

Joint protocol

August 2014

**“Children and young people who
run away or go missing from
home or care”**



Contents

1. Background	page 4
2. Definitions	page 6
3. Legislation	page 10
4. Scope	page 11
5. Principles	page 12
6. Procedures for a child missing from home	page 13
6.1 Responsibility of parents/carers	page 13
6.2 All agencies/members of the public	page 14
6.3 Role of Police	page 14
6.4 Review of continued absence	page 15
6.5 Return of the child	page 15
7. Procedures for a child looked after	page 18
7.1 On admission to placement	page 18
7.2 When the looked after child goes missing	page 19
7.3 Missing	page 21
7.4 Absconders	page 22
7.5 Roles and responsibilities	page 23
7.6 Review of continued absence	page 24
7.7 Return of the child	page 26
8. Return interviews	page 27
9. Monitoring Arrangements	page 30
10. Looked after children who may have been trafficked from abroad	page 31
Appendix	page 32

Introduction

This protocol is important for the safeguarding of children and families across Lancashire, or those using services in the area. It should be read and must be implemented by all practitioners and managers working with children or young people who are at risk of going missing from home or care or who are already doing so.

It is intended that this protocol will assist in developing robust responses to running away, which mirror the good practice already established across Lancashire with regards to children and young people (hereafter referred to as 'children') at risk of sexual exploitation. It should be used to engage partner agencies in developing preventative services for children and young people who are at risk of running away.

It has been written jointly by the three local authorities in Lancashire, Lancashire Constabulary and The Children's Society on behalf of the Pan-Lancashire LSCBs. All agencies responsible for implementing the procedures in this protocol will regularly review and audit its implementation and the LSCBs will monitor the effectiveness of the arrangements.



Lancashire, Blackpool and Blackburn with Darwen's Safeguarding Children Boards expects 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 and with those children already subject to multi-agency interventions from early help services through to looked after children and children leaving care.

Contact information

If you believe that a child is at immediate risk, this should be reported without delay to the Police service; for emergencies use 999, or for urgent/immediate reporting 0845 125 3545 or 101 as well as making contact with Children's Services:

Lancashire: 0845 053 0000
Blackpool: 01253 477299
Blackburn with Darwen: 01254 587547

Reporting a child missing from care

The vast majority of Local Authority Care Homes have facilities to make direct 'missing person' reports onto the SLEUTH system, which in turn creates a unique Log reference number. A call will then also be made by the care professional to the Lancashire Constabulary to acknowledge receipt of the report. For those Local Authority carers who do not have remote access to the SLEUTH reporting system, they can contact Lancashire Constabulary via the contact Telephone number 101. This will provide direct contact to one of the Divisional Communications Rooms and the staff within the Contact Management Unit will record these details. By the utilisation of a question set, the contact Management Staff will risk assess each reported case to ensure correct operation deployment classification.

Return Interview

Completed return interview forms should be sent to the relevant Lancashire Constabulary Missing Person Co-ordinators.

Please note that these email addresses are for non-urgent contact and should only be used for sending the completed return interview forms.

East-MFHCO-ORDINATOR@lancashire.pnn.police.uk

South-MFHCO-ORDINATOR@lancashire.pnn.police.uk

West-MFHCO-ORDINATOR@lancashire.pnn.police.uk

Where return interviews highlight the need for urgent protective action, sharing information with the relevant services involved already with the child and with children's social care must be undertaken, in addition to the Missing Persons Co-ordinators.



Lancashire Constabulary Divisions



1. Background

1.1 During the past three years the Lancashire Constabulary has experienced a reduction in the number of reported missing persons. From a figure of, 9134 during 2010 – 2011, to 7000 during 2012 – 2013 to date.

65% of all missing person's reported are under the age of 18.

64% of individuals who are reported as missing from home, return within 24hrs and this is a feature across all of the risk categories. This trend can be attributed to a more pragmatic interpretation of missing through policy change and numerous initiatives to address repeat missing.

1.2 For the 2012-13 period, 524 children have been missing more than twice. These 524 children generated a total of 3,624 incidents of missing from home/care, which is more than 50% of the incidents reported to the Constabulary. Many of these incidents involve children who are looked after by the local authorities in Lancashire; particularly those resident in children's care homes operated by the local authorities and private care providers. Children placed in care are disproportionately represented in the missing incident reports compared to children living with parents in a family home. In 2011-12, 60% of missing from home incidents involved children who were looked after by the local authorities. This is due in part to the duty placed with foster carers and residential care staff to report all incidents to the Police. Conversely, it is evidenced in national research that children living with parents in the family home are under-reported, with around two-thirds of incidents never reported to statutory agencies including the police.



1.3 Why children go missing

The Children's Society through its research has identified the following risk factors that can precede a missing incident

- Arguments and conflicts
- Conflict within a placement
- Poor family relationships
- Physical and emotional abuse
- Boundaries and control
- Step parent issues

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
- 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
- Child sexual exploitation
- Poor physical and / or mental health

1.4 Academic research together with local analysis by The Children's Society¹, Street Safe Lancashire Project, Local Authority staff and Police show that children who run away are often very vulnerable in the ways described above. *Still Running II and III, The Children's Society*

1.5 Since the first version of this protocol was introduced in November 2003, Lancashire County Council Children and Young People's Services Directorate, Blackpool Children's Services and Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council Children's Services, the Police and The Children's Society Street Safe Lancashire Project have worked hard to address the problem. Using partnership problem-solving and performance management the incidence of repeat runaway behaviour showed an initial reduction by around 20% throughout 2005. In November 2012 Lancashire Constabulary developed the Deferred Deployment Reporting system that provides a case by case risk assessment for each formally reported missing person incident. The report will be allocated one of three risk based categories; High : Medium : Standard. The Standard level risk assessment provides the opportunity to defer operational deployment for up to 9hrs. This will allow for a focused operational response on missing person cases that demand intensive and immediate deployment to meet safeguarding needs.

¹Still Running II and Still Running III, the Children's Society'

2. The Definitions

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub

The introduction of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) in April 2013 has provided a more robust approach to identifying vulnerable children and ensuring they are provided with the correct level of support. The MASH has also been successful in identifying vulnerable people who do not meet the statutory thresholds for social care support and facilitates the signposting to other services. This includes Early Action Teams, Neighbourhood Policing and Voluntary Organisations.

The MASH is the initial point of contact for a safeguarding alert (sharing of a concern) and is responsible for screening the alerts in order to provide a multi-agency response to determine whether or not the alert requires further investigation by the specialist safeguarding team.

The MASH has led to more effective communication between key agencies as it facilitates appropriate information sharing and immediate and secure access to records and data.

2.1 The following definitions apply to this protocol and relate to children who go, or have gone missing. The definition of running away is taken from the Social Exclusion Unit Young Runaways report (2002) and includes reference to young people who self-define running away as being forced to leave because, for example, they do not believe they have any alternative.

Child: Anyone who has not reached their eighteenth birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people'.

Missing person: ACPO definition: "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.



Missing child: A child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers.

Young Runaway: A child who has run away from their home or care placement, or feels they have been forced or lured to leave.

Looked after child: A child who is looked after by a local authority by reason of a care order, or being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989..

Missing from care: A looked after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (eg school) and their whereabouts is not known.

Accommodated: A child is accommodated if the Local Authority looks after her/him with the voluntary agreement of his/her parents or with the child if s/he is over 16 years old.

Repeat Missing Child: This is a child that has been missing and formally reported more than once.

Frequent Missing Child: This is a child that has been missing and formally reported as such, 5 times in a 90 day period.

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.

Sexual exploitation: Sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive something (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities.

N.B. For the purposes of these protocols a missing child will be defined as one where the missing episode has been reported to the Police and or recorded on the Police SLEUTH database

Unauthorised Absence: This is a Local Authority term and not one use by the Police. Some children absent themselves from home or care for a short period and then return, often their whereabouts are known or may be quickly established through contact with family or friends or are unknown but the children are not considered at risk. Sometimes children stay out longer than agreed as a boundary testing activity which is well within the range of normal teenage behaviour. These children have taken ‘unauthorised absence’, and would not usually come within the definition of missing or reportable ‘absent’.

‘Unauthorised absences’ must be carefully monitored as the child may subsequently go missing and will require to be formally reported to the police.

Absent Recording by Police: If a child is at a known location then the police would only be contacted 'if' there was a cause for concern for their personal safety. All reasonable steps must be taken by the family or carers to bring the child back to their place of residence.

Full details of an 'absent' episode will be risk assessed and recorded by the police but no formal deployment will take place under this classification. Absent episodes will not be aligned to any episodes which contain an element of RISK and not out of character.

Responsible Local Authority: The local authority that is responsible for a looked after child's care and care planning.

Host local authority: The local authority in which a looked after child is placed, when placed out of the responsible local authority's area.

Care Leaver: An eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Childrens Act 1989.

Away from placement without authorisation: A looked after child whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be and the carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the police.

NOTE... within Lancashire all care home staff will internally manage all 'unauthorised absent' cases until such times that they deemed it suitable and their concerns are raised regarding the personal safety of the individual and they are satisfied that the 'missing' criteria is fully complied with. If the individual at a known location but at no risk, it is the responsibility of the Carer, to bring the individual back to their place of residence.



Missing Person Risk Categories

Classification of risk and response

The definition of each category (High, Medium, Standard and Absent) and what each category means in terms of police operational response is detailed below:

High risk

The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the individual is in danger through their own vulnerability; or may have been the victim of a serious crime; or the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger. This category requires the immediate deployment of police resources. There should be a press/media strategy and/or close contact with outside agencies.

Medium risk

The risk posed is likely to place the individual in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others. This category requires an active and measured response by police and other agencies in order to trace the missing person and support the person reporting.

Standard risk

'This classification will relate to when the location of the person being reports as 'missing' is unknown but the circumstances of the report highlights no associated or perceived risk. A measured Police investigation would commence upon this initial report and risk classification alignment.

No child under 16 would be placed into this category.

Absent

The reported incident reflects the fact that there is NO associated level of risk to the individual. The individual is simply 'not at a place where they are expected or requested to be'. In situations of this nature the reporting person, parent or carer MUST make all reasonable steps to locate and trace the individual. The 'absent' classification does NOT cover incidents that reflect any Local Authority or Private Care Home 'in house' policy of 'Unauthorised Absence'. The 'Absent' classification must not be misused. This classification does not remove the parental responsibilities of Care Professionals and all necessary checks and searches must be carried out prior to reporting the incident to the police.

All 'missing and absent' classifications are under constant review. Should at any time, additional information come to light that would raise concerns for the safeguarding of the individual, then the new information would be incorporated into the missing person log. A full review would then take place by supervisory officers and the risk level classification would be raised if deemed appropriate and in the case of an Absent episode it would be raised to Medium or High with full police deployment.

The Absent classification is not age specific and is subject to full risk assessment and constant review. However, 15hrs is the maximum period that any under 16yr old can remain in the Absent classification. After this period, if the individual has not been located or returned home, a full investigatory review will take place and if the individual is under 16yrs, the classification will be raised to HIGH or MEDIUM (dependent upon the circumstances) and formal police deployment actioned.

For the information of Lancashire Police Officers and Police Staff; full details of the Lancashire Constabulary Missing Persons Reporting Policy can be found within the Constabulary Intranet, Applications, Policies A-Z, Missing section.

3. Legislation

3.1 The legal parameters within which missing person enquiries are conducted can be found in common law, international law and the provisions of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR). Some of the provisions of the ECHR have been given legal effect within the United Kingdom by virtue of the Human Rights Act 1998.

3.2 Data Protection legislation places certain conditions on the ‘processing’ of information classed as personal data. Data held for policing purposes should only be disclosed for such purposes. Adherence to this agreement will therefore ensure compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and Lancashire Constabulary Data Protection policies. Data Protection legislation does not prevent the Police and Local Authority working together to ensure the safe return of a missing child. Both organisations are registered for the purpose of protecting people and therefore for disclosing information for that purpose.

3.3 Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home (DfE January 2014).

3.4 Working Together to Safeguard Children (DfE March 2013) Guidance to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

3.5 ACPO Interim Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons 2013.



4. Scope

4.1 The protocol is designed for all practitioners from all agencies that work with children within Lancashire:

- All children living in the boundaries of the Local Authority.

The Local Authority retains responsibility for children looked after and placed outside the Local Authority boundaries. In these cases the Local Authority will require the placement provider to comply with their own local protocols. (In the absence of any local protocols, the placement provider will adhere to the Lancashire Protocol)

Other Local Authorities placing children within 'the Local Authority' boundary will be required to comply with these protocols.

4.2 Within this context, "Children Looked After" refers to children accommodated under Sect 20 of the Children Act 1989, children subject to Care Orders including Interim Care Orders, Sect 31 and 38 Children Act 1989, and children who are otherwise provided with accommodation by Sect 21 Children Act 1989. These include PACE transfers, children on remand and children subject to a supervision order with a residence requirement.

4.3 In addition the protocol will apply to all young people placed within the county or Local Authority boundaries for whom Lancashire County Council, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council or Blackpool Council have continuing responsibilities.



5. Principles

5.1 This protocol reflects statutory guidance but cannot anticipate every situation. Anyone working with children in a professional capacity should also use their judgment to take whatever additional action is deemed necessary to protect and safeguard the child, based on an assessment of risk for each individual.

5.2 Our joint aim is to recover the child to safety as soon as possible and prevent them from suffering harm. It is also vital that we understand why they went missing, in order to support them and meet their safeguarding needs. We do this by partnership working, information sharing, problem-solving and performance management.

5.3 Our joint aim is to reduce the incidence of all children going missing. Children who go missing may place themselves 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.

5.4 Interventions are important in attempting to address repeat missing episodes. Interventions for looked after children must be informed by and reflected in the placement information record and in the care plan. Interventions must also be informed by effective return interviews. Children’s views and concerns will be taken seriously.

5.5 PUSH – PULL Factors – Reasons that lead children to runaway.

They can be things a child runs from (Push Factors) like problems at home, family break-up, bullying, mental health problems. They can also be the things that the child runs to (Pull Factors), for example friends or a boyfriend who might be grooming them for sexual exploitation.

5.6 The Local Authority will report a child missing to the Police according to this protocol. Lancashire Constabulary will also receive and record reports of children missing from their home. The Local Authority and the Police will monitor compliance with the protocol and monitor outcomes jointly via quarterly performance reports which is calculated over a fixed 90 day period as below:

- **Period 1 April to June**
- **Period 2 July to September**
- **Period 3 October to December**
- **Period 4 January to March**

6. Procedures for a child missing from home

6.1 Responsibility of parents/carers

6.1.1 Parents and those with parental responsibility are expected to undertake the following basic measures to try to locate the missing child if considered safe to do so. The following bullet points illustrate the requirements:

- **Have you searched the home address?**
- **Have you attempted to contact the missing person?**
- **Have you contacted family and associates?**
- **Have you checked known addresses and places frequented?**
- **Have you checked social network sites?**
- **Have you contacted local hospitals?**

Anyone else who has care of a child without parental responsibility should take all reasonable steps to locate the child and ascertain their safety.

Once initial checks by the parent / carer have been completed and the individual is known to be 'missing', the police should be informed without delay, to enable Lancashire Constabulary to risk assess each case and make a decision based upon the fact, as to the classification of the investigation and appropriate operational deployment.

The exact same pre-checks and searches must also be conducted for an individual who is risk assessed as being 'Absent'. It will be the decision of the reviewing Police Sergeant as to the correct risk classification aligned to each incident, although the informant will be consulted at this initial decision making stage.

6.1.2 Anyone who has care of a child without parental knowledge or agreement should also do what is reasonable to safeguard and promote the child's welfare. The Police will consider advice or warning under the Child Abduction Act 1984, if it is appropriate. Section 2 notices apply when an adult allows a child to be in their company and their actions may be perceived as facilitating that child to be absent from the person with parental responsibility without authority. This is preventative for the purpose of safeguarding vulnerable children.

6.1.3 Anyone who 'takes or detains' a child without lawful authority and /or parental consent may be prosecuted under Section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984. The Police may formally warn a person under the abduction legislation prior to prosecution and a subsequent marker may be placed against them on their Police National Computer (PNC) record.

6.1.4 Children under the age of 16 years old are not legally considered as being able to live independently. For children over the age of 16 years old, consideration should be given to their legal status, physical and emotional needs when making a judgment as to whether they can live independently.

6.2 All agencies / members of the public

- 6.2.1 If it comes to the attention of any agency that a child is missing, they must advise the parent/carer of their need to report this matter to the Police. They also need to advise the parent of the agency's duty to ensure that the matter is reported to the Police and if necessary follow this up by contacting the Police to verify that the child has been reported missing.
- 6.2.2 The consent of a person with parental responsibility will be sought for a photograph to be used in any subsequent missing person investigation. If possible the consent of the child should be gained.
- 6.2.3 It is important to state that if a child is 'missing' or 'absent' from a family home, foster placement or Care Home (Local Authority or Private), the reporting procedures and methodology of investigation remains constant. The initial police risk assessment is the same for all people irrespective of age and the level of parental responsibility and expectation by the police for basic searches and enquiries to take place prior to formal reporting, will once again remain a constant. This is a Joint Protocol for all children and their safeguarding needs remains the focus for this document.
- 6.2.4 If an agency becomes aware that a child has previously been missing but was not reported, they should inform the Missing From Home Co-ordinator. Local Authorities should pro-actively consider investigating further to identify early any safeguarding concerns, or whether the child and their family need further support. In addition parents and carers should be encouraged to report any future episodes of running away.

6.3 Role of the Police

- 6.3.1 Upon receiving an initial report of a child being missing from home, the Police will evaluate the information against the ACPO approved Missing Person definition in order to confirm that the circumstances of the incident meet the criteria for a formal missing person report. Once this fact has been established, the individual risk assessment will take place. Upon completion of a formal person report, automated e-mail notification will be sent to the relevant Local Authority.

Refer to the Lancashire Constabulary Missing Persons Reporting Policy for the complete process of the Role of the Police at this stage of the Missing Person Investigation. For the information of Lancashire Police Officers and Police Staff; full details of the Lancashire Constabulary Missing Persons Reporting Policy can be found within the Constabulary Intranet, Applications, Policies A-Z, Missing section.

6.3.2 Risk Assessment

A Risk Assessment is carried out for each missing person episode. The full list of questions are available for viewing within the aforementioned Missing Person Reporting Policy, together with an '**Action Check List**' which is a set of questions that are asked of the informant, in order to ascertain if basic searches, contact enquiries have been made and resulted prior to formal reporting. It also allows the Officer to embark in a conversation to ensure that continual updates will be provided to the Police should the circumstances of any risk assessed 'absent episode' change before the end of the 15 hr. maximum period, prior to formal deployment/ review and escalation to the **HIGH** or **MEDIUM** risk classification.

6.3.3 Sharing information

It is incumbent upon all agencies both Statutory and Voluntary that work in the area of Missing Children, to pro-actively share information and highlight to all relevant parties working with the child and family, the details of missing person episodes and the associated risks. Open lines of communication are vital in order to maximise the provision of Safeguarding to the individual. Should any child be missing over 48hrs (or earlier is deemed appropriate), the agency holding this information must make partners aware of the full situation and the level of their involvement together with their enquiries, up to that point in time.

Close working relationships will be developed with the Missing Person co-ordinator in order to inform the appropriate Children's Services if there is further information on a particular case.

Consideration should also be given of the **'Child Rescue Alert'**

Child Rescue Alert is a partnership between the police, the press and the public. Its aim is to locate abducted children and bring them to safety by using the media to promptly publish details about an abducted child's disappearance.

This system is compatible with other European Child Alert systems, so that concurrent alerts can be launched across EU country borders.

Please refer to your own internal organisational systems to view full Child Rescue Alert Document.

6.4 Review of continued absence

6.4.1 During the course of a Missing Person investigation, Police will, with the support of the informant and other appropriate persons and agencies, continue to risk assess the case, make on-going enquiries and conduct appropriate actions.

6.5 Return of the child

- 6.5.1 It is the responsibility of the parent or carer to contact the Police and confirm that the missing child has returned.
- 6.5.2 If the whereabouts of the 'missing person' or 'absent individual' become known, it is the responsibility of the parents or carers to arrange for the child's return.

Only in exceptional circumstances, would the Police collect and return a child to their home address. The Police would be considered the appropriate party to conduct this action, only if it was deemed to be a risk to the personal safety of the individual for them to be left at the known location.

6.5.3 Police 'safe and well' check

This check has to be a 'face-to-face' action and the purpose of this check is to establish the basic indications if the child has suffered harm during the period of time that they were missing. It also provides the opportunity for the Officer to establish any associates which may indicate where and with whom they have been; and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by, or against, them. Although this check is by no means an in-depth assessment of the full incident, it provides a framework for intelligence gathering that is fundamental for the further provision of support to the individual.

In order to maximise the value of the Safe and Well Check, the Officer must ensure that any intelligence obtained at this stage of the enquiry is fully recorded and provided to the associated partner e.g. Social Worker and to inform the return home interview process if vulnerabilities are also present, completion and submission of a Vulnerable Child report is required.

All children reported as 'missing' will be entitled to a police Safe and Well Check.

There is no requirement for police to conduct a Safe and Well check on children who have been reported and recorded as 'absent'.

However, in Local Authority or Private Care Homes, the request for police attendance to conduct a Safe and Well check will be based upon the request from the professional care provider at the residential establishment. The returning individual will have already been spoken to by the care professional; who will have assessed, listened and formally recorded the reasons for the 'absent' or 'missing' episode and made a qualified decision as to their safeguarding needs. If further discussion is required and there is sufficient concern to suggest that the incident is linked to an unmet safeguarding need or in some cases, associated criminal activity, then a contact call will be made by the Care Professional to the Police, requesting a Safe and Well check.

Each request for police attendance to conduct Safe and well checks under these circumstances, will be dynamically reviewed. If the facts reflect the statutory guidance, a Safe and Well check will be conducted; the findings of which, will be formally recorded and appropriate action taken.

6.5.4 If it is apparent, on the return of a child, that they have been the victim of a crime whilst absent, or that they may be in danger or at risk from any person arising out of circumstances that have occurred whilst they were absent then the Police will instigate further enquiries. This is vital for the protection of the child and for the expeditious recovery of evidence. For all matters in relation to this area of investigation, refer to the Lancashire Constabulary Missing Person Guidance Document.

There will be occasions that the police locate a 'missing' or 'absent' child during their normal course of their duties. In these situations, due to the direct contact of the Officer to the Child, a Safe and Well check will be conducted.

Where a child goes missing frequently, it may not be practicable for the police to see them every time they return. In these cases a reasonable decision should be taken in agreement between the police and the child's parent or carer, or their social worker, with regard to the frequency of such checks bearing in mind the established link between frequent missing episodes and serious harm, which could include gang involvement, forced marriage, bullying or sexual exploitation. The reason for a decision not to conduct a safe and well check should be reported both on the case file for the child (for a Care establishment placement) and also on the police report.

For the information of Lancashire Police Officers and Police Staff; full details of the Lancashire Constabulary Missing Persons Guidance Document can be found within the Constabulary Intranet, Applications, Policies A-Z, Missing section.

6.5.5 Additionally, in matters of sexual exploitation, or any other situation which indicates that the child may have been subject to, or at risk of, significant harm, a referral must be made to the Local Authority in accordance with local safeguarding procedures.

6.5.6 Return Home Interview

Documented Return Home Interview information will have been obtained from the missing person (subject to their consent) as soon as practicable after the missing episode. This information must be securely emailed to the Missing Person Co-ordinator and the Local Authority lead for the areas that the individual went missing from, without delay.

See section 8 for further information

Divisional Missing Person Co-ordinator and Local Authority Lead will be the recipients of the Return Home Interview reports and it will be their responsibility to disseminate the intelligence from the Return Home Interview form, ensure that it is recorded appropriately for future reference and also if required, highlighted to relevant Police Officers to further subsequent investigations.

7. Procedures for a child looked after

7.1 On admission to the placement

- 7.1.1 Each looked after child has a care plan based on a full assessment of the child's current and future needs, including potential risk to self or others. The care plan will therefore take account of any risk that the child may go missing in future and any factors which may increase the risk to the child should they go missing. Children's residential and fostering service staff should contribute to this assessment. All information should be included in the placement plan and in the child's care plan. As part of this assessment it may be appropriate for the Local Authority to consult with the Police and other relevant parties, in order to share information that may be of relevance.
- 7.1.2 The care plan will remain in the possession of the Local Authority. It is not a public document. It is not envisaged that the Police will need to view the care plan at any time. However, there may well be circumstances when it is necessary to involve the Police in aspects of the care planning process to safeguard the child.
- 7.1.3 Should a child go missing it is vital to the safe recovery of the child that a recent photograph of the child is made available. The photograph must be a good likeness of the child. Most commonly the photograph will be used by local Police officers to help them recognise the child when patrolling or when actively looking for the child at relevant locations. In very serious cases, where the child is believed to be at severe risk, the Police and Local Authority may decide to use the photograph more widely and even involve publishing the photograph to national or local media. If in such circumstances no such photograph were available we would be missing a vital opportunity to safeguard the child.
- 7.1.4 In respect of looked after children, a recent photograph bearing a good likeness to the child will be kept on record by the Local Authority. When a child is admitted to care the consent of a person with parental responsibility will be sought for a photograph to be used in any subsequent missing person investigation. If possible the agreement of the child should also be gained.
- 7.1.5 The Local Authority will ensure that sufficient knowledge and information about the child is recorded to enable carers to complete the missing person form should the child go missing in future.
- 7.1.6 Where available, an electronic version of the missing from home form should be completed in advance to enable speedy and accurate reporting if and when required.
- 7.1.7 The residential home manager/foster carer should consider the most appropriate ways to meet the above requirements and whether it is necessary and appropriate to discuss 'running away' with the child.

See **Appendix 1** of the Flow chart to illustrate the process of actions for a **"Missing Child in Lancashire"**

7.2 When the looked after child goes missing /categories for absence

7.2.1 In deciding the category of absence, all staff must consider the circumstances of the child and their absence. This will include detailed consideration of

- **The circumstances of the absence**
- **The child's care plan**
- **The age of the child**
- **The maturity of the child**
- **Any physical or cognitive disability of the child**
- **Any continuing or urgent need for the child to have medication or other medical treatment**
- **The legal status of the child**
- **Previous behaviour and history of the child**
- **Danger posed by the child to themselves or others**
- **General vulnerability of the child**
- **The child's tendency to drug/substance abuse**
- **Whether the child is perceived as running to, or running from, someone or something**
- **Any circumstances within the placement, say with carers or other residents that may be relevant to the absence**
- **The risk of offending**
- **The influence of peer groups, families or friends**
- **Predatory influences on the child. These may relate to others wanting to use the child for crime, sex or drugs**
- **Any known risk of abduction**
- **Environmental factors including weather, time of year, community events or tensions**

Based upon the considerations of the above points, if the individual is regarded as 'unauthorised absent' then the incident will be dealt with via internal procedures but if the individual is to be regarded as 'missing' or as an 'absconder', then this matter must be reported to the police without delay.

7.2.2 Children who are 'unauthorised absent' from their placement can be a matter of considerable concern to their carers and there is a need to locate them and ensure they are safe. The children can be thought of as being on a continuum, with there being little cause for concern at one end, and with significant cause for concern at the other. Children who are a few minutes late home from school would not normally give rise to concerns; they may have missed the bus, or they may be exhibiting normal adolescent testing out, to establish the boundaries of acceptable behaviour, or to show their disagreement with aspects of their placement. It is not helpful to consider every momentary absence as warranting a formal missing person report.

7.2.3 However, at some point, depending upon the child and the circumstances, the child's absence will give rise to justifiable concern and require a formal missing person report to the Police. Whilst there can be no substitute for a considered judgement, based on a sound assessment of the child and the circumstances, it is the purpose of this framework to assist carers to structure their thinking with regard to the three categories of absence. This decision should not be taken in isolation, residential staff should consult with the senior member on duty and foster carers should liaise with the child's Social Worker or EDT staff. The situation should be kept under constant review and changes in circumstances taken into account. If the child is receiving support from CAMHS professionals, Educational Psychologists and so on, it may be advisable to discuss the case with them. However, if they are not readily available a decision must be made on the basis of the best available information. In cases of doubt it may also be appropriate to discuss the case with a local Police supervisor.

7.2.4 Each case must be decided on merit and a formal missing person report to the Police may be actioned earlier in some circumstances than in others. Indeed for a small number of young people it may be appropriate to immediately report them as a missing person. Normally this will have been previously agreed as part of the Care Plan because of the child's vulnerability.

7.2.5 The fact that the child may have gone missing on a number of previous occasions does not reduce the risk. In fact, children who repeatedly go missing are often being enticed away from their placement by activities that they see as exciting or by predatory influences. Furthermore, short absences may be as risky as lengthy ones.

7.2.6 Actions to be taken before a child looked after is reported missing.

This applies to both residential and foster placements.

- Has the placement been checked?
- Have you attempted to contact the missing child?
- Have you checked with the family, if appropriate to do so?
- Have you checked known addresses and associates if safe to do so?
- Have you checked social media?

Once initial checks have been completed and the child is known to be missing, Lancashire police should be informed immediately to allow risk assessment and appropriate deployment to take place.

7.2.7 Looked after children who are away from their placement without authorisation.

Sometimes a looked after child may be away from their placement without authorisation. While they are not missing they may still be placing themselves at risk because of where they are. For example at the house of a friend where sexual exploitation may be a risk. Where this is the case efforts should be made to ensure the child's safe return by immediate contact from staff or carer.

It may be in these circumstances contact with the police is made for assistance even though the child is not actually missing.

This situation must be further debated with the child, social worker and Independent reviewing officer to ensure the child fully understands the issues and risks involved, and to prevent a recurrence of the situation.

7.3 Missing

7.3.1 Where the child's location or reason for absence is unknown and/or due to the circumstances, there is concern for the child or potential danger to the public.

7.3.2 Reporting a young person missing involves providing detailed information to the Police on the missing person form. This will be done electronically where possible – via direct on line reporting. The form will always be supported by a telephone call. It is important that the carer makes it clear to the Police that they are reporting the child as missing. The carer should always ask for, and record a Police log reference number. This will cause the Police to record the case as a missing person on the Storm command and control system.

7.3.3 The carer will provide information about risk factors in the case on the missing person form. Where applicable the direct electronic reporting form will be used. After considering this and other information the Police will decide the risk level to be assigned to the case. This will be **High**, **Medium** or **Standard**.

7.3.4 The following should be undertaken without delay:

- **The carers must inform the out of hours Duty Team (if the child is missing out of office hours) or Social Worker**
- **The Social Worker or the accountable team manager**
- **The emergency duty team if out of hours and the**
- **Social Worker and accountable team manager the next working day and the Social Worker to contact the IRO**
- **Consideration must be given to any notifiable incidents for OFSTED**
- **The Local Authority will inform the parents and any other person who has parental responsibility (unless indicated otherwise on the care plan)**



7.4 Absconder

- 7.4.1 An Absconder is a child who is absent from the placement without permission and who is subject to an order or requirement resulting from the criminal justice process (e.g. remands, curfews, tagging, conditions of residence, other bail conditions, PACE detention or ASBO's), or a secure order made in either civil or criminal proceedings. A child in this must be reported to the Police without delay.
- 7.4.2 If an absconder is under the age of 16 years, or if the absconding does not involve a power of arrest, the Police will treat the case as BOTH a missing child case AND an absconder. This means that it will be necessary to provide detailed information to the Police on the missing child form. This will lead to a proactive Police investigation managed locally by the Police on the 'SLEUTH' computer system. Moreover, the individual will be circulated nationwide via the Police National Computer system. When the child is traced however, it is likely that they will also be arrested or dealt with by the Police in relation to any offence or breach. It is essential however, that they are also viewed as a child in need of protection and safeguarding, and any risks exposed to during their absence must be reviewed fully and reported to the police without delay.
- 7.4.3 However, if the child is aged 16 or over and is liable to arrest, the Police will treat the child solely as an absconder and not as a missing child, unless there are grounds to suspect that factors other than the absconders desire to evade justice are involved in their disappearance. If the Police treat the case solely as one of absconding, in these circumstances they will actively seek the absconder for arrest. Notwithstanding, absconders in this category must also be reported to the Police without delay.



7.5 Roles and responsibilities

- 7.5.1 After reporting a child missing, Children's Services remain responsible for the child in their care. This responsibility is not absolved when the child has been reported missing to the Police.
- 7.5.2 Carers and the child's Social Worker will be responsible for liaising with the Police, taking an active interest in the investigation and passing on all information, which may help to inform the investigation and assist in protecting the child while absent.
- 7.5.3 Carers and the child's Social Worker should continue to make appropriate enquiries with other residents or by telephone with all persons who may be able to assist with the investigation unless they are requested not to do so by the Police. All information gleaned from these enquiries should be passed to the Police.
- 7.5.4 Once a child is reported missing to the Police, the Police will have primacy in respect of the investigation to trace the child.
- 7.5.5 In certain circumstances the Police may need to revisit the duties initially performed by care staff. When necessary they will do so in liaison with appropriate children's services staff and will do so sensitively, causing as little disruption as possible to the home and young people.
- 7.5.6 Throughout the process in this protocol, relevant staff must keep a full record of all actions taken and messages received and given. Police will likewise keep a record of all aspects of the investigation on the 'SLEUTH' computerised missing person case management system.
- 7.5.7 **Media Strategy:** In some cases, particularly where a missing child is felt to be especially vulnerable or where they have been missing for a long period of time, it may be necessary to publicise the case via the media. Such an approach is not routine but is usually a response to very serious concerns for the child's safety. Either carers or the Police may suggest such an approach. Normally, such decisions to publicise will be jointly made, and where appropriate, in consultation with parents and Children's Services. However, for operational reasons primacy over such decisions must lie with the Police.
- The Police may also utilise the website facility of the **Missing Persons Bureau (MPB)** (www.missingkids.co.uk) to publicise the absence of the child or young person.
- 7.5.8 If the case falls within the criteria for 'Child Rescue Alert' (see supporting documents - criteria for launching child rescue alert) then any decision to publicise the case is likely to be urgent. It will be made in accordance with nationally agreed procedures by a Police officer of the rank of Detective Superintendent. Where practicable, Lancashire County Council, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council or Blackpool Council will be consulted in advance.

7.6 Review of continued unauthorised absence

7.6.1 When a child has been absent for a period of 9 hours the Social Worker should inform the relevant senior manager as per the Local Authority protocols via the usual line management route.

7.6.2 Throughout the missing episode, carers and the Police will continually review the case. If concerns are raised at any time during the 'missing episode', the police must be informed of this fact and provided with all additional information in order to assist with the investigation. If deemed appropriate, an urgent care plan meeting will be held. It will involve Police officers, carers, the child's Social Worker, Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), and any other professional involved in the care of the child.

The meeting will review:

- What action has been taken so far by the Police and professionals
- What action needs to be taken by the Police and professionals
- Decide whether the child should return to that placement when located
- Consider any other relevant information

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

7.6.3 Collecting sharing and analysing data on children looked after who go missing.

Information relating to all missing episodes of young people in the care system should be collected and shared with the pan Lancashire authorities. The collection of the information will be undertaken by Lancashire police and shared on a monthly basis at the meeting between police co-ordinators and authority representatives. (including the IRO from each authority).

The information, pan Lancashire can then be used to identify patterns of behaviour and particular 'hotspots'. This should then be used to identify particular risks in areas such as exploitation, gangs or crime related activity that might otherwise not be apparent. Trends of behaviour relating to specific Children's homes will also become apparent.

Top areas for 'missings' activity and children of concern are also to be discussed at the monthly meeting, or more often if necessary.

The County lead for missing children will then collate the information and data, and regularly advise council members, lead members for social services, and the LSCB, of the missing activity and actions taken.

This information should include an overview of children placed with the pan Lancashire area by other authorities, and also an overview of children placed by the pan Lancashire authorities outside of their authority area. This will allow for an analysis of patterns for children placed by other authorities within Lancashire.

7.6.4 Out of area placements.

This applies to children placed within the pan Lancashire area by other authorities and to children placed by the pan Lancashire authorities outside their boundaries.

When a child is placed outside the authority area, the responsible authority must make sure the child has access to the services they need.

Notification of the placement must be made to the host authority, and other specified services.

If a child placed out of their own local authority area goes missing, then the local protocol will apply and should be followed, in addition to complying with other processes that are specified in the policy of the responsible local authority. Liaison by and with the pan Lancashire authorities is essential as it is possible that the child may return to their local area.

This liaison will be with Lancashire police, and children's social care in the first instance.

The relevant team manager will be responsible within children's social care for ensuring the notification is sent to the responsible authority within 24 hours.

7.6.5 Care planning and review.

Where a child has an established pattern of running away, the care plan must include a strategy to keep them safe and an action plan to address the behaviour, and to minimise the likelihood of repeat episodes. The action plan should be discussed and agreed as far as possible with the young person, their family and all relevant professionals, clearly identifying roles and responsibilities.

Independent reviewing officers should be informed about the missing episodes and address these with the young person as part of the review process.

7.6.6 Agency support for families.

Children's social care will be the primary agency to support the child's family before and during a missing episode, and following the return of the child, further support may be necessary.

Local arrangements may involve other support networks such as various charities, but the principal responsibility lies with the local authority.



7.7 Return of the child

7.7.1 If the whereabouts are known or suspected, it is the responsibility of the carers, to arrange for the child's return. This is not a Police task.

7.7.2 However, there will be circumstances when, in the interests of the safe return of the child, the Police may agree to requests from the Local Authority to assist.

7.7.3 It is the responsibility of the carer to contact the Police by telephone and to confirm that the missing child has returned. For children in residential placements, the Police will accept confirmation from care professionals without the need for an officer to attend the home and visit the returnee. This will lead to the Police closing the missing person investigation and the case being cancelled on the Police National Computer. **For children in foster placements, the Police will verify the child's safe return in person.**

7.7.4 If it is apparent, upon the return of a child, that they have been the victim of a crime whilst absent, or that they may be in danger or at risk from any person arising out of circumstances that have occurred whilst they were absent then the Police must be called and asked to attend without delay. This is vital for the protection of the child and for the speedy recovery of evidence.

7.7.5 In such circumstances, the missing persons clothing, mobile phone and trace evidence from their body, fingernails or hair may be crucial. In cases of sexual abuse the child should be discouraged from washing and immediate advice sought from the Police. If carers become aware of the location of the scene of any crime committed against the child, or of the location of any crucial evidence (i.e. a used condom) they must notify the Police without delay. This will enable the Police to take steps to secure and preserve evidence.

7.7.6 In sexual cases the Police have access to specially trained officers, doctors and facilities designed to care for the victim and obtain evidence.

7.7.7 Additionally, in matters of sexual exploitation, or any other situation which indicates that the child may have been subject to, or at risk of, significant harm, referral must be made under the Local Safeguarding Children Board policy guidance and procedures – see supporting documents - Guidance on child sexual exploitation.

It should be noted that if any one agency or professional has increased or serious concerns for a child's well-being or safety then they may call a multi-agency strategy meeting at any time, regardless of the number of missing episodes.

7.7.8 When a child returns to the placement it is the responsibility of the carers to notify any person of the missing episode under para 7.4.

8. Return interviews: safety, assessment and information gathering

8.1 'Return Interviews' is the term applied to the safety, needs and risk assessment carried out by an independent person (ie, someone not involved in caring for the child). It should include and in depth exploration of the reason the child left their home or placement (as well as what risks they were exposed to whilst missing) and helping the child plan how to prevent repeat missing episodes. The 'return interview' is different from the police 'safe and well' check.

8.2 The return interview is important in safeguarding the child in the future, including providing information of how to prevent future missing episodes. It must not be viewed as a routine or administrative task but as an opportunity to inform case planning, take account of the child's views and inform wider strategic planning.

8.3 The Local Authority The local authority is responsible for deciding whether a return interview is conducted for each missing episode. Each local authority will also decide the appropriate arrangements to ensure the interview is carried out by an independent person. Interviews should be carried out within 72 hours of the child returning home or their placement.

Where return interviews highlight the need for urgent protective action, sharing information with the relevant services already involved with the child (including with children's social care and where appropriate the child's IRO) must be undertaken in addition to the police missing person's co-ordinator

8.4 Return Interviews are required to be offered for every missing episode, but must be prioritised when one or more of the following characteristics are present where a child:

- has been missing for over 24 hours
- has been missing, or has runaway on two or more occasions
- has been frequently absent from home or placement without authorisation
- has been hurt or harmed while they have been missing
- Is at known, or suspected, risk of sexual exploitation or trafficking
- Is known, or suspected, risk of involvement in criminal activity, gangs or risk taking behaviours like drugs
- has contact with persons posing risk to children; and/or
- known mental health issues.

These characteristics are equally applicable for looked after children and children missing from home.

Appropriate safeguarding procedures should be followed where there are safeguarding concerns, for example:

- where the child has been hurt or harmed whilst they have been missing (or is believed to have been the case)
- where there is known or suspected risk of sexual exploitation or contact with persons posing risk to children.

8.5 The acceptable minimum in the event of a single missing episode is that the missing episode is risk assessed following information gathering and cross-referenced with the child, the carers and the police.

8.6 Where a child refuses to engage with an interviewer, parents and carers should be offered the opportunity to provide any relevant information. The aim of this is to ensure further instances of missing from home/care can be prevented and identify early any support required.

8.7 It is the responsibility of each locality Children's Services Team Manager to ensure that the return interview is carried out to a suitable standard by a person approved to do so. Statutory guidance outlines it is conducted by an independent person who is trained to carry out these interviews and is able to follow up any actions that emerge. Account should be also taken of any preference the child has for the conducting of the return interview, including the use of their nominated independent person or advocate.

8.8 For all children the return interview should be offered in a neutral place where they feel safe.

8.9 Where a looked after child is living outside of the area and goes missing, the responsible authority has the duty to ensure the return interview takes place. This may be through asking the host authority to conduct the return interview.

8.10 The person conducting the return interview must endeavour to cover and assess the following factors in the interview:

- identify and deal with (including making appropriate referrals) any harm the child has suffered, either before they went missing or whilst missing;
- understand the child's individual and family circumstances including the child's characteristics, vulnerabilities and risk factors;
- understand and try to address the reasons and motivation(s) why the child went missing, including any pattern of absences;
- information about potential destinations, associates and the circumstances in which the child was found/returned;
- help the child feel safe and help them understand they have options other than running away to prevent repeat instances of missing;
- provide information to the child on how to stay safe (statutory /community /family /friends resources, helplines etc) if they choose to run away again.

8.11 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 and young people.

8.12 Following the return interview (and safe and well check) the different agencies should work together including sharing information:

- to build a comprehensive picture of why the child went missing
- to understand what happened whilst they were missing
- about who they were missing with
- about where they were found
- to analyse the individual missing episode with any past patterns (including for residential looked after children analysing patterns in relation to other children in the residential setting)
- to provide support in preventing future missing episodes and ensuring all needs and risks are identified and responded to in accordance with statutory guidance.

8.13 All actions taken in fulfilling these requirements should be clearly recorded in the child's records including management authorisation and reasons for any departures from the required guidelines and timescales. Recording and Information Sharing practice must be in line with LSCB policies and procedures.



9. Monitoring Arrangements

9.1 Each agency will collate and report performance management and quality assurance information internally within their organisation. The effectiveness of each agency's arrangements in meeting the requirements of this protocol should be monitored regularly by each agency and reported to their respective LSCB. This information should also be made available for elected members.

9.2 To fulfil their role, the LSCBs will give due consideration to the safeguarding risks and issues associated with children who go missing or run away from home or care. Each LSCB will review that partners from children's social care, police, health, education and other services are working together effectively to safeguard children who go missing or run away. The LSCBs will ensure that the protocol is adequate for the safety of their local children and that it is kept up to date.

9.3 The LSCBs will require from all partners working with children who go missing or run away the following to be reported a regular basis:

- reports analysing and scrutinising data on children missing from home and care;
- analysis of information from return interviews, including analysis of the child's views and wishes; and
- reports from children's homes used by or within the local authority on the effectiveness of measures to prevent children from going missing.

10. Looked after children who may have been trafficked from abroad

Some looked after children are unaccompanied asylum seeking children or other migrant children. Some of this group may have been trafficked into the UK and may remain under the influence of their traffickers even while they are looked after. Trafficked children are at high risk of going missing, with most going missing within one week of becoming looked after and many within 48 hours. Unaccompanied migrant or asylum seeking children who go missing immediately after becoming looked after should be treated as potential victims of trafficking.

The assessment of need to inform the care plan will be particularly critical in these circumstances and should be done immediately as the window for intervention is very narrow. The assessment must seek to establish:

- relevant details about the child's background before they came to the UK
- an understanding of the reasons why the child came to the UK
- an analysis of the child's vulnerability to remaining under the influence of traffickers.

In conducting this assessment, it will be necessary for the local authority to work in close co-operation with the UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC) and immigration staff familiar with patterns of trafficking into the UK. 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.

Useful Numbers

UKHTC TAC Advisors 0844 7782406

Salvation Army Referral Line 0300 3038151

Home Office (formerly UKBA) 0161 2611682

Poppy Project 0207 7352062

Medaille Trust 0161 2252861

Stop the Traffik 0207 9214258

NSPCC 0808 8005000

Provision may need to be made for the child to be in a safe place before any assessment takes place and for the possibility that they may not be able to disclose full information about their circumstances immediately. The location of the child should not be divulged to any enquirers until their identity and relationship with the child has been established, if necessary with the help of police and immigration services. In these situations the roles and responsibilities of care providers must be fully understood and recorded in the placement plan. Proportionate safety measures that keep the child safe and take into account their best interests should also be put in place to safeguard the child from going missing from care or from being re-trafficked.

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.

Where it is suspected that a child has been trafficked, they should be referred by the local authority into the UK's victim identification framework, the National Referral Mechanism (NRM).

Appendix 1

Missing Children in Lancashire



