

Telford & Wrekin Council

Children Missing From Home, Care & Education

Operational Guidance

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1. Introduction

“Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is a key duty on local authorities and requires effective joint working between agencies and professionals. When a child goes missing or runs away they are at risk. Safeguarding children therefore includes protecting them from this risk. Local authorities are responsible for protecting children whether they go missing from their family home or from local authority care”

(DfE [Statutory Guidance](#) on Children Who Run Away or go Missing from Care 2014)

The West Midlands Safeguarding Procedures ([click here](#)) sets out how in Telford & Wrekin agencies should work together and the standards to which that work should be completed when children are missing/or have returned to their home/placement. Also see Missing Children flow chart



Missing Children
Flow Chart.pdf

This practice guidance is to be read alongside the West Midlands Safeguarding Procedures. It will attempt to not repeat practice guidance and processes already described in the other document but will instead focus on the key elements of the child’s journey pertinent for Social Workers and practitioners to know in order to respond appropriately to Telford & Wrekin children who go missing.

It is important to note that the children for whom we are the responsible local authority (Telford & Wrekin looked after children) and have placed in another local authority’s area Social Workers must familiarise themselves and comply with that local authority’s joint multi agency missing procedures as they will operationally differ to our procedures. In the unlikely event that another local authority does not have local area Missing Procedures Social Workers should comply and use the Telford & Wrekin procedures.

Clarity of Definitions

Based on the statutory guidance on Children who run away or go missing from home or care (2014), key definitions:

- **Child:** anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. ‘Children’ and ‘young people’ are used throughout this document to refer to anyone under the age of 18.
- **Missing child: a child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers.**
- **Looked after child:** a child who is looked after by a local authority by reason of a Care Order, or accommodated under s20 of the Children Act 1989.
- **Responsible local authority:** the local authority that is responsible for a looked after child’s care and care planning. If a child is placed in care outside of a child’s local authority, the responsible local authority remains the child’s home authority or placing authority, not the local authority where the child is placed in care.
- **Host authority:** the local authority in which a looked after child is placed when placed out of the responsible local authority’s area.
- **Carer:** The care provider who has been tasked by the Local Authority and those with parental responsibility for the child to act in ‘loco parentis’.

The College of policing APP defines missing as: “Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered to be missing until located and their wellbeing or otherwise confirmed”.

Children missing from home, care and education is not to be confused with the Children Missing Education (CME) policy the definition of which is: “A compulsory school-age child who is not on roll of a school, not placed in alternative provision by a local authority, and who is not receiving a suitable education at home”.

2. Children going missing from home

Any child who goes missing from home should be reported to the police by the person who has parental responsibility for that child. Social Workers and practitioners may become aware that a child has gone missing from home, in these instances advice should be given to the parent to report the child missing to the police. Social Workers and practitioners

should also contact the police to verify and to ensure that the child has been reported as being missing providing information as necessary. The police are the lead agency for investigating and locating the child.

The police send detail of all children's missing and found reports to Family Connect who research electronic systems such as Protocol & CRM and establish whether:

- The child is not known to T&W children services (no allocated practitioner)
- The child has an allocated T&W children services Social Worker/practitioner
- The child is a looked after child and T&W is the responsible authority.
- The child is a looked after child and Telford & Wrekin is the host authority.

The child is not known to T&W Children Services

Further consideration by Family Connect:

- Is this the first occasion that the child has gone missing?
If this is the first occasion that a child has gone missing and there are no immediate safeguarding concerns raised Family Connect will send a letter to the parents outlining support is available should they require this.
- Are there immediate safeguarding concerns for this child?
If there are immediate safeguarding concerns for the child Family Connect Safeguarding Advisors will consider the information and take the appropriate action that is required ie strategy discussion, social work assessment etc.
- Has this child had a previous missing episode?
If the child has had a previous missing episode a Strengthening Families practitioner will be assigned to undertake a Return Home Interview once the child has been located by the police and has returned home.

Child has an allocated Telford & Wrekin Children's Social Worker or Practitioner

Family Connect will ensure that the allocated Social Worker/practitioner and their manager is informed that the child is missing as notified by the police. See below for detail pertaining to action taken by Family Connect and that required by Social Workers and practitioners:-



Missing Children
CRM Workflow.doc



Missing Person
SOP.docx

If there are known safeguarding concerns for the child T&W Safeguarding Procedures need to be followed as usual. <http://westmidlands.procedures.org.uk/>

Child is Located

Once a child is located, the police will notify the parent. A 'safe and well' interview will be undertaken by the police and the need for further police action considered. The police will update the child missing report and send this through to Family Connect.

If it is considered unsafe for the child to return home the police will refer to Family Connect and a strategy meeting will be held as per Telford & Wrekin Safeguarding Procedures.

Good Practice Note

When undertaking assessment and planning for a child have you considered:

Does the child have a history of going missing?

Is there potential for the child to go missing?

If so what needs to happen to mitigate against identified risk?

If the child goes missing is there good quality information readily available to assist the police risk assessment and to be able to locate the child speedily?

3. Children Who are Looked After, Missing From Care

When placing a child consideration needs to be given to the potential that the child may go missing from placement. For the information required to be completed and held by the responsible carer to assist the police should the child be reported missing [see link](#).

It is important to familiarise yourself with detailed guidance on roles and responsibilities at set out [West Midlands safeguarding procedures](#) and CIC Missing Flowchart



CIC Missing Flow
Chart.docx

Definitions

Missing – the term ‘missing child’ means any individual less than 18 years of age whose whereabouts are unknown to such individual’s legal custodian, or person with whom it is agreed by the parent and local authority should care for the child. This includes foster carers and children looked after by the local authority that reside in residential establishments.

Unauthorised Absence – when a child under the age of 18 years of age is known to be staying with a friend or relative and the arrangement has not been agreed by the person/s responsible for caring for them. The term is also used when a child under 18 years of age is known to be socialising and is out later and beyond the set time for them to have returned to their agreed residence and carer.

If the child does not return to a placement and it is considered to be an unauthorised absence as defined above the placement should inform the allocated Social Worker.

If the child is missing, this must be reported to the police by the carer, allocated Social Worker, EDT informed and child’s birth parents should also be notified where it is appropriate.

If there are immediate safeguarding concerns for the child a strategy meeting must be held as soon as possible and no later than **24 hours** with all the relevant professionals working with the child, to share information held within the child's network and devise an action plan to seek the whereabouts of the child or address the risk associated with absconding. The allocated Social Worker is responsible for organising this meeting and the team manager should chair the meeting. If a child has been missing for 24 hours a strategy meeting should also be convened.

Considerations at strategy meeting needs to include:

- Whether to instigate a s47 enquiry and agree if a single or joint agency enquiry is necessary, plan enquiry
- Plan for the child's return
- Who needs to be informed of the child's missing status or/and informed of the child's return.
- Police safe and well interview and Return Home Interview planning
- Child's health and emotional wellbeing - plan for examination and support.
- Media considerations
- Whether legal advice is required and a legal planning convened to consider court orders that may assist the local authority in keeping the child safe.
- Is there anyone with parental responsibility that should be informed of the missing episode, what action is being taken and when the child is located.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children are provided with services under s20 Children Act 1989. The UK Border Agency (UKBA) holds records of all unaccompanied asylum seeking children. If an asylum seeking child goes missing the UKBA must be informed. Some of these children may have been trafficked into the UK and still remain under the influence of their traffickers even whilst they are in care close cooperation with the UKBA is required in addition to the steps to be taken as with any child who is missing from Telford & Wrekin

care. Refer to 2.20 West Midlands Safeguarding Procedures for further information – children who are foreign nationals and go missing.

Children Looked After Placed In Telford & Wrekin by Other Local Authorities

If a child is placed here by another local authority and that child goes missing the police will notify Family Connect. Refer to Missing Children CRM Workflow for detail as to actions taken by Family Connect and Strengthening Families BSO.



Missing Children
CRM Workflow.doc

Responsible local authorities are required to complete the Return Home Interview when the child is located.

Children of concern will be discussed at the Missing Multi Agency Operations Group Meeting and actions agreed on how to reduce the risk of the child going missing from placement or education. This group meets monthly and is chaired by the Police Missing Persons Prevention Officer.

Telford & Wrekin Looked After Children Placed outside of Telford (externally placed children)

Telford & Wrekin has a duty to notify a host local authority when intending to place a looked after child in their area. Ideally Social Workers should make contact with the host local authority to check out local risks and areas prior to placing a child.

Referrals sent to placement providers via Brokerage should include any significant risk for the child i.e. history of going missing, history of being exploited.

If you are placing a child outside of Telford & Wrekin it is important that you familiarise and understand the procedures in place for children who go missing in that area.

Details of who to contact in the host local authority in the case of a child missing notification being received should be clearly recorded on the child's electronic record.

Social Workers should be clear about what the host local authority arrangements are for Return Home Interviews bearing in mind that the responsibility to ensure that this is offered within 72 hours of the child being found will always remain with Telford & Wrekin local authority. This should be very clear on the child's electronic record.

If the child being placed has a history of going missing or risk of exploitation this needs to be set out very clearly in the preplanning information informed by the Social Worker and held by the carer and detailed in the child's care plan.

There should be agreed contingency plans in place for any missing episodes and any subsequent meetings should include specific discussions about how to prevent repeat episodes of missing.

The child's IRO needs to be kept updated and informed of any missing episodes and should then address these specifically in the child's child in care review and placement meetings.

4. Return Home Interviews

After a missing episode, when the child has been located they should be offered a return home interview (RHI) conducted by a professional other than the child's carer and should take place within 72 hours of the child being located. For children not in the care of the Local Authority consent from the parent and in all cases a child's consent is required to undertake an RHI. In the event that consent is refused by a parent consideration should be given as to whether this constitutes a safeguarding issue.

For detailed guidance on why and how to conduct a RHI click [here](#) and for good practice guidance see Runaway Return Interviews.



runaway_return_int
erviews.pdf

Local arrangements for RHI are as follows:

- Child is unknown to Children Services and there is no information to suggest a child is or has been exploited the RHI will be completed by Strengthening Families Practitioner.
- The allocated practitioner is CATE (Child at Risk from Exploitation Team) the RHI will be undertaken by CATE practitioner.
- The child has an allocated Social Worker and the child lives in Telford & Wrekin. The RHI will be undertaken by a CATE Practitioner
- The child is a Telford & Wrekin looked after child placed externally to Telford & Wrekin. The Social Worker will discuss with the CATE practitioner and agree who is best to complete the RHI. The principle being that the CATE practitioner will attempt to do so depending on the distance involved and the local arrangements in place with the host local authority. Please note the initial visit to the child undertaken by the police once a child has been returned to placement is **not** considered to be the RHI.

CATE Team (Children at Risk from Exploitation Team)

As stated above the CATE Team will undertake the majority of RHIs for children. The rationale for this is that research clearly identifies key links between exploited children and going missing. Intelligence, patterns and themes identified during these interviews are able to be collated and discussed at key partnership meetings/panels overseen by the CATE Team Manager and Missing Coordinator. This will include the Multi Agency Missing Children Operations Meeting, CE Safeguarding Partnership Sub Group, Multi Agency CE Risk Panel and CE police and CATE Meetings.

5. Missing Intervention Meetings/Strategy Meetings

These are the triggers for convening a multi-agency meeting:

- Child who is missing and is at significant risk of harm
- Child has been missing for 24 hours

- Child has been missing on 3 occasions in the past 90 days
- Child has been missing on seven plus occasions in the past year.

The allocated social worker/ practitioner is responsible for organising the meeting, and the Team Manager will be responsible for chairing the meeting.

Strategy meetings will be organised by the Social Worker and the Social Worker team manager will chair the meeting.

Refer to Safeguarding Procedures 2.20 and Missing Intervention Process guidance for recording



Missing Intervention Process

Refer to template for recording the Missing Intervention Meeting



MIM Form 2019.docx

6. Key Local Contacts

Police West Mercia Tactical Lead	Chief Inspector Graham Preece	graham.preece@westmercia.pnn.police.uk
T&W Council Strategic Lead	Service Delivery Manager Tina Knight	tina.knight@telford.gov.uk
T&W Council Missing Coordinator	Senior CATE Practitioner Helen Morris	helen.morris@telford.gov.uk
Police West Mercia	Missing Persons Prevention Officer Adam Vaneer	adam.vanner@westmercia.pnn.police.uk
T&W Council Strengthening Families Service	Team Manager Christine Thursfield	christine.thursfield@telford.gov.uk
T&W Children in Care	Team Manager Sara Castro	sara.castro@telford.gov.uk