going away was helpful?

• Were you thinking about leaving again what might you say to yourself?

• What could your carer/parents do differently when you want to leave?

• Do you know of other people who go missing? Do you think they see things like you do?

• What are the bad points about being reported missing? Who can you talk to about that?

**Future Orientated Questions – think about asking questions that are linked to the future moving away from the present difficulties future together.**

• Who could you speak to in future before leaving?

• If you do go, what are you going to do to keep yourself safe?

• What ideas do you have about who can help you stay? What do they need to be doing?

• Where are the safe places that you go and hang out? Where are the unsafe places?

• If you had a friend who was in a similar situation to you or going missing what would you want them to know about and do? What would you share with them?

**Appendix B: Legal Powers and Duties**

It is permissible to physically intervene to prevent a child running away from care, however any action will need to be justified by an assessment of the risk that a child might experience and physical intervention does not offer a long-term risk management strategy. Building trusting and respectful relationships with children is paramount.

**Recovery Order**

The local authority may apply to the Court for a Recovery Order (under Section 50 (1) of the Children Act 1989[11]) when a child is subject to an Interim or Full Care Order and it is clear that the child is in immediate danger of Significant Harm.

1. Has been unlawfully taken away or is being unlawfully kept away from the responsible person;

2. Has run away or is staying away from the responsible person; or

3. Is missing.

**A Recovery Order:**

• Operates as a direction to a person able to do so to produce the child on request to an authorised person;

• Authorises the removal of the child by an authorised person;

• Requires a person who has information as to the child's whereabouts to disclose it, if so requested, to a constable or an officer of the court;

• Authorises a constable to enter any premises specified in the order and search for the child, using reasonable force if necessary.

**Emergency Protection Order:**

Under Section 44 of the Children Act 1989, the local authority can apply for an Emergency Protection Order (EPO) where there are reasonable grounds for believing there is an immediate risk of Significant Harm to a child.

Under S48 (3) an Emergency Protection Order authorises the applicant to enter premises specified by the order and search for the child with respect to whom the order is made.

Under s44(1)(a) the court may only grant the order under this ground if it is satisfied that there is reasonable cause to believe that the child is likely to suffer Significant Harm if either:

• They are not removed to accommodation provided by or on behalf of the applicant; or

• They do not remain in the place where they are being accommodated

**Power to use Reasonable Force or Physical Restraint:**

If a constable has reasonable cause to believe that a child would otherwise be likely to suffer Significant Harm, the constable may remove the child to a place of safety and keep the child there (S46 Children Act 1989) [Children Act 1989 (legislation.gov.uk)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/section/46)

The Children Act legislation implies the power to use reasonable force in appropriate circumstance to take a child into police protection or to keep the child at a place of safety (Home Office Circular 44/2003).

[Children Act 1989 (legislation.gov.uk)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/section/46)

**Police Powers of Protection:**

Under Section 46 of the Children Act 1989, the police have the power to remove children to a safe location for up to 72 hours to protect them from "significant harm". Police do not require a court order to take such a step.

**Power of Entry to Recover Child/ Young Person:**

**Under S17 (1) (e) Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984:**

A constable can use reasonable force, but in some circumstances a Recovery Order would be required to enter premises. The welfare of the child/ is paramount and where there are grounds to believe a vulnerable missing child is on premises and access is being refused, there should be no hesitation in gaining entry under this provision. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1984/60/section/17>

**Under S17 (1) (b) Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984:**

**Appendix C: Trigger Plan**



Trigger plan agreed: Click here to enter a date.

**Missing Person Trigger Plan**

**Subject Name:** [Add subjects name]

This is a Missing Person Trigger Plan, its purpose is to outline the agreed multi-agency response for individuals who are considered to be at risk of going missing, and where there is a significant risk of harm to the subject or the volume of times they go missing is considered to be excessive.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SUBJECT | | POLICE OWNER | |
| Name |  | Name and Rank |  |
| Date of Birth |  | OCU |  |
| PNCID |  | Unit/Team |  |
| Cris/Crimint |  | Location |  |
|  |  | Contact |  |
|  |  | Email |  |

SUBJECT PHOTO



|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| APPEARANCE | |
| NATIONALITY |  |
| IC Code |  |
| Height |  |
| Build |  |
| Dress |  |
| Eyes |  |
| Hair |  |
| Tattoos / Scars |  |
| Other |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| CURRENT HOME ADDRESS & CONTACT | |
| Address |  |
| Mobile |  |
| Home |  |
| Email |  |

Approximate date photo taken:

Click here to enter a date.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY | |
| Name |  |
| Address |  |
| Mobile |  |
| Home |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| PARENTS / CARERS AND FAMILY (addresses / contact numbers & comments) | |
| *NAME* | *ADDRESSES / CONTACT NUMBERS & COMMENTS* |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ASSOCIATES (addresses / contact numbers & comments) | |
| *NAME* | *ADDRESSES / CONTACT NUMBERS & COMMENTS* |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| RELEVANT ADDRESSES AND LOCATIONS FREQUENTED | |
| *ADDRESS* | *REASON FOR RELEVANCE (include dates and locations previously found)* |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| OTHER | |
| MEDICAL ISSUES |  |
| OYSTER CARD NUMBER |  |
| SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ORDERS | |
| *ORDER TYPE* | *DETAILS OF ORDER (Include act/section and dates)* |
|  |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| LOCAL AUTHORITY | |
| Local Authority where child is care for |  |
| Social Worker (Name/Contact number and email) |  |
| Out of hours contact  Emergency Duty Team (EDT) |  |

|  |
| --- |
| BACKGROUND |
| *Overview of the subject and associated risks* |
| Click here to enter text. |

|  |
| --- |
| IMMEDIATE ACTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN REPORTED MISSING |
| *Actions for consideration when the subject is reported missing, this should not be a generic action plan, this should be bespoke for the subject. Multi-agency actions should be agreed as part of a strategy meeting and include actions to be taken by all persons involved with the subject, including carers/parents.* |
| **POLICE:**  Click here to enter text. |
| **MULTI-AGENCY:**  Click here to enter text. |

|  |
| --- |
| ACTIONS UPON SUBJECT BEING LOCATED |
| *Officers should always tailor their actions to the individual missing episode and consider their powers of police protection where relevant.* |
| **POLICE:**  Click here to enter text. |
| **MULTI-AGENCY:**  Click here to enter text. |

|  |
| --- |
| OTHER INFORMATION NOT COVERED ELSEWHERE |
| *Use this field to add any other information that may be considered useful should the subject go missing* |
| Click here to enter text. |