

# Children who Run Away and are Missing from home: Policy and Procedure

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## **Accessibility**

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## 1 Purpose of this Policy and Procedure

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is a fundamental duty of local authorities. When a child goes missing, they are at risk. Both the Police and Local authorities are responsible for protecting children whether they go missing from home or Local Authority Care and effective joint-working agencies is essential.

Repeated missing episodes are known to be a factor in the breakdown of family units and care arrangements. The policy supports permanency for children and prevention of escalation to higher need.

This policy promotes an effective, collaborative, safeguarding response from all agencies involved when a child goes missing. It provides guidance for assessing both the likelihood of the child going missing and the risk to the child while they are missing. It describes staff/agency actions that should be undertaken to locate and return the child and to identify the factors that led to the child going missing.

This policy also covers the arrangements in place for children who are reported as absent rather than missing.

This policy must be read alongside the

- Multi Agency Strategy for the Prevention of Children Running Away/Going Missing from Home or Care;
- The Bracknell LSCB On-line Child Protection Procedures; including Children and Families that go missing (including Unborn Children)
- The Joint Protocol concerning children and young people who run away or go missing from home or care. This protocol was agreed in April 2014 between Thames Valley Police and Children's Social Care representatives from across the Thames Valley, including Bracknell Forest Council. See appendix 1

For the purposes of this policy, the word "home" is used for the child's primary residence and incorporates family units and care placements. It is important to recognise that a care placement should be a place that a child considers home.

## 2 Principles & Policy

The following principles underpin this policy:

- The child's safety and welfare are paramount whatever the circumstances.
- Locating and returning the child to a safe environment is the main objective.
- Child Protection Procedures will be initiated whenever there are concerns that a missing child may be at risk of harm.
- The analysis of data relating to missing children should inform strategy.
- Understanding the reasons that a child goes missing is key to prevention.

## 3 Definitions

### 3.1 Missing or Absent Definitions

The following definitions of Missing, Absences and Away from placement without authorisation are used for all work carried out by Bracknell Forest Council employees and by the Police:

**Missing: “Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character, or the context suggests the person may be subject of a crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.”**

Department of Education Statutory Guidance on Children who Runaway or Go Missing from Home. Association of Chief of Police (ACPO), 2013

Therefore, a child (i.e. under the age of 18 years) is to be considered ‘missing’ if their whereabouts are unknown, whatever the circumstances of their disappearance. They will be considered missing until they are located and their wellbeing or otherwise is established.

**Absent: ‘A person is not at a place where they are expected or required to be’.**

Absences that cause concern are those where:

- There is no indication that the child is likely to return within a reasonable period; and
- Frequent / persistent absences that form a pattern

### 3.2 Unauthorised Absence definition

**Away from placement without authorisation: a Child who is Looked After whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their home or place they are expected to be and the carer has concerns or the local authority or the police have been notified.**

This category is critical to the clarification of roles of the Police and Children’s Social Care. Some children absent themselves from home or school for a short period and then return. Often the children are not considered at risk, for example when staying out longer than agreed as a boundary testing activity which is considered normal adolescent behaviour. These children have taken ‘unauthorised absence’ and would not usually come within the definition of ‘missing’ for this policy.

If a child’s whereabouts are known, then they cannot be ‘missing’. However, if they are known to be staying somewhere where they are in danger and it is not possible for the carer/ person with parental responsibility to remove the child, then it may still be necessary to involve Police and partners in safeguarding them.

In the case of Children who are Looked After, Social Workers and partner agencies should always consider whether an unauthorised return to family or staying with a friend places a child at risk.

Unauthorised absences must be carefully monitored and the reasons that led to the child’s “flight” response, addressed. This is an early indicator that a child may begin to go missing.

Patterns in absent episodes also need to be monitored, and this can be done via the weekly missing and absent spreadsheet (see part **XXXX**).

## 4 Scope

Estimates suggest that there are around 100,000 child missing episodes per year. Children may run away *from* a problem (Push Factor), such as abuse or neglect at home, or to somewhere they want to be (Pull Factor). They may be coerced to run away by someone



else. It is thought that approximately 25 per cent of children that go missing are at risk of serious harm.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/307867/Statutory\\_Guidance\\_-\\_Missing\\_from\\_care\\_3\\_.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_from_care_3_.pdf)

Within Bracknell Forest between April 2018 to March 2019 there were 166 children reported as either missing or absent, which is 0.6% of the child population. Going missing or Absent impacts approximately 16% of children in receipt of services from Bracknell Forest Council's Childrens Social Care.

There is an established link between children running away and the risk of sexual and/or criminal exploitation. Missing children may also be vulnerable to other forms of exploitation, to violent crime, gang exploitation, or to drug and alcohol misuse. Factors/risks associated with going missing include, Female Genital Mutilation, abuse by adults or other children, abduction by family or others, domestic violence, sexual exploitation, trafficking and fabricated or induced illness.

## 5 Procedures

### 5.1 Children's Social Care Overview /Response

Bracknell Forest Children's Social Care responds to missing episodes in accordance with current legislation and Statutory Guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care issued by Department for Education in January 2014.

Children's Social Care will consider what assessment and intervention needs to be carried out following a missing person episode and will consider the level of risk and vulnerability for the child when deciding on the response. Children and young people missing from home may be considered 'Children in Need' and be entitled to a service under Section 17 of The Children Act 1989. Depending on circumstances such as parental response, the child may be at risk of, or subject to, significant harm and therefore in need of protection. In these circumstances child protection procedures would be followed. If these thresholds are not met the child's needs may be responded to by a multi agency approach under the Common Assessment Framework (CAF)

### 5.2 Response to Daily Notifications from Police

Each working day Thames Valley Police send a list of all children in Bracknell Forest reported missing by email to the Children's Social Care Administrative Support Team and the Missing Children account. The Missing Children Account is monitored by the Makesafe Team. The Makesafe safe Team sit within Children's Specialist Support and work with children at risk of exploitation. The team is also responsible for undertaking Return Home Interviews (RHIs) for children open to long-term teams in CSC.

For those children and young people already open to Children's Social Care, the notification will be passed to their allocated Social Worker, or Team Manager if the allocated SW is not available. The Senior Practitioner in Makesafe will undertake an RHI or delegate the task to another member of the Makesafe team. In the absence of the Senior Practitioner, the Exploitation Prevention Manager will delegate RHIs to the Makesafe Team or the wider CSST.

If the child is open to CSC under duty and assessment then the allocated worker – or another in their absence - from this team will undertake the RHI.

## Children who Run Away and are Missing from Home or Care

If the child or young person is not already open to Children's Social Care the notification will be passed to the MASH Team, who will arrange an RHI or delegate to Youth Services.

If the child or young person has been open previously to Children's Social Care the notification should be passed to the team that had been working with the family, if the case closure was 3 months or less prior to the Missing Person Episode, otherwise this should be passed to MASH.

See also Appendix 2, 3a Flow charts

### **5.3 Response to children who present as missing from outside the Bracknell Forest area**

If a child missing from home in another local authority area is found in Bracknell Forest, the Police will notify Bracknell Childrens Social Care MASH. When these children become known to Children's Social Care their immediate safety needs will be assessed and necessary action taken. The MASH will communicate with the authority where the child lives and send a copy of the Police report to them.

Where it is suspected that children may be trafficked into Bracknell for the purpose of exploitation the usual child protection processes will be followed, i.e. convening a strategy discussion with all relevant agencies and the authority where the child lives.

### **5.4 Children and Young People Missing from School and Children Missing from Education**

It is important to recognise the difference in Children Missing from School and those who are Missing Education in a broader sense.

Some children go missing from school and are still managed under the missing from home policy. However, some children leave school without permission or fail to attend certain lessons, and these are dealt with as absents if their whereabouts are known or the period is very brief.

If a member of Education staff becomes aware that a child may be missing, they should try to establish with staff, the parents or carers, what has happened. If this is not possible, and the child's whereabouts remain unknown or the behaviour is unusual, the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) should ensure the child is reported missing to the police.

If Education staff notice that a child who was missing has returned, they should establish whether Police or Children's Social Care were involved in returning the child to their home and, if not, inform Police and/or Children's Social Care.

Children who are Missing from Education are often referred to as CME. There are a wide range of reasons a child may be classed as CME, for example children who don't arrive at a new school when they have been enrolled, don't return to school for a new term or have a medical reason for not attending school. There is a separate policy, procedure and panel for managing CME cases which sits within Targeted Services (People Directorate).

### **5.5 Children and young people who may have been trafficked from overseas**

#### **5.5.1 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking or other Migrant Children**

## Children who Run Away and are Missing from Home or Care

Some CLA are unaccompanied asylum seeking (UAS) children or migrant children. The responses to a UAS child going missing should be the same as for all other children, whether they are CLA or living in the community.

However, it is important to acknowledge that children in this group may have been trafficked into the UK and could remain under the influence of their traffickers. Trafficked children are at highly likely to go missing, with most doing so within one week of becoming looked after and many within 48 hours. UAS children who go missing immediately after becoming looked after should be treated as potential victims of trafficking.

### 5.5.2 UAS Assessment

Completing the assessment of need as soon after the child arrives as possible is critical as the window for intervention is very narrow. The assessment must seek to establish:

- Details about the child's background
- An understanding of the reasons why the child came to the UK; and
- An analysis of the child's vulnerability to remaining under the influence of traffickers.

The child needs to be in a safe place before assessment is undertaken. It should be considered that they may not be able to disclose full information about their circumstances immediately. The location of the child should not be shared outside of professional networks unless identity of enquirers and their relationship with the child can be established.

The roles and responsibilities of care providers must be fully understood and recorded in the placement plan. Safety measures that consider the child's best interests should also be put in place prior to being placed.

The Modern Slavery Human Trafficking Unit (MSHTU) can assist in completing this assessment. Immigration staff who specialise in trafficking issues should be able to advise on whether information about the individual child suggests that they fit the profile of a potentially trafficked child.

'Safeguarding Children Who May Have Been Trafficked' contains guidance for agencies that are likely to encounter children who have been trafficked. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-children-who-may-have-been-trafficked-practice-guidance>

The NSPCC Child Trafficking Advice Centre<sup>1</sup> provides specialist advice and information to professionals who have concerns that a child may have been trafficked. Phone 0808 800 5000 Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm; email [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.nspcc.org.uk/services-and-resources/services-for-children-and-families/child-trafficking-advice-centre-ctac/?\\_t\\_id=1B2M2Y8AsgTpgAmY7PhCfg%3d%3d&\\_t\\_q=Child+Trafficking+advice+centre&\\_t\\_tags=language%3aen%2csiteid%3a7f1b9313-bf5e-4415-abf6-aaf87298c667&\\_t\\_ip=195.59.13.75&\\_t\\_hit.id=Nspcc+Web+Models+Pages+StandardPage/b4a6fa62-81ad-40b8-90ff-22e0e6366475\\_en-GB&\\_t\\_hit.pos=1](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/services-and-resources/services-for-children-and-families/child-trafficking-advice-centre-ctac/?_t_id=1B2M2Y8AsgTpgAmY7PhCfg%3d%3d&_t_q=Child+Trafficking+advice+centre&_t_tags=language%3aen%2csiteid%3a7f1b9313-bf5e-4415-abf6-aaf87298c667&_t_ip=195.59.13.75&_t_hit.id=Nspcc+Web+Models+Pages+StandardPage/b4a6fa62-81ad-40b8-90ff-22e0e6366475_en-GB&_t_hit.pos=1)

### 5.5.3 Information Sharing

It is essential that the local authority continues to share information with the police and immigration staff concerning potential crimes against the child, the risk to other children, or other relevant immigration matters.

## 5.6 Responding to Unauthorised Absences of Children in Care

Where a child who is looked after is absent from their home without authorisation, foster carers / residential staff must do all that a reasonable parent would to locate the child and ensure their safe return home. This is important to the child's sense of self worth and permanency needs; children need to feel and see actions that demonstrate they are cared for, even if they are resistant.

Examples of what is expected:

- Telephone the child, their friends or relatives to ascertain their location; then collect the child or negotiate some safe alternative arrangements if they are resistant to returning.
- Before making these arrangements, the carer may wish to discuss the situation with the child's social worker or the Emergency Duty Team (EDT).
- If the carer believes the child is at risk or feels that they are unable to make an informed judgment (for example if the child is new to their home or if the staff on duty do not know the child well enough) they must inform the child's social worker or EDT immediately and the police if necessary. If it is thought that there are specific issues around safety or public order involved in returning the child, then action should be agreed between the police, the carer and the social worker/EDT.
- If the local authority knows, or believes it knows, the child's location and there are difficulties or dangers involved in returning the child, a Recovery Order should be sought. These circumstances would not necessarily mean the child should be categorised as 'missing' (as the child's whereabouts are known).

## 5.7 Over 24 hours Unauthorised Absence of Children and Young People in care

The carer, residential unit manager or supervising social worker should report any child who has been away from their home without permission for longer than 24 hours to the Social Worker Team who will inform the responsible Head of Service and IRO. Joint consideration should be given to next steps, including a fixed time limit after which the child would be reclassified as missing and assistance from the police in locating and returning the child sought.

## Children who Run Away and are Missing from Home or Care

Once a child has returned home consideration should be given to prevention of future occurrences. Using the positive factors checklist is recommended to look for opportunities to increase safety and well-being. A referral for a 'Family Group Conference' or a Missing Prevention Meeting (organised through the Makesafe Team) are other options.

If there are a series of unauthorised absences for the same child and interventions are not effective in reduction, consideration should be given to calling an early CLA review.

### 5.8 Children who are Looked After Going Missing/Absent

There is a statutory requirement to record all CLA missing episodes of 24 hours and over.

Whoever discovers that a child is missing or absent should act immediately. For Childrens Homes/Residential Schools it is expected that they will follow their missing policies alongside any specific expectations for that child set out in their CLA plan or missing risk assessment. All BFC Foster Carers are offered training around missing children, providing them with practical advice and guidance. Foster Carers should be made aware of any risks relating to missing episodes for children in their care and a plan should be formulated and followed in this eventuality.

In all cases carers / residential staff should take all reasonable and practical steps, which a good parent would take, to secure the safe and speedy return of the child, for example visiting addresses where the child may be or telephoning around known friends.

The social worker should arrange a Strategy Meeting within 72 hours of the child being reported if they have not been located. Representatives from both the Police Missing Persons Unit and Child Abuse Investigation Unit should attend the strategy meeting, as well as other practitioners involved with the child.

Children who fall within the category of 'unauthorised absence' must be the subject of continuous risk assessment whilst they remain absent. During their absence circumstances may change and the Social Worker/Emergency Duty Team and the Residential Unit Staff/Foster Carer must respond accordingly and report the child missing if necessary.

Everyone with Parental Responsibility should be kept updated when a child is missing.

### 5.9 Care Leavers

The statutory guidance also covers young adults that have left care. These cases are managed within the Leaving Care Service and are not discussed at MACE. The Leaving Care Service should ensure that pathway plans set out where a young person may be vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking or going missing, and put in place support services to minimise this risk.

### 5.10 Children for whom there is a Child Protection Plan who go Missing

Children who have a Child Protection (CP) Plan or who are subject to a Section 47 enquiry need additional action to that required for other children:

## Children who Run Away and are Missing from Home or Care

- Informing the Local Authority Custodian of the Child Protection Register or equivalent, and the local Primary Care Trust's Designated Nurse
- The social worker should arrange a Strategy Meeting within 72 hours of the child being reported if they have not been located. Representatives from both the Police Missing Persons Unit and Child Abuse Investigation Unit should attend the strategy meeting, as well as other practitioners involved with the child. **This is also the case for child who are the subject of Child in Need plans.**
- Where a child with a Protection Plan has gone missing with/without their family, Children's Social Care must implement the Notification of Missing Children/Persons Procedure.

### 5.11 Children & Young People Not Known to Children's Social Care

When a child is not known to CSC and there are repeated missing incidents (three times in 28 days) CSC will initiate a Single Assessment and consider an Integrated CSE/CCE Indicator and Analysis Tool. The child will also be discussed at MACE.

If the child is returned within 24 hours but the Police have further safety concerns, they should make a referral to Children's Social Care in addition to the standard missing notification.

A Strategy Meeting should be held within 72 hours of the child being reported if they have not been located. Representatives from both the Police Missing Persons Unit and Child Abuse Investigation Unit should attend the strategy meeting, as well as other practitioners involved with the child.

### 5.12 Children Who Go Missing from Family Home

It should always be remembered that children missing from their family home may experience similar risks to those of Children who are Looked After and local agencies should treat all child missing episodes seriously. Children who go missing from their family home are offered a Return Home Interview by either a member of staff from CSC or the Youth Service.

Where a parent or professional has concerns that a child who is not open to CSC may go missing, a CAF (Common Assessment Framework) should be undertaken and an early help support plan put in place.

## 6 Longer Episodes of Being Missing

### 6.1 Where a child/young person is missing for more than 7 days

A child's social worker, in consultation with their Team Manager, should arrange a further strategy meeting if a child remains missing for 7 days. The meeting should include all key people, including foster carer/residential staff/parents, police, education and health. It may also be relevant to invite someone from BFC Communications team and/or legal services. This meeting should be chaired by a Head of Service. The purpose of this meeting is to ensure that all necessary action is being taken to locate the child and to consider what further action needs to be taken.

If the child is still missing after 7 days, two weekly (or, as required, minimum once a month) meetings should be held. The Head of Service, following every meeting, must provide a

written briefing for the Assistant Director CSC, who will brief the Director. The Director will brief the Chief Executive and Lead Member for Children and Young People.

### 6.2 Still Missing after 3 months

If the child is still missing after three months, the Assistant Director for Childrens Services should Chair the onward strategy meetings until they are found. Once the child has been missing for 6 months, the Director will review the case.

### 6.3 Longer Absences

Whilst the child remains absent, his/her case should be identified as 'open' on the Children's Social care client database. It is recommended that a Head of Service, or equivalent in responsible partner agencies, should formally and regularly review all cases where children have been missing for six months or more to ensure on all actions have been undertaken to recover the child.

All Police missing person's files will remain 'live' until the child is located and returned to their home, or circumstances are considered safe.

### 6.4 Missing Child Strategy Meetings

In the cases outlined above, CSC must, in addition, call a face to face Strategy Meeting as soon as possible and within no more than five days, involving representatives from all relevant agencies including the Police Missing Persons Unit and Child Abuse Investigation Unit.

The Strategy Meeting must consider the following:

- Making further attempts to contact the child/young person's known relatives, friends, regular places of visit, conveying the expectation that CSC should be informed if they obtain any relevant information.
- Writing to other local authorities and local agencies with the information about the missing child/young person. Partner agencies should receive information from each other in order to take action to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child.
- Use of publicity. This will require agreement with the Assistant Director, Childrens Social Care, who will consult with the Director and assess the circumstances. The Council's Communications Team and the police's Missing Person Unit will also need to be consulted. The child's parents must be informed prior to a press release being made and consent should be received from them or those with parental responsibility. Legal Services should be consulted with if there are any issues regarding obtaining consent. Social workers should be aware that it is an offence for a person to publish material which is intended to, or is likely to, identify a child as being involved in court proceedings under the Children Act 1989. However, the court can give leave for this restriction to be waived if the child/young person's welfare requires it.
- Contacting the Missing Person's Helpline. This group provides a specialist service to Children's Social Services when any of its CLA go missing, including asylum seeking

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children. This working arrangement with Local Authorities forms the basis of an information sharing agreement with Childrens Services. The Missing from Care Group can be contacted on 020 8392 4527, 24 hours a day.

- Seeking a Recovery Order and deciding how the order should be exercised i.e. whether there should be a joint visit with police and Social Care staff. (See 12.2 for further details).
- Notifying national authorities and agencies, such as Department for Work and Pensions and Child Benefit agencies
- Appropriate legal interventions if there is any suspicion that the child may have been removed from UK jurisdiction.
- Intervals at which further strategy meetings should be held whilst the child/ young person is missing. The Missing Child Risk Assessment should inform this decision.
- How EDT will be kept updated and by whom.

The decisions of the strategy meeting, actions and timescales must be clearly recorded, using the template at Appendix 7. A copy should be kept on the child's case record.

Further Strategy meetings can be called whenever the professionals involved wish to hold one but must take place at a minimum once per month.

All strategy discussions and meetings should be recorded and made available to key professionals within 24 hours for their agreement.

### 6.5 Notifying the Police and Working Together

The Police should be notified as soon as possible as the Lead agency for Missing Children. The Police will investigate all reports of missing children. Ideally the report should be made from the source the child is missing from so the information is at its purest rather than third party.

If the child is Looked After the parental responsibility of the Local Authority is not absolved when a child is reported missing to the Police.

#### 6.5.1 Role of the Police

The Police's Authorised Professional Practice (APP) outlines definitions, risk assessment, response, process, joint responsibility, minimum actions and national specialist support and services when investigating missing persons. This can be found here: <https://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/missing-persons/>

#### 6.5.2 Risk of Significant harm

Where a child is at risk of significant harm, child protection processes must be followed. Such situations might include:



## Children who Run Away and are Missing from Home or Care

- If the parents/carers appear to show a lack of concern or failed to report their child missing.
- Where a child under five years old is missing
- Where a child under ten years old is missing and it is suspected that parental issues (e.g. substance abuse, domestic violence) may have been a factor
- Repeated (more than three within 28 days) missing from home episodes, especially where there appears to be a lack of appropriate parental response
- Where a child or young person is vulnerable (e.g. has a learning disability, physical disability, history of self-harm, has a medical condition that makes them vulnerable)
- Where a child runs away to be with adults who give cause for concern
- Where there are concerns around possible sexual or criminal exploitation

### 6.5.3 Information to be Made Available to the Police

When reporting a missing child to Police the person making the report should be able to provide the following information:

- A description of the child (name, date of birth, physical appearance).
- Recent photograph
- When the child was last seen and with whom
- What the child was wearing
- Family addresses
- Known acquaintances
- The name and address of the child's GP

The Police will search the address at which the missing child was last seen.

## 7 Locating the Child and their Return

### 7.1 Planning for when the Child is Located and their Return

When a child is reported missing a plan should be formulated for when they are found. Plans should include:

- Will the child return to their home or are they safe in the location where they are found?
- If the child is to return to their home, how will they be moved?
- Do the Police wish to interview the child (safe and well check) where they are located or after they have returned their home?
- Who will carry out the Return Home Interview with the child?

Children who have '*unauthorised*' absences should be offered an independent person to talk to if this happens on three or more occasions in 28 days.

Sometimes it may be necessary for the police to use Protection powers to keep the child safe. The police do not have the power to use force to take children into Police Protection. There will be occasions when a child is found in a location that is considered unsuitable, but where there would be no legal grounds for taking them into police protection. The police and

## Children who Run Away and are Missing from Home or Care

a Team Manager from CSC will need to liaise to discuss what steps may be necessary in order to safeguard the child's welfare. CSC should obtain legal advice if police protection is being considered.

Until the child is returned home, further reviews of the missing episode should take place at agreed intervals.

### 7.2 Intervention after the child is found

#### 7.2.1 Safe and Well checks / Return Home Interviews

The Police will interview all children when they return. They will ask set questions about where the child was, where they went, what they did, who they were with etc. If the child makes an allegation of crime during this interview, the Police will record this allegation and take action.

Children should be informed by the police that they will be offered the opportunity to speak to someone independent of their parents/carers and social worker on their return. This is called a Return Home Interview (RHI).

RHIs should be offered within 72 hours of a child's return. It is recognised that providing children with an opportunity to talk as soon as possible after the missing incident is key to meeting any current need and safeguarding them from future harm.

The interview and the actions following from it must:

- Identify and deal with any harm the child has experienced (his/her medical condition should be discussed immediately and any need for medical attention assessed)
- Understand the reasons the child went missing (push and pull factors)
- Take steps to avoid it happening again
- Ensure that any intelligence gathered is referred to the police.

For children open to CSC in the long-term teams these interviews are carried out by the Makesafe Team, who are situated within the Childrens Specialist Support Team.

For children not open to Childrens Social Care, the missing report is received and assessed by the MASH Manager. RHIs are then completed by MASH or Youth Services as part of the Councils early help offer. The RHI is recorded and then passed back to MASH who re-review threshold and actions.

For Children open to Duty and Assessment, the allocated social worker or family worker undertakes the RHI.

For some children bespoke arrangements are made which may include using a member of YOS, volunteers or commissioned services such as the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS).

A copy of all RHI's should be sent to [missingpersonsberks@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk](mailto:missingpersonsberks@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk) to enable police to extract intelligence and build a profile for prevention.

## 7.3 Harboursing

In order to safeguard children who repeatedly go missing and are found to be with the same person, the police may issue a written warning to any persons considered to be harboursing a young person who has run away. Repeated incidents may lead to their arrest and prosecution under Section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984.

# 8 Prevention and Planning for Children at Risk of Missing

## 8.1 The Missing and Child Exploitation (MACE) meeting

The Missing and Child Exploitation (MACE) meeting will meet on a monthly basis in respect of the following tasks:

- Review the data collected by the Police on the cohort of young people who have been missing 3 times in 90 days, had been missing for lengthy single periods, been missing overnight or vulnerable to sexual/criminal exploitation or particularly vulnerable due to their age (under 12)
- Review the profile of where children and young people are going missing from
- To identify the Local Authority which has responsibility for the young person's welfare
- To establish any pattern of missing episodes
- The type and degree of risk they are believed to be facing
- Actions which should be taken on the basis of the overall profile.
- To identify any vulnerable locations or person of interest who may cause risk to a missing child.

MACE provides a forum to enhance information sharing to reduce risk and increase safety. It does not replace child protection process for individual children at risk.

## 8.2 Children who are Looked After (CLA)

### 8.2.1 Research

Research shows that children looked after by the Local Authority are over-represented in the cohort of children who go missing. Social workers and carers should familiarise themselves with the current research on the reasons why and the circumstances in which children are likely to go missing. This may help to identify high risk factors and early warning signs and allow for early intervention to be taken.

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/children-missing-from-care-report.pdf>

<https://www.rip.org.uk/resources/publications/strategic-briefings/children-and-young-people-missing-from-care-and-vulnerable-to-sexual-exploitation>

## 8.2.2 Assessment of Risk

Prior to each placement of a child CSC staff and Residential Workers or Foster Carers, must assess the likelihood of the child absencing themselves and the risks associated with this.

This should include:

- Obtaining and reading copies of the 'Location Risk Assessment' and Missing policy from the children's home/ residential unit to ensure suitable measures are in place
- Where there is a risk a child may go missing a Missing Risk Assessment (see 8.3) should be completed and sent to the placement, Local Police Area for the child's 'host' area (i.e. the area they will be living) and the Out of Hours Emergency Team for Bracknell Forest and the host area.

## 8.3 Social Care Missing Person Risk Assessment Record

Where there are indicators or concerns that a child may go missing from Care or home, a Missing Person Risk Assessment Record should be completed on Mosaic (see appendix 2). It is the responsibility of the child's Social Worker to ensure that the Missing Person Risk Assessment Record is completed for CLA when a placement is approved and with every change of placement.

The key elements of the assessment should consider:

- The likelihood of the child going missing, including information about previous patterns of going missing and risks associated with being missing.
- The child's view on the current placement and stability of their relationships at home.
- The level of care / supervision / support available to the child and how this may be enhanced.
- The views of those with parental responsibility on what action should be taken if the child goes missing or regularly returns home late.
- The level of risk presented if the child goes missing considering, for example, a history of alcohol/ drug misuse, sexual and/or criminal exploitation, mental health or learning difficulties.
- Details of any medical condition and treatment that the child is currently undergoing and the implications of this in terms of their missing / absence.
- Consideration of any external influences which may result in the child's removal without consent.
- Recording all the contact names, addresses and telephone numbers relevant to where child/ young person may go to while missing.

## Children who Run Away and are Missing from Home or Care

Unless there is risk associated with doing so this work should be done with the child or explained to the child, so they are aware of what actions will be taken if there are concerns about their whereabouts and what they can do to help – e.g. keep in touch with the carer even if they do not want to return.

Missing Risk Assessments should be kept up to date and shared when amended with relevant Local Police Areas, EDT and other agencies.

### 9 Missing People Helplines

The charity Missing People is dedicated to helping missing people, their families and those who care for them. It has information sharing agreements with the police.

**The Missing People 24-hour Freephone confidential Helpline 116 000 takes calls from families and police reporting missing people.**

**The Runaway Helpline 116 000** is a national 24-hour Freephone Helpline for anyone who has run away or been forced to leave home. Confidential advice is given, referrals made to other organisations and it can help a child or young person get to a place of safety or pass on a message. **The Missing People Runaway help line should be given to all children at risk of going missing; workers should encourage them to put it into their mobile phone contacts list.**

### 10 Communication

The relevant Head of Service must be informed immediately if it is a high-risk case. High Risk cases would include:

- Any child/ young person who presents an immediate risk to themselves or to other people
- Any child who is 12 years old or younger whose whereabouts are unknown
- Any child that is open to MACE (therefore known to be actively exploited)
- Any child/ young person who is abducted from care

The Assistant Director, Children's Services, should always be informed of any child who has been missing for 48 hours by the relevant Head of Service. The Assistant Director will then be responsible for deciding who else should be made aware at this stage.

At the latest if the child remains missing for 5 days, the Assistant Director must inform the Director who will in turn inform the Chief executive and the Lead Member for Children and Young People's Service when appropriate.

In high-risk cases where a child is missing from residential care, the manager of the residential unit should notify the registration authority (Ofsted).

Should a child's absence continue, consideration needs to be given to what other children may be impacted and their needs identified and met. For children in the community and known to local services, the agencies involved will need to decide who should be told and what support might be necessary.

The child's school should always be informed and kept up to date; they may have valuable information which would assist in establishing

## Children who Run Away and are Missing from Home or Care

whereabouts. Any such information should be passed immediately to the Police.

### 11 Informing the Press

Guidance around press releases for missing children should be obtained from BFC's Communications Team. CSC and the police will liaise with the child's parents about informing the press. For a CLA who is missing a decision to publicise by press and/or television will be made by the Police in consultation with the relevant Head of Service. The child's parents should be told of the intention to publicise prior to doing so if possible.

### 12 Recording

If a child's absence continues beyond a few hours and falls within this Procedure, all agencies should note their discussions, decisions, actions taken and messages received/given; and the child's Social Worker (or other agreed key worker/lead professional) should keep a single agreed record on the child's file. Residential Unit Staff and Foster Carers should record the information in the daily log/diary, with a duplicate entry for the child's file (e.g. photocopies).

### 13 Governance

The Head of Service for Children's Specialist support has responsibility for the operational management of Missing Children within Bracknell Forest and should report quarterly to the LSCB strategic sub-group for CSE and Missing. This work includes keeping a database of all children who are reported missing in or relating to Bracknell Forest. This database is circulated weekly to all relevant leads to use for the purpose of prevention and protection.

Bracknell Forest is the provider of one Children's home which is a Short Breaks Unit for children with disabilities. Should children go missing from this home, notification would be made to Ofsted.

The LSCB ensures regular inter-agency audits to assist with the continual development of work in this area.

Local Strategic Group – send to Sarah Gee

## 14 Appendices

### 14.1 Appendix 1: Joint Protocol 2014

#### CHILDREN'S SERVICES AUTHORITIES IN THAMES VALLEY AND THAMES VALLEY POLICE

Joint protocol concerning children and young people who run away or go missing from home or care-to include reports of absences from April 29<sup>th</sup> 2014.

This should be read in conjunction with *Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care (January 2014)* which details the responsibilities of those involved with 'looked after' children.

#### Police missing and absent definition from April 29<sup>th</sup> 2014

**MISSING** -*"Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another"*

**ABSENT** – *"A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be"*

*Thames Valley Policy will not categorise the following as absent –they will always be subject of a missing person investigation:-*

- *All children 14 and under*
  - *All registered sex offenders*
  - *All children 15 and over who have a CSE warning marker, CSE intelligence or are named in a child abduction warning notice*
1. The Police Enquiry Centre (PEC) receives a report that a child is missing and records them as missing or absent dependent on the answers to 10 standard risk assessment questions.
- *What is the specific concern that has caused you to call the police?*
  - *What has been done so far to trace the individual?*
  - *Is this significantly out of character?*
  - *Do they need urgent medical attention or essential medication that is not likely to be available to them?*
  - *If under 18 are they currently at risk of child abuse including child sexual exploitation?*
  - *Are they likely to be subjected to any other crime?*
  - *Are they likely to be the victim of any other form abuse?*
  - *Are they likely to attempt suicide?*
  - *Do they pose a danger to other people?*
  - *Is there any other information relevant to their absence?*

## Children who Run Away and are Missing from Home or Care

2. The person reporting this to the police should provide the police with up-to-date information to inform the above, as well as details of enquiries the caller has made to trace the missing child. A control room supervisor will authorise the status as missing or absent.
3. In cases where the report initially goes to Children's Social Care (CSC) in the relevant Council, the case should still be referred to the Police Enquiry Centre (PEC) on 101.
4. If a child is risk assessed to be recorded as 'absent' their details will be added to the Police National Computer (PNC) and an appropriate call-back time agreed with the caller. When that time is reached the police will call back the reporting person and review the ten questions. If at that time, or earlier if further information comes to light, the 'absent' child is deemed by the Police to be at risk, their status will be changed to 'missing' and officers deployed to liaise with the reporting person to commence a missing person investigation.
5. Once the location of an absent child is established it will be the responsibility of the reporting person to collect the child and establish the reasons behind their absence. The police will not conduct a safe and well check unless crimes or other safeguarding issues are suspected.
6. Police will record and monitor absent occurrences alongside missing, will share information with partners in the same way as missing, and will refer appropriate cases of absent children to missing person panels.
7. When the answer to any of the initial 10 questions is yes, the child is recorded as missing. A police officer will visit the reporting person and commence a missing person investigation. They will conduct a further risk assessment to establish potential risk as high or medium. Missing children under 18 will never be categorised as low risk by the police.
8. The police duty supervisor is informed and he/she will manage the police response. All high risk cases will be led by a senior officer.
9. Police officers will :
  - Search the premises and surrounding grounds accepting this action should already have been completed by the reporting person. Police are searching both for the missing child, and also evidence of 'push/pull' factors behind the child going missing.
  - Obtain full details concerning the child's disappearance
  - Complete a full risk assessment asking the initial 10 questions again to ensure nothing is missed, together with 8 further questions.
    - *Is the person detainable under any Mental health legislation-if so what is the legislation?*
    - *Is the person vulnerable due to other factors?*
    - *Is the person particularly at risk of harm due to physical disability, frailty or memory loss?*



## Children who Run Away and are Missing from Home or Care

- *Does the person lack the ability to interact safely with others in an unknown environment (mental illness, learning disability and/or sensory impairment?)*
  - *Has the person been involved in a violent, homophobic or racist incident immediately prior to disappearance*
  - *Any child safeguarding concerns (subject to child protection plan, known to social care/pvp and/or specific PNC warning flag triggered?)*
  - *Is the person suffering from a drug or alcohol dependency?*
  - *Any social concerns?  
(family/relationship/employment/financial/school/college)*
- Obtain a detailed description of the child's clothing, together with a recent photograph
  - Obtain consent to release the photograph to the press (if required) and pass details to partner agencies assisting with the search
  - Add the child's details to the missing person records management system,
  - Add the child's detail to the Police National Computer (PNC)
10. Police will undertake a secondary investigation to identify any incidents or issues which may inform the risk assessment or help locate the child more quickly e.g. Domestic violence, child protection reports, the child is in care, potentially at risk from CSE or other crime or particularly vulnerable for any reason. Police should consider contacting CSC in the relevant Local Authority and the risk assessment must be continually reviewed.
  11. Police are responsible for liaising with family as well as with other agencies and force areas. If the child is in care, it may be more appropriate for CSC to undertake enquiries with the family and other agencies and report their findings back to the police. This approach should be decided on a case by case basis.
  12. The local Police Missing Person Co-ordinator is the single point of contact for all agencies. Out of week day office hours the local Duty Inspector is the contact.
  13. All high and medium risk missing persons are reviewed at the beginning and end of every shift by the duty Inspector. Any child who is in care or who is particularly vulnerable will be reviewed within 24 hrs by CSC. Children missing over 24 hours will be notified to social care by way of referral to the relevant CSC assessment team.
  14. Where there are concerns about a child's vulnerability or that the child may be at risk of significant harm a referral should be made to CSC as soon as this becomes evident.
  15. If the child has been missing for more than 24 hours, the case will be reviewed at the police daily management meeting.
  16. In all high risk cases or once a child has been missing over 24 hours, the police, in consultation with partner agencies, must consider a media strategy.

## Children who Run Away and are Missing from Home or Care

17. When a child deemed to be medium risk has been missing for more than 48 hours, the case will be reviewed by a Detective Inspector.
18. When a child has been missing over 5 days CSC will convene a strategy meeting. CSC will call a strategy meeting sooner if they consider the child is likely to suffer significant harm.
19. All missing persons are notified to the Police National Missing Persons Bureau (National Crime Agency) after 48 hours or earlier if the child is at high risk of harm.
20. If the child has been missing for more than 10 weeks, the missing person co-ordinator will ask for the PNC entry to remain in place for up to a year.
21. Within 24 hours of the child's return, the police undertake a 'safe & well' check and inform all agencies of the child's return. Police will pass details of the safe & well check to CSC as soon as practicable.
22. In cases where a child goes missing repeatedly, or if there are other concerns about the child, the police will make a referral to CSC irrespective of the duration of time the child has been missing.
23. In cases where a child discloses a child protection issue, a referral will be made to the referral centre who will liaise with CSC in order to determine if there is need for joint agency investigation. If so, a strategy meeting will be convened.
24. Panel meetings must take place regularly (according to local need) in each area to respond to information provided by the police to review cases. All relevant agencies and partners will be invited to attend as judged necessary to achieve an appropriate problem solving response.
25. Data on missing children will be sent by the Police quarterly to the performance data section in each Local Authority's Children's services.
26. Out of hours arrangements

If a child goes missing out of office hours, the police should consider informing the emergency duty/social work team, which covers that area.

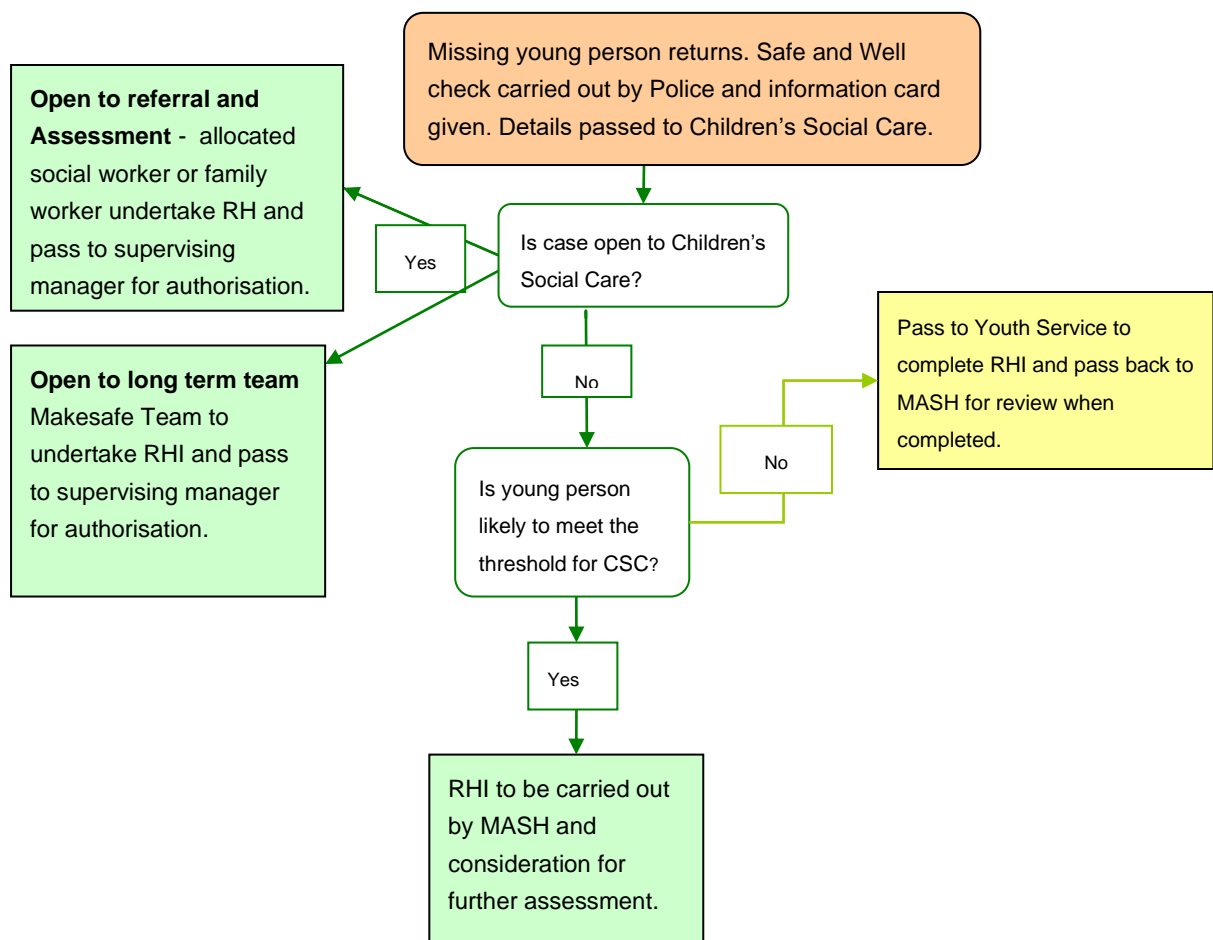
### 27. Out of area arrangements

There may be occasions when a child goes missing and they are placed in care in a different Local Authority area or police area. In these circumstances CSC should report the child missing to the Police force in which the child is residing and to Thames Valley police as the child may have returned to his/her home area.

This protocol was agreed in April 2014 between Thames Valley police and Children's Social Care representatives from Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, West Berkshire, Reading, Wokingham, Slough, Windsor and Maidenhead, and Bracknell Forest Councils.

Effective April 29<sup>th</sup> 2014

## 14.2 Appendix 2: Return Interview



### 14.3 Appendix 3:

## **BRACKNELL FOREST COUNCIL RETURN INTERVIEW PROCEDURE**

### **Guide to Return Interview**

The interview should always start with some open questions about the child or young person's understanding of why the worker is seeing them. Adults may think it is obvious to the young person that it is because they have been missing however this may not be the case and starting with an open question allows the worker to check out the young person's understanding of why the visit is taking place.

In addition to this it allows the worker to be clear about the purpose of the visit and to address any issues that might interfere with the interview. For example if a young person believes that the worker is seeing them because of something that happened at school and thinks they are in 'trouble', this may interfere with the overall process. It may also allow the young person to discuss information that is relevant to the missing episode, for example they might reply because of the argument I had at home. From this question the interviewer can move onto clarify it is because they have been reported missing, and again check out the young person's understanding of this. Again as adults the definition of missing may seem clear but for children and young people it may be different.

This form is designed to be used for all children and young people and this will include those who have gone missing for the first time and those who are frequent absconders, however it still remains important to clarify the young persons understanding.

Young people who have been reported missing before may have their own definition of what constitutes missing, for example if they told their carer they weren't coming home for them this may not constitute missing. Overall it is important to remember that the purpose of the interview is to elicit as much information as possible about the missing episode for the child or young person.

The proforma is a guide for structuring this interview and to offer some guidance on the areas to cover, however if a child or young person is speaking very freely the worker should not feel that they have to stick rigidly to the format or to 'close down' the discussion to ensure the form is completed. The worker can always go back over the form at the end of the interview and explain to the young person they want to ensure that they have covered everything as it is really important to do so.

Conversely if the child or young person is very reticent to engage the form can provide some structure to the visit. The form could even be copied for a young person to complete themselves and for the worker to then talk through it with them. Professionals will be familiar with young people who prefer completing worksheets as they find it easier to write answers down.

Overall the format is to be used as a tool to assist practitioners and should not be viewed as paperwork exercise.

**It is expected that the police will inform families of the potential for return interviews when they do the safe and well check.**

### Missing Person Return Interview Record

Name:		
DOB:	Gender:	Ethnicity:
Address Reported Missing From:		Missing Reference:
Date and Time Reported Missing:		
Date and Time Returned:		
Tell me why you think I have come to visit you today?		
What do you think being reported missing means?		
Do you understand why you were reported missing?		
How long have you been missing?		

Children who Run Away and are Missing from Home or Care

Tell me about where you went while you were missing?

Hotspot identified?

Who were you with while you were missing?

Were they with you all the time?

While you were missing did you ever feel unsafe or frightened?

Did anybody hurt or threaten you?

Children who Run Away and are Missing from Home or Care

Did you drink alcohol or take any drugs while you were missing?

Why did you come back?

If the police brought you back what would have made you come back on your own?

Tell me about why you went missing?

What might stop you from going missing again?

Children who Run Away and are Missing from Home or Care

Scaling Question 0-10 On a scale of 0-10 how likely is it that you might go missing again?          Analysis:
Date form completed:
Role of person completing form:

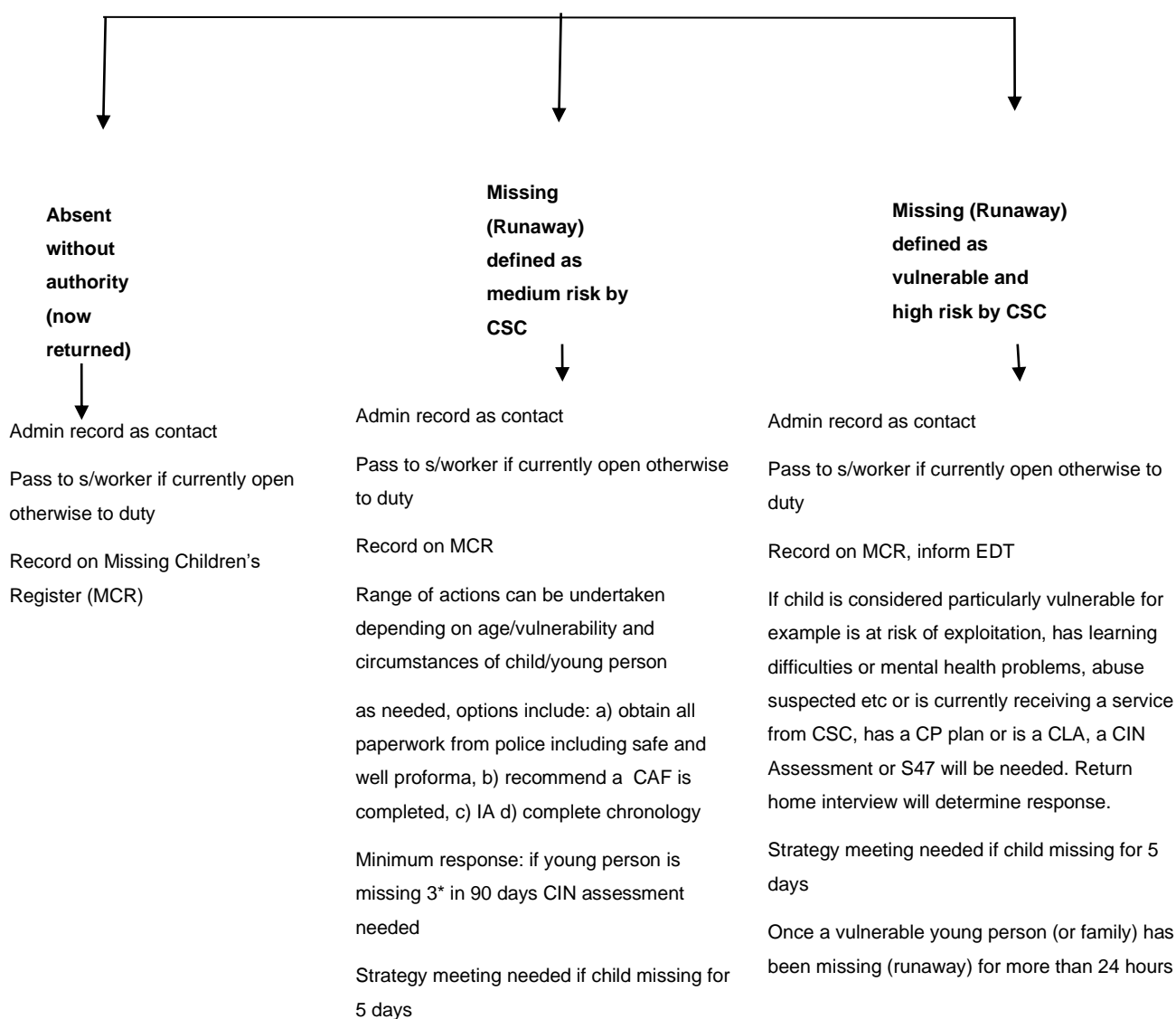
WHEN COMPLETED SEND TO: [missingpersonsberks@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk](mailto:missingpersonsberks@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk)



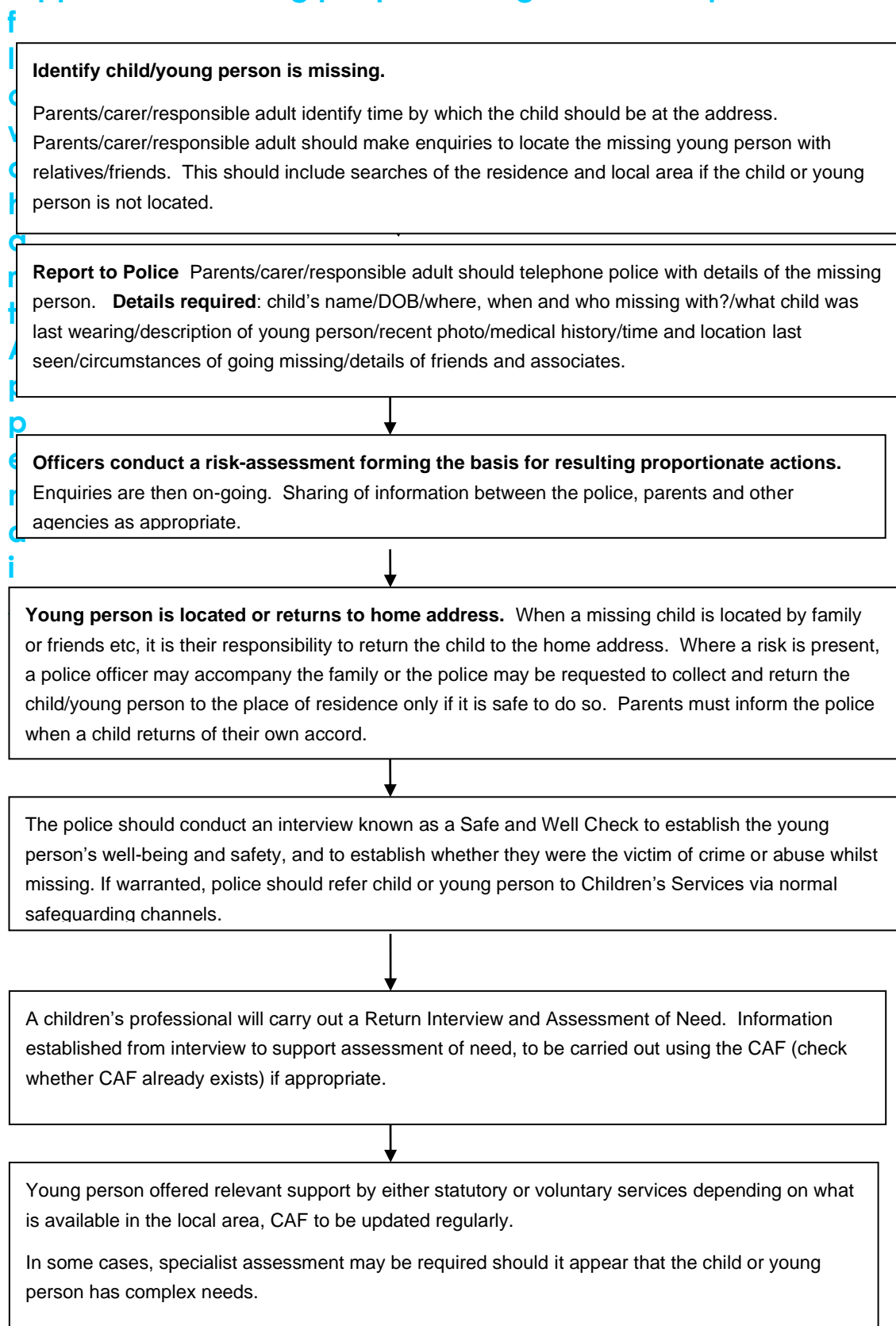
## 14.4 Appendix 4: Flowchart for Children's Social Care: Process for responding to Daily Missing Children Notifications

### Flowchart to be used in conjunction with Thames Valley Missing Children Joint Protocol

**NB:** Social worker for the child to ensure that admin are made aware if a young person returns home so MCR list can be up-dated.



## 14.5 Appendix 4b: Young people missing from home process



Children who Run Away and are Missing from Home or Care

## **14.6 Appendix 5: List of useful contact numbers and links**

Bracknell Forest Children's Social Care Duty Team – 01344 352020

Emergency Duty Team – 01344 786543

Thames Valley Police – 101

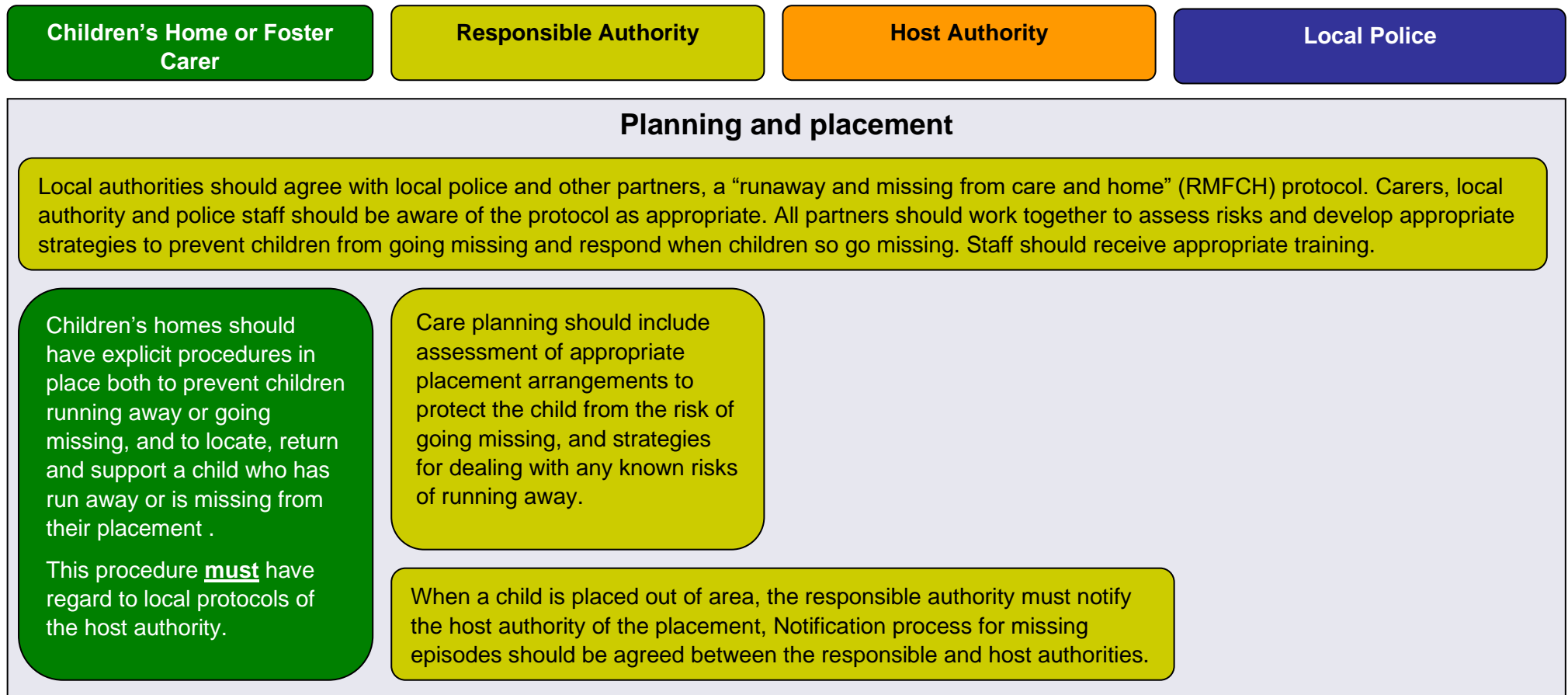
Childrens Specialist Support Team – 01344 354042

Missing Person's Helpline (24hrs) 0500 700 700

Message Home (for young people to get a message to their parents) 0800 700 740  
[www.missingpeople.org](http://www.missingpeople.org)

**14.7 Appendix 6: Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care Flowchart showing roles and responsibilities when a child goes missing from care (overleaf)**

The following chart shows the main steps that need to be taken when a child goes missing from local authority care, and where responsibility lies for those steps. It should be read alongside the full statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care, and is not intended to be a comprehensive list of actions



## Children who Run Away and are Missing from Home or Care

**Children's Home or Foster Carer**

**Responsible Authority**

**Host Authority**

**Local Police**

### When a looked after child goes missing

The carer should take agreed actions to locate the child. If they cannot be located, they should inform the police, the responsible authority and anyone else identified in the child's plan (e.g. parents)

Useful information to report to the police include:

- The Child's name and DOB
- Description and a recent photograph
- Where and when they were last seen
- Details of friends or associates

The responsible authority should provide relevant information about the missing child to police to enable all risk factors to be considered

The responsible authority should notify the host authority that a child in their area has gone missing

Police should perform a risk assessment which will form the basis for their operational response. The case will remain under constant review, particularly in the light of new information and / or changes of circumstances.

**Children's Home or Foster Carer**

**Responsible Authority**

**Host Authority**

**Local Police**

### When a looked after child is found

If the child returns to their placement, the responsible authority and police should be informed.

Carers should continue to offer warm and consistent care when a child returns and running away should not be viewed as a behaviour that needs to be punished

If the child is located, but meaningful contact cannot be established, the responsible authority and police should consider appropriate action.

An independent return interview should be offered and provided within 72 hours of the child's return. When a looked after child is placed in a host authority, the responsible authority should ensure that the independent review takes place, working closely with the host authority.

A "safe and well" check should be carried out by the police as soon as possible after a child reported as missing has been found.

The responsible local authority should review whether the child's placement remains appropriate. The decision should be informed by discussions with the child and carers where appropriate,

Care plans should include a strategy to minimise future risk of missing episodes.

IRO's should be informed about missing episodes and address these in statutory reviews

## Children who Run Away and are Missing from Home or Care

