

Tees Protocol for Children Missing from Home and Care



1. Introduction

The protocol has been updated as a result of the authorised professional practice issued by the college of policing January 2017 on children who run away or go missing from home or care (click here for report). The protocol is underpinned by local procedures in the four unitary authorities of Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton.

This protocol is important for the safeguarding of children across Teesside. It should be read and implemented, where necessary, by all practitioners and managers working with children who are at risk of going missing from home or care or who are already doing so. This protocol will assist in developing robust responses to running away and should be used to engage partner agencies in developing preventative services for children and young people who are at risk of running away.

The North and South Tees Safeguarding Children's Partnerships expect all agencies working with children or young people who are missing from home or care to implement this protocol and ensure that all relevant staff are aware of it and how to use it. It should be used in all new contacts with children.

The North and South Tees Safeguarding Children's Partnerships will be responsible for ensuring an annual review of the effectiveness of all aspects of this protocol.

2. Purpose

The purpose of the protocol is to outline what action will be taken to ensure that effective safeguarding responses are in place when a child goes missing from home or care. The protocol depends on good communication and a willingness by all agencies to work together to promote the welfare of all children. This protocol should be read in conjunction with the Tees Safeguarding Children Procedures <http://www.teescpp.org.uk>

3. Objectives

The objectives of the document are to:

- Promote the prevention of children running and missing from their home or care.
- Ensure effective safeguarding of those children and young people who are running and missing from their home or care.
- Locate children who are running and missing from their home or care.
- Outlines the actions Cleveland Police and Local Authorities will take when children are running and missing from their home or care and return home.
- Promote the exchange of accurate and consistent data about running and missing from home and care including data relating to contextual risk between Cleveland Police and the four Tees Local Authorities.

- Plan to reduce future possible missing episodes from their home or care.

4. Safeguarding

This protocol does not alter the current arrangements and procedures that exist between Cleveland Police and each Local Authority in respect of safeguarding children. If Cleveland Police believe that a child is at risk of or is suffering significant harm, they will contact the relevant Local Authority using the existing procedures and contact points in respect of daytime office hours Monday to Friday and the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) outside of office hours.

5. Why Are Missing Children Important

We all have a responsibility to safeguard the young and vulnerable. Running away can be symptomatic of wider problems in a child's life but whatever the reason, one thing is clear; children who decide to run away are unhappy, vulnerable and in danger. More tragically, 'missing' may result in loss of life and may be the first stage of a police murder enquiry.

Through its research, The Children's Society has identified push and pull factors of causation to go missing:

Push Factors

- Family Conflict
- Parental Separation
- Domestic abuse in the home
- Neglect
- Physical, emotional or sexual abuse
- Parental substance abuse
- Mental Health Concerns
- Issues with their care placement

Pull Factors

- Criminal Exploitation (including County Lines)
- Sexual Exploitation
- Peer Relationships
- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Substance Misuse
- Parties/Gatherings
- Visiting Family away from placement

The immediate risks associated with going missing include:

- No means of support or legitimate income – leading to high risk activities

- Involvement in criminal activities
- Victim of abuse (including Forced Marriage, Honour Based Violence)
- Victim of crime, for example through sexual assault and exploitation
- Alcohol/substance misuse
- Deterioration of physical and mental health
- Missing out on schooling and education
- Increased vulnerability

Longer-term risks include:

- Long-term drug dependency / alcohol dependency
- Crime
- Homelessness
- Disengagement from education
- All forms of Child exploitation
- Poor physical and/or mental health

It is important, through the risk assessment process to ensure that resources are targeted at locating those children who are particularly vulnerable.

6. Definitions

Cleveland Police identify that the key drivers of missing person's investigations are vulnerability and risk and as such use the following definition of a missing person.

A Missing Person is defined as:

- Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located and their wellbeing or otherwise confirmed,
- Where the circumstances are out of character or
- The context suggests that the person may be subject to crime or
- The person is at risk of harm to themselves or another

This criteria precludes the catch-all definition, which is simply that a person is missing if their whereabouts cannot be established. The additional criteria provide instances where it is appropriate for Police to undertake their duty to investigate. The police will be required to investigate where there is demonstration of the above, for example.

- Where there is concern that the person has been, or is likely to be, a victim of a serious crime (such as murder, abduction, kidnap, rape, child sexual offence, false imprisonment, serious assault, human trafficking, modern day slavery or criminal exploitation);

- Where there is concern that the person has suffered or is likely to suffer harm due to the person
 - Intending to commit suicide or cause self-harm
 - Being unable to safely interact with their environment unaccompanied
 - Having left home with no intention to return whilst having care and support needs and being incapable of independent living or
 - Being lost, ill or having suffered an accident and needing urgent assistance.
- Where there is concern that a person is dangerous and poses a real, immediate risk of harm to another person

Note that the latter two of the three criteria above are subject to an immediacy test, simply because a person has previously been subject to crime does not immediately imply that they will be at this episode of missing unless specific intelligence / information dictates. This will also be relevant when dealing with persons with Exploitation markers (VEMT / MACE) who may not fulfil the criteria to be missing but may be High Risk due to their likelihood to be exploited / trafficked or subject to criminality

Child: anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. ‘Children’ therefore refers to ‘children and young people’ throughout this protocol with the exception of a former relevant child within the meaning of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. These young people continue to be the responsibility of the Local Authority up to the age of 21 (24 years if in receipt of full time education).

Looked After Child: a child who is looked after by the Local Authority by reason of a Care Order or being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

Away from placement without authorisation: a Looked after Child whose whereabouts are known but who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be.

Unauthorised absence from school: a child who is not present at school as required or who is absent without explanation from school. Unless there is a belief that an absent child is at risk of significant harm, these matters should be referred to the Local Authority by schools after they have followed their own school level actions. Where there is a pattern or frequency of absence episodes that cause concern, this may require an investigation to determine if the child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm.

Children Missing Education: a child believed after reasonable investigation from the school to have moved out of the area and whose whereabouts are unknown. The response to this falls within the Children Missing Education (CME) procedure.

Absconded: When a missing child is subject to a court order, such as curfew or bail conditions, police must be made aware of the order and the expiry date in order for the child to be classified as an absconder. If the expiry date of the order is not known, the child will be classified as a “missing person” NOT an absconder.

Missing from Home (MFH), (return) interviews: Once a child has been located, the police will carry out a police safe and well interview as soon as possible after the child has returned. It will not be conducted over the telephone. The purpose is to check for any indications that the child has suffered harm; where and with whom they have been and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them.

Information from the safe and well interviews will be shared with partner agencies and social workers as soon as possible to inform further decision making.

Where this is undertaken, the information will be shared with children's services to further inform the Missing from Home return home interview.

Return Home Interview (RHI): The relevant Local Authority is responsible for offering all young people an independent return home interview and where accepted will be carried within 72 hours of their return home. This interview will be carried out by the local authority or a third party to support the local authority to ascertain the level of risk.

7. Child Exploitation

Sexual:

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. CSE does not always involve physical contact, as it can also occur through the use of technology.

Criminal:

Whilst there is still no legal definition of 'Child Criminal Exploitation' or CCE, the term CCE refers to "The act of using a minor child for labour, profit or financial advantage. It may involve gangs and/or organised criminal networks used to store, move, export or deal illegal drugs and/or money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence and weapons."

Vulnerable:

Whilst it is acknowledged that there are many forms of vulnerabilities, the term vulnerable refers to young people who are or at risk of being 'Vulnerable to Child Sexual Exploitation, Child Criminal Exploitation, Modern Slavery and/or being Trafficked.'

Trafficked:

Trafficking relates to the movement of young people for the purposes of modern slavery, sexual or criminal exploitation, which is classed as a form of 'human trafficking' under the Modern Slavery Act 2015. Although Human Trafficking is international, trafficking for CSE is often within the UK.

Modern Slavery:

Modern Slavery is the term used within the UK and is defined within the Modern Slavery Act 2015. The Act categorises offences of Slavery, Servitude and Forced or Compulsory Labour and Human Trafficking. These crimes include holding a person in a position of slavery, servitude, forced or compulsory labour or facilitating their travel with the intention of exploiting them soon after.

Complex Exploitation Team (CET):

The Complex Exploitation Team have two prime objectives. This is to investigate long-term exploitation often involving multiple victims and or perpetrators. Secondly to continue to develop and work alongside partners to respond contextually to exploitation across the Tees.

Roles and Responsibilities of Agencies:

There is a Tees-wide multi-agency process to identify and assess those children who may be at risk of missing, exploitation and/or trafficking. The joint aim is to reduce the incidence of all children going missing. Children who go missing are at increased risk and others at risk and each missing episode is potentially serious. The reasons for their absence are often varied and complex and cannot be viewed in isolation from their home circumstances or their experiences of care. Every “missing” episode should attract proper attention from the professionals involved, who must collaborate to ensure a consistent and coherent response is given to the child on his/her return.

Local Authorities placing Looked after Children in care settings have a statutory responsibility to:

- Inform the host authority Director of Childrens Services of the intended placement and seek views regarding the appropriateness of the placement.
- Ensure that a holistic assessment of risk takes place regarding potential risks to the placed child and potential risks from the placed child towards others children. This would include reviewing any residential home’s location risk assessment, which should outline any concerns in the local area including child exploitation.

Tees Local Authorities should contact the Cleveland Police Missing Coordinators who will conduct local and national police checks and provide police information to inform the risk assessment in relation to any care placement in the Tees area where information has not been appropriately furnished.

When a child does go missing, the aim is to prevent that child suffering harm and to recover the child to safety as soon as possible. We will do this by partnership working, information sharing, problem solving and performance management.

All reports of children running away or going missing must be seen as a multi-agency investigation to identify the reasons for the child going missing, find them and take action to minimize future missing episodes and mitigate risk. It is not simply a matter for the police or children's services nor is it just about finding and returning the missing child. A range of agencies need to be involved, sharing information and developing strategies for safeguarding those at risk of harm and those actually suffering harm or significant harm. Early identification of risk should lead to the development of a safety plan to address the causes of that risk.

Where a coordinated multi-agency response is required for those children who run or go missing from home or care, the Local Authority will be the lead agency. The Local Authority must ensure that effective support services are provided to reduce the risk of further incidents of running or missing from home or care and reduce the risk.

The accountability for monitoring trends, reporting statistics and co-ordinating a reduction in instances of this group of children lies with the Local Authorities via the North and South Tees Safeguarding Children partnerships.

The lead responsibility for finding and returning children reported as running or missing from home or care lies with Children's Social Care in conjunction with Cleveland Police. The procedure also recognises that a police station is not a place of safety for a child unable or unwilling to return to their home address.

In these circumstances staff from Children's Social Care and the EDT have a responsibility to work together and actively seek to remove children from police stations, as soon as is practicable.

If it comes to the attention of any agency that a non-Looked After Child is missing, they must advise the parent/carer of the need for them to report the matter to the police. They also need to advise the parent of the agency's duty to ensure that the matter has been reported to the police and that they will follow this up by contacting the police to verify that the child has been reported missing.

In the case of a Looked after Child who has been reported missing by their carer's, the Local Authority remains responsible for the child. This responsibility is not absolved when the child has been reported missing to the police. Carers and the child's social worker or EDT social worker will be responsible for liaising with the police, taking an active part/interest in the investigation and passing on all information, which may help to inform the investigation and assist in protecting the child whilst missing. Once a child is reported and agreed as 'missing' to the police, the police will have primacy in respect of the investigation to trace the child.

8. Information Sharing

Information will be shared between Cleveland Police and the individual Tees Local Authority. The purpose of exchanging the data is to ensure that the welfare of children who are reported running or missing from home or care is safeguarded in line with statutory guidance.

There will be an automated daily data exchange between the police to each Local Authority to ensure the timely completion of return interviews within 72 hours of the child returning home or to placement. The information will categorise children under the relevant risk headings. The information from Cleveland Police will record the date and time the child went missing in addition to the date they were reported missing and the date they were found and returned. This will ensure each Local Authority will be clear as to the length of time a child has been missing from home or care.

The active management of missing from home episodes remains with the Incident Management Team (response) and there is an expectation that the officer dealing will provide their contact details when they are allocated the enquiry. Follow up contact can be made via the 101 system or in an emergency via 999. There remains an expectation that the Philomena reporting process should be the default reporting mechanism for children in care placements.

Where a Looked after Child, placed in the Tees area by an external Local Authority goes missing, Cleveland Police will share this information with the home Local Authority as well as the host (Tees) Local Authority. If information is shared with Cleveland Police by another Police Force about a missing episode of a Looked after Child placed in the other police area by a Tees Local Authority, this will be forwarded to the relevant Local Authority.

Each Local Authority will share any relevant information obtained from a return home interview with Cleveland Police for the purpose of intelligence gathering regarding specific areas of risk the child may be placing themselves in whilst running or missing from home and care. This will be submitted as intelligence on a Partner Intelligence Sharing form and directed by email to force.intelhub@cleveland.pnn.police.uk. This should include specific areas of risk if known that the child may be placing themselves in whilst running or missing from home and care including addresses attended and who with which might direct officers looking for the child in future.

9. Deciding whether a child or young person is missing

The police are entitled to expect parents and carers including staff acting in a parenting role in care homes, to accept normal parenting responsibilities and undertake reasonable actions to try to establish the whereabouts of the individual. Children who are breaching parental discipline should not be dealt with by police unless there are other risks.

Once those enquiries have been completed, it may be appropriate to record the child as missing and take actions set out in national police guidance.

The decision about what category of missing the child is, lies with Cleveland Police. Parents or those with parental responsibility and anyone else who has care of a child without parental responsibility should take all reasonable steps to locate the child and ascertain their safety before reporting the child as missing to Cleveland Police.

They are expected to undertake the following basic measures to try to locate the missing child if considered safe to do so:

- Search bedroom / accommodation / outbuildings / vehicle
- Contact known friends and relatives where the child may be
- If it is possible, visit locations that the child is known to frequent
- Visit the address where the child is supposed or thought to be

Once the basic measures are completed and the child has not been located, it is expected that the police will be informed without delay. If there are any serious concerns for the safety of the child at any stage, the police should be informed immediately.

For all looked after children, at the time of placement their social worker should complete a pre-assessment of risk which should be noted within the Placement Plan. During this assessment, social workers should seek to record details that will be useful should the child go missing such as the Philomena Profile Document.

A photograph should be obtained and kept on file with the child should informed that, should they go missing; the photograph will be shared with the police for the purpose of locating them before they come to harm.

During placement, if there are concerns that a Looked after Child may be missing, the foster carer, residential carer or supported lodgings provider (the carer) must make enquiries to locate the child by trying to make contact via telephone / text and checking with their friends and relatives in the first instance. A search of the accommodation and local area/known places where they may be should also be conducted. The carer should also consider checking with the local Accident & Emergency Department and the police, as in some circumstances the child may have been arrested and refused to give their name or address to the police.

If these initial enquires are not sufficient to locate the child, the carer will need to report them missing. This decision is based on an assessment of risk, which can be achieved if the foster carer or residential carer refers to the placement plan or other known vulnerabilities.

If the current whereabouts of the child are known or can be easily identified and they are not considered to be at risk, then they are away from their placement without authorisation and are not a missing person.

Where the child in question is twelve years old or younger, it would be exceptional not to report them as missing, as their age is considered to be a risk factor.

For all children in residential care, the residential carer should complete the Philomena Protocol document and a copy should be shared with the police. Commissioning Departments should ensure that use of the Philomena Protocol is adhered to across care placements.

In all cases, the carer can liaise with the child's social worker or the EDT (depending on the time of the incident) for advice and guidance to help to make a decision and agree a course of action.

If the child is considered 'Missing', the carer must make a missing person report to the police without delay. The carer must also report the missing incident to the child's social worker or the EDT. The report must be noted by the Local Authority / EDT.

For all children in foster care, the foster carer must pass the information on to their supervising social worker. During the period of absence, frequent communication between the carer and the allocated social worker / EDT is essential.

If a child is away from care and does not return to placement or is not located, the assessed level of risk may eventually increase to the point where it may be necessary to deal with them as missing (low, medium or high risk). This is a matter of professional judgement taking into account all other risk factors and the views of all professionals responsible for the child's health, safety and wellbeing.

If the child has not returned to placement or been located by the start of the next working day, the carer must update the allocated social worker (or the team manager if the social worker is not available).

The allocated social worker in collaboration with their team manager (or EDT if the absence is over a weekend / holiday) must keep the unauthorised absence / missing from care risk assessment in continual review. The appropriate service manager (this will be the on-call service manager if being contacted by EDT) must be informed when an absence reaches 24 hours.

Any absence, which lasts for 48 hours, must be reported to the police and the child will then be considered as a missing person. The Local Authority will update the appropriate service manager.

Senior Management should also ensure that care settings are prepared for an effective response if a child is not where they are supposed to be. Sufficient numbers of staff should be on shift, a vehicle should be made available if staff need to go and collect a young person. Ongoing work should be carried out with the local authority (including the responsible authority if a child is placed out of area) to ensure that necessary action can be taken if a child's risk assessment or care plan identifies that they may go missing. If possible, it may be helpful for care settings in a local area to work together to ensure appropriate resource is available (for example, a vehicle).

If a child is not where they are supposed to be but the decision is taken that they do not need to be reported missing to the police, a process should be put in place for ensuring that a child's social worker is still informed. This will help in identifying patterns of unusual behaviour or potential risks of grooming.

Staged Risk Assessment

A care home risk assessment will identify if the matter should be reported to the Police in the first instance or if intermediate enquiries can be carried out by the staff to return the child / young person. This may include undertaking actions to locate the young person. The actions carried out should be, at a minimum, trying to contact the young person on the telephone, address search of young person's room and the care premise as a whole and a search of the area the young person was last seen.

This will further inform the risk posed to the child as a result of the incident and whether the child or young person should be considered as missing.

Once these enquiries have been carried out or the risk presented on assessment is high, then Police should be informed and a THRIVE risk assessment will be undertaken. Police may defer accepting missing enquiries if the initial actions have not been carried out.

'Missing' in which case the incident should be reported to the police immediately. The Cleveland Police definition of missing will be as above, anyone whose whereabouts are unknown and informing the requirement for Police investigation; where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject to crime or the person is at risk of harm to themselves or another. It is expected that whilst Police investigate the episode of missing, the carer or other designated responsible parties will continue to carry out attempts to locate the person missing.

'Away from placement without authorisation' in which case the incident should not be reported to the police unless there are specific concerns that require police intervention. The police will treat this type of call as an advice matter. This will preclude the recording of young people who are simply late home for curfew etc.

For Looked after Children, this assessment of risk is the primary responsibility of the foster carer or residential carer who can seek advice and guidance from the allocated social worker or EDT depending on the time of the incident.

Whilst the child is missing, the risk assessment is the primary responsibility of the police however; information pertinent to changes in risk should be communicated to the Police to inform the level of policing activity. The assessment of risk is often a difficult process and must be carefully considered. Out of character behaviour is a strong indicator of risk but must not lead to complacency over those who are frequently missing. It is not correct to consider that these circumstances indicate no or low risk. Careful consideration must be given to all reports to ensure that an absence of information indicating that the child has come to harm isn't mistaken as a demonstration that the child is safe and well. Children and young people with additional vulnerabilities may be at greater risk during periods of absence or missing.

The levels of risk category most commonly used to prioritise incidents of missing children are cited below but it is essential that all missing children be given a new and thorough risk assessment each time based on the individual circumstances of that missing episode. Exploitation flags and previous history will form part of that but should not dictate the same risk category on each and every occasion.

Actions to be taken during a missing episode

Risk Table

Low risk

The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as possible but minimal.

Proportionate enquiries should be carried out to ensure that the individual has not come to harm.

Medium risk

The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as likely but not serious.

This category requires an active and measured response by the police and other agencies in order to trace the missing person and support the person reporting.

High risk

The risk of serious harm to the subject or the public is assessed as very likely.

This category almost always requires the immediate deployment of police resources – action may be delayed in exceptional circumstances, such as searching water or forested areas during hours of darkness. A member of the senior management team must be involved in the examination of initial lines of enquiry and approval of appropriate staffing levels. Such cases should lead to the appointment of an investigating officer (IO) and possibly an SIO, and a police search adviser (PoISA).

There should be a press/media strategy and/or close contact with outside agencies. Family support should be put in place where appropriate. The MPB should be notified of the case without undue delay. Children's services must also be notified immediately if the person is under 18.

The table above should be used as a guide to an appropriate level of police response based on initial and ongoing risk assessment in each case. Risk assessment should be guided by the College of Policing Risk principles, the National Decision Model and Police Code of Ethics.

The Children Act 1989 introduced Significant Harm as the threshold that justifies compulsory intervention in family life in the best interests of children.

Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Emotional Abuse and Neglect are all categories of Significant Harm.

Harm is defined as the ill treatment or impairment of health and development. This definition was clarified in section 120 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (implemented on 31 January 2005) so that it may include, "for example, impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill treatment of another".

Suspicion or allegations that a child is suffering or likely to suffer Significant Harm should result in an Assessment incorporating a Section 47 Enquiry

There are no absolute criteria on which to rely when judging what constitutes significant harm. Sometimes a single violent episode may constitute significant harm but more often, it is an accumulation of significant events both acute and longstanding, which interrupt, damage or change the child's development.

10. Designated Missing

The CET will produce a monthly report that will designate certain children as being of HIGH RISK of significant harm, should they be deemed missing and at risk when reported.

This does not supersede those initial decisions whereby a child may be absent due to breaking curfew or disobeying parental instruction. There remains clear guidance around this, in terms of those with parental responsibility to take appropriate action to locate the child.

The CET and the Force Missing from Home coordinators will produce a monthly list of children who will be designated as HIGH RISK, in the event that they do go missing. The list will cover every district and will contain those individuals identified as at highest risk at the VPG. Investigations into Designated High Risk missing will be by the local response team or other appropriate investigating party with the support of the CET.

Each child will have a flag on NICHE and within that will be a HIGH RISK MISSING ACTION PLAN. This plan will reflect the placement plan and risk assessment and will inform the persons, locations and situations who pose risk to the missing persons. This plan will contain the following

- Rationale for HIGH RISK MISSING decision including a Current Situation Report on all factors affecting the child

- Action Plan for location the child (associates, phone numbers, current intelligence / information summary, up to date photograph)
- What care plan (if any) is in place and whether Police Protection should be considered
- Contact details for the CET lead and Partnership contacts

As per the Tees protocol, the CET will work closely with the force Missing from Home Coordinators to ensure that all children they are working with are identified.

The CET will case manage high and medium risk children where there is evidence that the child is being exploited for criminal or sexual reasons. If a child is not being case managed by the CET then the Cleveland Police Neighbourhood Teams will be asked to provide a single point of contact (SPOC) to link in with the existing child safety plan. This will receive support from the CET.

11. Making a Missing Report to the Police

The responsibility for making a missing person report to the police rests with:

- The parent or primary carer for children who are not looked after the Local Authority or are subject to a care order and placed at home with a parent or person with parental responsibility
- The foster carer, for children in foster care
- The residential carer for children in residential care
- The supported lodgings provider for children in supported accommodation

If the child goes missing from a hospital or educational setting etc., the staff must inform a person with parental responsibility (if appropriate). If the hospital or educational staff are concerned about the safety of the child, they should inform the police without delay and report them as missing or absent.

Missing person reports should be made via telephone to the non-emergency number 101 or by using the 999 system, if it believed the child or young person is at serious / immediate risk of harm. The police will require as much of the following information as possible, (some may be provided in a follow-up visit by the police):

- Details of the child / young person, name, date of birth, legal status, mobile telephone number etc;
- A physical description including clothing worn when the child or young person left the placement;
- Names, addresses and contact numbers of family members, significant others and friends;
- Details of where, when and with whom the child or young person went missing;
- Legal status of the child or young person, who has parental responsibility, or Local Authority care section 20 or 31;
- If the child is looked after and overall time in care;
- Relevant medical history;
- A recent photograph cropped as necessary to show only the missing person;
- Any other relevant information e.g. addresses / locations frequented;

- Previous history of missing and circumstances of where found;
- Actions already taken to try and locate the child or young person along with the results of this action;
- Any factors, which may increase the risks to the child or young person.

The person making the missing person report will be given a unique reference number, which should be retained and used in any future contact with the police regarding this matter.

Following the initial telephone notification, a police officer will visit the child's home or placement to collect any information not already provided. If the young person is in care and has a Philomena Risk Profile, this should be handed to the attending officer who will be investigating.

12. During an Active Missing Episode

For all Looked After Children, if not already done, the allocated social worker (or team manager if the social worker is not available) must be notified by the carer that the child has been reported missing to the police. The child's parent(s) must also be notified as appropriate.

Cleveland Police will investigate all cases of missing children in accordance with the Cleveland Police Missing Person's Policy.

Responsibility for the child or young person remains with:

- The parent or other person with parental responsibility for all children who are not looked after;
- The Local Authority for all Looked After Children

For all Looked after Children, as and when updates occur following the missing person report, the carer must update the police with the status of the child's absence including details of any action that has taken place to locate them such as attempts to contact via mobile telephone. If the police provide any updates or information to the foster carer or residential carer, they should record (foster carer); residential case file (residential care) or other recording system (supported lodgings).

The allocated social worker must send relevant updates on the missing incident to EDT using the EDT Message Sheet until the child has returned to placement or been located.

When a child has been missing for 24 hours, the appropriate Children's Social Care Service Manager must be informed. Where the child is looked after, the Independent Reviewing Officer should also be informed at this time.

The Police or the Local Authority may call a multi-agency meeting at any point to develop a plan to manage and reduce any risks posed to or by the child while they are missing and to review and plan actions to locate them.

When a Looked After Child has been missing from their placement with no contact or sightings for 48 hours, a Senior Children's Services Manager / Assistant Director must be notified by the appropriate Service Manager (or on-call Service Manager via the EDT if out of hours). If there has not already been one, a multi-agency meeting/strategy discussion must be held. The following professionals should be invited to attend the multi-agency meeting (any absences must be recorded):

- The most appropriate Cleveland Police Officer or support staff officer from either the CET, the Missing Persons Coordinator and/or a Detective Sergeant from the multi-agency Front Door Team
- The Team Manager
- The Social Worker
- The Foster Carer or Residential Carer
- The Foster Carer's Supervising Social Worker (if applicable)
- The Team Manager Child Placement (if applicable)
- Fostering Agency Manager (if the placement is with an Independent Fostering Agency)
- The Residential Childrens Home Manager
- The Independent Reviewing Officer
- An Education Representative / School Nurse
- Any other relevant agency representative
- Parents / Carers (as appropriate)

Further such reviews will take place at least every five days thereafter or earlier, if deemed appropriate.

The police have responsibility for advising the media regarding children who are missing in order to assist in locating that person or warning the public if the child is a significant threat. For all Looked after Children, any decision to publicise will always be made in consultation with the Local Authority.

The senior representative of Children's Services is the delegated decision maker regarding any decision to release publicity about a missing Looked after Child.

If the child has been missing for 28 days, a senior Police Officer and a Children's Social Care Service Manager should jointly review the case and take any actions they consider necessary to locate and return the child.

During the missing episode, the professionals involved will identify the most appropriate agency to support the family. Depending on the circumstances of the case, this will generally be the police or Children's Services Department however, in some instances, it may be more appropriate for another agency to assume this role.

13. Publicity / Media Strategy

It is the responsibility of the Police to advise the media regarding any missing child or young person. For those missing from their "home / parental" address, the approval of the parents (or those with parental responsibility) will always be sought but Cleveland Police reserve the right to publicise the child without parental consent if they believe that the concerns for the child outweigh any reservations highlighted by those with parental responsibility.

For those missing from the Local Authority or private care providers, the decision to publicise by press and/or television will always be made in consultation with the child's social worker and the Head of Service or Service Manager, Children's Social Care and with the agreement of the Assistant Director (Children's Social Care). However, Cleveland Police reserve the right to publicise the child if there are serious concerns for the welfare of that child.

Such publicity will be arranged at local level, by direction of the IO (Investigating Officer) or SIO (Senior Investigating Officer).

Children and young people looked after by Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland or Stockton on Tees who are placed with an Independent Fostering Agency or Independent Children's Home.

Any placement provider located outside of the local area should be given a copy of this procedure so that they are aware of their responsibilities should a child in their care be missing. It is the responsibility of the child's social worker to provide a copy of this procedure to the placement provider.

Responsibility for reporting the child as 'missing' lies with the foster carer or residential carer in the placement. The placement provider will also have their own procedures covering reporting requirements but their risk assessment in relation to the child must be communicated and agreed with the allocated social worker.

If a child placed in an out-of-borough placement is reported missing, the carer must report the incident to their local police force and responsible authority for the child. This will be the home authority EDT (if the incident happens outside of office hours) or to the allocated social worker (or the team manager if the social worker is not available).

During a missing episode, there must be regular liaison and exchange of information between the police and professionals in the host authority where the child is placed and within the placing authority. This exchange of information must be well managed and co-ordinated. Cleveland Police must also be informed of the missing incident by the police force in the host authority.

The allocated social worker must also communicate regular updates to the child's parent(s) as appropriate.

14. When A Child Is Located or Returns Home or To Their Placement

For children who are missing from home, if the child returns of their own accord, the parent or primary carer must inform the police. If the whereabouts are known or suspected, it is the responsibility of the parents or carers to arrange for the child's return. In **exceptional** circumstances and in the interests of safeguarding the child, the police may agree to requests from parents or carers to assist. Where the police locate a missing child and they indicate that they are running away because of abuse within the home or care setting, then the police will not return the child to that setting and will instigate Safeguarding procedures

For Looked After Children, if they return to their placement of their own accord the carer must inform the police, the social worker and the parents (if appropriate) as soon as possible. If the child is located somewhere, it is the responsibility of the foster carer or residential carer to recover them from the place where they have been located where this is safe and practical. If necessary, the carers can seek support from the social worker.

If there are specific and identified issues of safety or public order associated with returning the child then a coordinated approach to recover the child should be agreed with the police.

When a missing child has returned home the police will conduct a Safe and Well Interview to establish their wellbeing, check for any indications that they have suffered harm, where and with whom they have been and to determine whether they were a victim of crime while they were missing. The police must be confident that there is nothing untoward that has been missed. It is common for missing children to be unwilling to engage in this process. If this is the case, it is important to record their demeanour, their physical state and any other factors that may be relevant later. The place of location and any observations or known detail of other persons present including children and adults.

If a missing incident has led the police to have sufficient concerns about the child's welfare, they will make a referral to Children's Services. If the child is already receiving services, the information will be forwarded to the allocated worker. If the child is not currently in receipt of services, the referral will be reviewed by the Redcar & Cleveland MACH or the Middlesbrough MACH or the Children's HUB for Stockton and Hartlepool to decide whether it should be progressed for assessment.

If a child is believed to have suffered significant harm while they have been missing or if the missing incident leads professionals to believe that the child may be at risk of significant harm, Tees Child Safeguarding Procedures must be followed and if appropriate, this will include an enquiry and assessment under section 47 of the Children Act 1989.

When a missing Looked after Child is found, they must be offered the opportunity to speak with someone independent of their placement before they are returned if it is considered that there are issues within that placement. However, they cannot be compelled to speak to someone if they choose not to.

When the child has been found or returned, the professionals involved will identify the most appropriate agency to support the family. Where there is an allocated social worker, Children's Services will generally assume this role. If Children's Services are not actively involved with the child and their family, this role may be assumed by another agency such as early intervention services or the child's school etc.

As part of the management of young people who have been found at a location or with a person in circumstances that may have encouraged directly or indirectly a young person to stay away from carers, a professional may wish to utilise a Child Abduction Warning Notice. The procedure aims to identify, warn and where necessary prosecute these individuals for harbouring or abduction in order to disrupt this activity under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 or section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984.

Warnings can be given in relation to children under the age of 16 years if they live at home and under 18 years of age if they are a Looked after Child. The notice can only remain in place until the young person reaches that age. Cleveland Police will give the warning where appropriate and record them on the IRIS system. In the case of a Looked after Child, this will be done in cooperation with the relevant Local Authority or other suitable disposals.

If during the course of a missing episode, it is established that a child has been moved from A to B for the purposes of exploitation the child should be referred to the UK Human Trafficking Centre using the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) available on the National Crime Agency website. This will ensure the child is assessed as being a trafficking victim, given support and will establish patterns and prevalence of trafficking nationally / globally.

15. Independent Return Home Interviews

Once any missing child has been found they should be offered an independent return interview. 'Return Home Interview' is the term applied to the safety, needs and risk assessment carried out by Children's Services and/or their partners. It should include exploration of the reason the child left their home or placement as well as what risks they were exposed to whilst missing. The return home interview should not be confused with the Police Safe and Well Interview, which has a very different purpose.

The return home interview is important in safeguarding the child in the future. It must not be viewed as a routine or administrative task. The Local Authority in each area is responsible for deciding whether a return home interview is conducted for each missing episode. For a Looked after Child, a return home interview should always be considered as part of the ongoing risk assessment.

The purpose of the return home interview is:

- To better understand the reasons why the child went missing
- To explore the circumstances which led to the missing episode(s)
- To inform future prevention strategies
- To inform any future missing person investigation should the child go missing again

- To learn of the activities, associates, risks and victimisation involved in the missing episode and where possible to address those risks with appropriate and proactive strategies
- To identify and address any harm the child has suffered including harm that may not have already been disclosed as part of the Police Safe and Well interview.

Each Local Authority within Tees will ensure that all missing episodes requiring a Police intervention graded low to high involving young people will be offered a return home from missing interview in accordance with the statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care 2014. Each Local Authority may also decide to initiate a return home interview for some missing episodes that are graded 'No apparent risk' as they would have done in previous cases of absent. Tees Strategic VEMT have agreed a best practice guide in respect of conducting and managing these interviews. Authorities should attempt to utilise this guide where appropriate. This is attached at Appendix A.

In **exceptional** circumstances, a Local Authority Officer not below the level of Service Manager may determine that a return home interview is not required i.e. where the missing child was very young and was missing for a very short period of time or the missing child was located in hospital following an accident.

Intelligence obtained from these interviews should be shared with police through the Partnership Information Sharing Report form procedure as a matter of course. <https://www.teescpp.org.uk/forms/partnership-information-sharing-form/>

In the case of multiple missing episodes, one return home interview is permitted, should the circumstances dictate provided that each episode is defined separately during the interview.

Although a child should be offered a return home interview by someone who is not involved in caring for them, the child cannot be compelled to engage in which case parents and carers should be offered the opportunity to provide any relevant information and intelligence they may be aware of. In addition, exceptions to offering an independent return home interview may be made where the child has expressed a preference to talk to someone with whom they have a strong relationship with rather than with an independent person.

Where a return home interview leads to a disclosure that needs specific action, for example, to safeguard the child or investigate a crime the matter should be referred to the Local Authority and/or the Police.

Where a new referral that is progressed for assessment, any Missing from Home Return Interview must be carried out as a standalone interview.

The return home interview must be undertaken within 72 hours of a child returning home or to their placement. Each Local Authority will have their own mechanism for how return home interviews are recorded.

The return home interview should explore the “push factors” i.e. those which drove a child to run away or go missing (such as a dispute with their carers) and / or the “pull factors” i.e. those factors outside of the placement that drew a child (such as influences of a peer group).

The interview should assess the risk of harm to the child when they were running or missing and should consider the likelihood of any future episodes occurring.

If the child is considered to have suffered or be at risk of suffering significant harm, the Tees Child Safeguarding Procedures will be utilised to amend the risk assessment and safeguarding measures in place around that individual.

Repeated missing episodes should be viewed with as much concern as children who run away for the first time. The persistence of this behaviour can suggest that actions following earlier assessments to reduce the likelihood of future episodes should be reviewed and alternatives considered.

It is acknowledged that a returning child may well share different parts of their experience with different people. It is the responsibility of all agencies therefore, to attend to issues of immediate safety, future support and safeguarding needs and information sharing in a way, which respects and safeguards children. The acceptable minimum in the event of a single missing episode is that the missing episode is risk assessed following information gathered and cross-referenced from the child, the carers and the police.

Where there is a decision not to carry out a return home interview, this should be justified and recorded in the child’s social care record.

For Looked after Children, the social worker and their team manager must liaise with the Independent Review Officer (IRO) to decide whether to convene a Looked after Review to consider the missing episode and to review the care plan.

When a Looked after Child is placed in another Tees area and they return from a missing episode, then it is the responsibility of the Local Authority who is the corporate parent to make arrangements for a return home interview to be undertaken. A copy of the return home interview form must be shared with the host area in line with the North East Protocol for missing children. For Tees, the return interviews should be sent securely to:

Hartlepool childrenshub@hartlepool.gov.uk

Middlesbrough middlesbroughmach@middlesbrough.gov.uk

Stockton childrenshub@hartlepool.gov.uk

Redcar missingchildren@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk

16. Multi-Agency Meetings

Multi-agency meetings may be called when:

- Children have been reported missing from their home or placement and where they are assessed as being at high risk of harm or that they pose a high risk of harm to others while they are missing. The purpose of the meeting in this set of circumstances is to share information about the child, to review actions taken to locate them and to determine what further actions, if any need to be undertaken to ensure the child's safe return as well as developing a plan to manage and reduce any risks posed to or by the child while they are missing – ***whilst a child or young person is missing, the Police will chair any such meeting.***
- Children have returned to their home or placement following a missing episode where they had been assessed as being at high risk of harm or that they posed a high risk of harm to others. The purpose of the meeting in this set of circumstances is to develop a plan to respond to any risks suffered by the child while they were missing and to formulate a plan to reduce any future running or missing incidents – ***For those children with an allocated social worker the children's social care team manager will chair the meeting; where there isn't an allocated social worker the police may consider making a referral to children's social care.***

The same child is frequently reported as missing and is assessed as being at high risk to themselves or others while they are missing. The purpose of the meeting is to:

- plan a response to any future missing episodes including a reporting strategy
- manage and reduce the risks posed by or the child and
- to plan to reduce the frequency that the child runs away or goes missing by considering appropriate interventions to address long term issues

Where the child is not currently missing and where there is an allocated social worker, Children's Social Care Team Manager will chair the meeting; where there isn't an allocated social worker, the police may consider making a referral to Children's Social Care.

Multi-agency meetings can be requested by the Police, Children's Social Care or Children's Home. Any unresolved issues should be escalated to a discussion between the Detective Inspector, Complex Exploitation Team and a Service Manager from the Local Authority as well as a Police Missing from Home Coordinator.

Vulnerable, Exploited, Missing, Trafficked (VEMT) Practitioners Group (VPG) or MACE

The VPG or MACE in place is a multi-agency group made up of frontline practitioners from a number of agencies including Children's Social Care, Health, Police and Voluntary Sector Organisations.

The VPG or MACE work collaboratively to ensure the safeguarding and welfare of children, who are vulnerable due to missing, exploitation or trafficking (or any combination of these factors).

The VPG or MACE seeks reassurance that appropriate risk management strategies are in place to reduce the risk for children at risk of or involved in exploitation. The Group also identifies any specific themes or trends relating to children such as hotspots and identifies potential facilitators/perpetrators of children missing or being exploited and ensuring that service provision for these children is adequate, identifying gaps in service provision. The potential risk of children being involved in exploitation can be explored through the use of a child exploitation risk assessment tool. The risks from potential perpetrators can be shared through the use of the Police Partnership Information Sharing Report form. It allows for the identification of local 'hot spots' for children and perpetrators who target children across the Tees area.

The VPG / MACE chair will receive information from Cleveland Police in relation to missing children and should determine which cases should be subject of multi-agency information sharing and problem solving discussion through the VPG structure or, in line with specific Local Authority procedures, through an alternative multi-agency group. As a minimum standard, the following missing cases must be subject of multi-agency information sharing and problem solving:

- All children missing on 3 or more occasions in a 30 day period (3 in 90 days – Middlesbrough and Redcar & Cleveland only)
- Any child who has had a missing episode categorised as high risk
- Any other child where the RHI identifies the child has been or is vulnerable to CSE, CCE or being trafficked
- Any child missing for 72 hours or more

This does not affect the ability of a practitioner from any agency to make a referral into VPG / MACE for any child where they feel it is appropriate.

The list of cases to be discussed at VPG / MACE should be circulated to member agencies in advance to allow information to be researched and presented at the meeting.

17. Photographs for Use in Locating Missing Children (Looked After Children)

The sharing of photographs for use in locating missing children (Looked after Children) should be in line with the protocol agreed by the Tees Strategic VEMT. This protocol is attached at Appendix B

18. Police Powers

Return of the Individual

Police Protection Powers (PPPs) Section 46 of the Children Act 1989

When a child is located and the police officer has reasonable cause to believe that the child is likely to suffer significant harm, they may take the child into police protection.

As PPPs have a time limitation, early thoughts should be given regarding actions to be taken when the PPP times out. This could include social services use of Emergency Protection Orders (EPO) or other measures available to the Local Authority such as recovery orders.

The statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care (January 2014) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_from_care_3_.pdf states that when a missing child is located, it is the responsibility of the parents/carers to collect the child, unless the circumstances pose a risk to them. In such circumstances only, the Police may be asked to assist in returning the individual but it must be recognised that the Police only have powers to return an individual who is not in care if circumstances are such that Police Protection is required. [\(See also Abduction / Harbourer's Legislation\)](#).

Where the locating officer has reasonable cause to believe that a person would otherwise be likely to suffer significant harm, the Police may take the person into police protection and return them to their home address, a place of safety, Local Authority accommodation or a place chosen by the Local Authority. A Police Station should not be considered an appropriate place of safety. Police Protection will not be used as a tool to simply facilitate the return of an individual. If any information is divulged by the individual when located that suggests they are not safe if they were returned home, this will be discussed with the EDT / Service of the Local Authority to establish a course of action and a place of safety, if necessary. Officers will also consider markers on an address that indicate abuse or other concerns or history.

Abduction / Harbourer's Legislation

Under Section 2 Child Abduction Act 1984, the taking or detaining of a person under 16 without the consent of a person who is lawfully responsible for the child is an arrestable offence. Offender(s) can be arrested and prosecuted for this offence without a complaint from the victim. Evidence can be obtained from persons having lawful control of the victim and a formal interview with the offender.

Child Abduction Warning Notice

This is an official warning for an offence under Section 2 Child Abduction Act 1984. Chief Constables Order 2003/04, item 2, outlines the procedures for warning offenders who it is suspected are guilty of the above offence. This is an alternative to arrest and prosecution but can be cited in any subsequent prosecution. There is evidence of these notices being used successfully as deterrents against inappropriate relationships or contact with young people who regularly abscond.

Recovery Orders

Recovery Orders may be sought in respect of children who are either in care, subject to an EPO or in Police Protection, under Section 50 of the Children Act, 1989. They can be applied for in situations where a child is somewhere they should not be and there is deemed to be the need for Police to gain entry into accommodation and effect the child's removal by force.

The process is as follows:

- The Local Authority Children's Social Care with Parental Responsibility (PR) should complete a risk assessment and take immediate advice from their Legal Services team. The Local Authority will then liaise with the Divisional Duty Inspector to consider whether the child's return can be effected without a Section 50 Order. If all other options are discounted, Children's Social Care will ask their Legal Services Department to apply to Court for a Recovery Order and inform Police when the application is to be made. Childrens Social Care will specify whether the Court needs to authorise the Police to enter specified premises.
- Once the Order has been made, the Police must be informed by phone and a copy of the Order sent to the Divisional Duty Inspector. A strategy will then be agreed as to how to best execute the order, involving line managers if necessary.
- The agreed strategy will then be executed. Police will transport the child to a Police Station if necessary. Childrens Social Care will be responsible for organising the required transportation of the child back to the placement. Ideally, the allocated social worker should accompany the child in order to minimise further distress and anxiety.
- A joint debrief will then take place and consider any learning points.

Criminality of Others

When a missing person is located by any agency, but particularly by the Police, steps should be taken to ensure that all aspects of criminality are considered. On too many occasions, a missing child has been located in the company of inappropriate adults and whilst the missing person is dealt with as a priority, little or no action or investigation takes place with regard to the adults concerned with the child's activities whilst missing. Consideration should be given to possible criminal activity to which the missing child is victim, whether they consider themselves as such or not. See Abduction / Harbourer's Legislation, above.

19. Looked After Children Missing In One Area Whilst On Placement from Another Area

Where a child is placed out of their local authority area, there is a statutory duty for the responsible authority to notify the host authority and other relevant services/agencies that the child is there, and provide certain information around the child's care. Whilst there is no requirement to notify the local police in missing person cases, if a child is likely to go missing, then it would be best practice to inform the local police Missing Person Unit (MPU) that the child is residing in the area. This is particularly relevant if the child has a history of missing episodes. This information should ideally be supplied prior to the child being placed or on their arrival, given that it is very common for children to go missing within the first 24 to 48 hours of a new placement.

It is also good practice for police forces to have a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with all their local children's homes and 'other provisions' which should include an agreement that the home will notify the local MPU when a new child arrives. It is beneficial to provide police with the risk assessment that has been received from the placing authority. It is really important that there is communication and partnership between the police, social care and the carer.

When a child runs away, it is highly likely that they will return to the responsible authority area, the place that they have the most ties – family & friends. Where the carer reports the child missing it is for the local police to receive and initiate the police investigation to locate the child. The local force will be responsible for obtaining the information required to generate a missing person report. They should explore any early investigative opportunities, seize any objects that may assist in locating the child (forensic samples, diaries, phones etc.), conduct searches locally for the missing person, including the searches required at the child's accommodation/home. One of their primary aims is to establish that the child has gone voluntary and is not a victim of crime.

At some stage, it may become apparent that the child is in another force area, whether that is in the child's responsible authority or another police area. Confirmation that a child is in an area other than the home force may come from a range of sources e.g. posts on their social media site, phone data, sightings or contact with family members in the area. In these cases where the investigating force is deciding where ownership of the investigation lies, they should apply the following two questions:

1. Who has the greatest opportunity of locating the missing person?
2. Where do the bulk of the enquiries lay?

The answer to this second question is usually where the person was last seen or is believed to be (although this is not always necessarily the case).

Where a missing child case is transferred from one police area to another, the transferring force should ensure that all information is passed to the receiving force. They must also ensure that the receiving force has received the transfer and has now taken ownership of the case. The investigation should not be closed in the original force until there is clear confirmation that the other force has taken ownership of the case. Cleveland Police utilise an official transfer of enquiry document to ensure that transparency and appropriate information sharing is undertaken in transfer cases.

20. Reporting To Local Safeguarding Childrens Partnerships

Reporting on Runaways and Missing from Care is required at least annually by the CSP's as part of the agreed Tees Performance Management Framework. Tees Strategic VEMT has previously considered the reporting requirement and recommended that reports be produced for each Local Authority area to include the following:

- Emerging themes
- Trend information by quarter covering at least 15 months (to allow comparison with same quarter the previous year)
- Number of missing episodes and number of individual missing children to be reported separately
- Frequency of missing episodes by individual presented in groupings as per Middlesbrough report
- Age, gender and ethnic breakdown of statistics
- Breakdown of those missing from care, missing from family or other.
- Postcode / ward based data
- Percentage of return interviews completed (with annual audit of quality of return interviews)
- Interventions resulting from return interviews (by type)
- Intelligence reports submitted to police
- Service user feedback (annual)
- Reasons for missing
- Case examples of problem-solving activity

To be reviewed in 6 months – September 2022