

London Borough of Haringey

Missing Children Protocol

October 2018

London Borough of Haringey- Missing Children Protocol

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Children who run away from home or Looked After Children missing from their placement are particularly vulnerable and at serious risk of harm. The purpose of this protocol is to assist practitioners across all agencies to develop a robust response to children who go missing. This includes the prevention of all children from going missing and reductions of associated risks and recovering them to a place of safety as soon as possible.

1.2 Preventing children from going missing can be achieved by providing effective support and interventions, including good information sharing, multi-agency assessment, planning and performance management. Intervention will include a consideration of risks for each individual child and a focus on reducing repeat missing episodes. Working in partnership with children and their families is a key part of this process and children's views and concerns will be taken seriously. This protocol sets the minimum standards for a consistent and effective approach in working with children at risk of running away or going missing. It is expected that all agencies working with children resident in Haringey who are considered at risk of going missing or are missing from home or care will implement this protocol and ensure their staff are aware of it.

2.0 Scope

2.1 This protocol applies to all children living in the London Borough of Haringey (LBH) whether they are at home with their parents/carers or Looked After Children by the Council. The London Borough of Haringey retains responsibility for Looked After Children who are placed outside the local authority area. In those cases LBH will require the placement provider to comply with the protocols for their local area supplemented by this protocol.

2.2 External local authorities placing Looked After Children within independent fostering or residential children's homes within London Borough of Haringey will be required to comply with this protocol. This protocol will also apply to all children and young people within London Borough of Haringey and for whom the authority has continuing responsibilities for under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

2.3 This document should be read in conjunction with London Borough of Haringey's "Children Missing Education Policy" and the statutory guidance for "Children Missing Education". Additional guidance as outlined in Appendix 1 should be followed alongside this document and is particularly significant when working with missing children who are at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation, Domestic

3.0 Guiding Principles

3.1 Children who are missing from home or care may be at greater risk of harm as a consequence of their basic needs for food, safety and shelter not being met and being at risk from people with whom they may come into contact with. Risks can include physical harm, sexual exploitation, drug abuse and involvement in a range of other criminal activities. Additional vulnerability may also be present due to the child's age, level of understanding, maturity and the seriousness of the

circumstances that led to the missing episode. The following principles should be adopted by all agencies in relation to identifying, locating and preventing children from going missing:

- The safety and welfare of the Child is paramount and therefore responding to any child missing from home or care, the priority should be to locating and returning the child to a safe environment.
- The Child Protection procedures will be initiated whenever there are concerns that a child is missing, has or likely to suffer significant harm.
- The police will act on any child missing.
- Every child missing from home or care who returns will be offered an interview by someone other than the direct carer.

4.0 Strategic Lead key functions & contacts

4.1 There are two Missing Leads based within London Borough of Haringey, one within the Council's Children's Social Care Service and one within Haringey's Early Help & Prevention service, these individuals are responsible for specifically identifying vulnerable absent and missing children, to "co-ordinate" a response to reduce long-term risk and to share best practice in relation to all missing children and young people investigations. The two nominated leads should work together to risk assess cases of children missing from home or care and analyse data for patterns that indicate concerns and risks.

4.2 Local Authority Missing Person's Lead Role and Responsibility:

- Effective use of performance data on missing children, return interviews, advocacy services to better understand the needs of the children who go missing and provide a co-ordinated response to cases of missing children;
- Strengthen partnership working to ensure consistent and robust information sharing, collaborative working and pooling of resources to provide support to children at risk of going missing and their families;
- Strengthen strategic planning and preventative work to inform practice and reduce the number of missing children;
- Lead on cases identified as high risk, alert senior managers and be part of a regular multi-agency forum including Police and Health partners where missing children are discussed;
- Ensure that the voices, views, wishes and feelings of the children are sought, heard and represented; and
- Work with the Learning and Development to ensure training for Social Workers, their managers and support staff in recording systems and developing good consistent practice approach to all missing children.

4.3 Lead Contact details:

- Meeta Mahtani -Head of Service- Early Help and Prevention
- Marisa Douglas – Exploitation Service manager

5.0 Police missing role and responsibilities.

- Identify vulnerable children who go missing or absent on more than one occasion, and who may be vulnerable or victims of crime whilst they are missing, via MERLIN reports send to children's Services;
- Collate and disseminate intelligence on identified problematic persons or locations and make any safeguarding referrals as required, to children's services and other agencies;
- Monitor incidents of missing and absent children, and identify children in need of protective measures and link in with the Local Authority Missing Person's Lead and Social Work teams as required;
- Identify those cases where multi-agency intervention is required to tackle the problem of repeat absences; and
- Assist in the development and delivery of training packages in relation to missing/absent children.

Lead Contact details:

Marc Robinson

Marc.Robinson2@met.police.uk

Other Key Contacts

-Haringey Children's Social Care
-Youth Justice Team
-NYAS National Advocacy Helpline - Tel: 0808 705 1011;
-UK Borders Agency - Tel: 0843 515 8453; and
- Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP)

6.0 Definitions

6.1 There are a range of definitions used concerning missing children across agencies for the purposes of referrals, risk assessment and recording of data. In determining the definition to apply to any form of absence, the Police and Social Care practitioners will be cognisant that some children absent themselves from home or placement for short periods with minimal risk to themselves or others. The level of risk will depend heavily on the age, understanding and vulnerability of the individual child. All absent and missing children should be Risk Assessed within 72 hours to determine the level of seriousness that should be attached to any absence.

6.2 The following definitions within this protocol apply in relation to children who runaway or go missing from home or care:

Missing:

- The whereabouts of the child / young person cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of a crime or at risk of harm to themselves or others
- Any child aged 12 or below whose whereabouts cannot be established.
- A child that is reported missing to the police
- The child will be considered missing until that child has been found and their wellbeing confirmed

Absent:

- Child / young person (aged 13 or over) is not at a place where they are expected or required to be (whereabouts unknown). Following enquires and assessment of risk the absence does not raise concern for their immediate safety or that of anyone else.
- Where a subject has been reported as absent and new information comes to light or if the subject has not made contact (within the maximum of 24 hours) the case can be categorised as missing and the child must then be reported missing to the police.

Unauthorised Absence

- The child's whereabouts are known but the child or young person is not where they are expected to be
- A child cannot be categorised as missing if their whereabouts is verified and known
- Report to Police only if there is sufficient safeguarding concern for the child / young person, or other, which may require Police intervention.

7.0 Missing Prevention & Planning

7.1 Research shows that Looked After Children are over-represented in the cohort of children who go missing. Support and interventions may be focused on the individual child, the child's home or by targeting 'push or pull' factors in the community. 'Push or pull' factors are the influences which appear to 'push' the child from his or her place of residence or 'pull' the child to an alternative place.

7.2 Each looked after child has a care plan based on a full assessment of their current and future needs, including potential risk to self and others. The care plan will therefore take account of any risk that the child may go missing in the future and any factors which may increase the risk to the child should they go missing. Children's residential, fostering and placement service should be included in placement and care planning. As part of assessing risk it may be appropriate for the local authority to consult with the child's family, police and any other stakeholders to share information that may be of relevance.

7.3 In respect of Looked After Children or children known to Haringey's Children's Services who are subject to a Child In Need / Child Protection plan considered at risk of going missing, a recent photograph of the child will be kept on record by the local authority. Where possible the consent of a person with parental responsibility will be sought for a photograph to be used in any missing person investigation. If possible the agreement of the child should also be gained.

7.4 When a child goes missing it is vital for the safe recovery of the child that a recent photograph of the child is made available. Most commonly the photograph will be used by local Police Officers to help them recognise the child whilst patrolling or when actively looking for the child at relevant locations. In very serious cases where the child is believed to be at significant risk, the police and local authority may decide to use the photograph more widely and even involve publishing the photograph to national, local and social media. The police would be required to seek consent from the Local Authority prior to publishing the photograph in the media.

7.0 Care Planning and Review

7.1 Prior to each placement, where there is a likelihood that a child may go missing from their established placement, the child's allocated Social Worker is to inform the carers at point of placement referral and addressed in the placement planning meeting with agreed actions. The residential home manager, semi-independent placement, foster carers should assist the child's social worker in gathering and updating this information. When the placements are unplanned there is an expectation that the Placement planning meeting should be completed within 72 hours days of the first placement start date.

7.2 If the child is or becomes subject to a Child Protection plan, the Child Protection Advisor (CPA) will have oversight of the case and will follow the local escalation procedure if safeguarding practice is not being followed.

7.3 The Assessment should include the risk of missing and should be discussed and agreed as far as possible with the child and with the child's parents/carers and should include detailed information about the responsibilities of all services, the child's parents and other adults involved in the child's network.

7.4 The Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) or CPA should address the missing episodes in statutory reviews, with consideration to bring a review forward to address this issue. The IRO / CPA will consult the Handbook and commence the local escalation procedure in cases where the local authority's response to missing episodes is not in line with this protocol.

8.0 Intelligence and Information Sharing

8.1 Effective sharing of information between professionals and local agencies is essential for identification, assessment and service provision in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the children of Haringey. Ultimately, effective safeguarding of children can only be achieved by putting children at the centre of the system, and by every individual and agency playing their full part, working together to meet the needs of our most vulnerable children. In this regard, The Haringey multi-agency Exploitation Panel undertakes this task fully with monthly meetings where all high risk cases are discussed.

8.2 The Local agencies, including the police and health services have a duty under Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 to ensure that they consider the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children when carrying out their functions. Under Section 10 of the same Act, a similar

range of agencies are required to cooperate with local authorities to promote the well-being of children in each local authority area.

8.3 This cooperation should exist and be effective at all levels of the organisation, from strategic level through to operational delivery, in accordance with Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015. If a child runs away to another local authority and/or police force area, information sharing will take place between Haringey Children's Services and/or Metropolitan Police with the other local authority and/or police force area.

9.0 Collecting, Sharing and Analysing Data on Children who go missing

9.1 Section 4 of this protocol outlined the Two Missing Leads who are responsible for specifically identifying vulnerable absent and missing persons and to "co-ordinate" a response in order to reduce long-term risk. Both roles identify and share best practice in relation to all missing person's investigations. The two leads work together to risk assess cases of children missing from home or care and analyse data for patterns that indicate particular concerns and risks. This includes children placed in Haringey by other local authorities and Haringey's looked after children placed out of the area.

9.2 Relevant data collated by Haringey's Children's Services jointly with the Police and partner agencies includes missing episodes for children from home or care (duration and frequency), police safe and well checks, information from return interviews and identification of specific trends and risks such as child sexual exploitation, child criminal exploitation (including county lines) and gangs. This information, intelligence and data is gathered at the monthly multi-agency Haringey Exploitation and subject of reports every six months.

A Missing Children Analysis Report will be maintained and updated quarterly; to ensure that the required actions have taken place and themed audits on missing children will provide additional qualitative and quantitative analysis to further improve practice. An annual overview report will be presented to LSCB by the Missing Leads.

10.0 Exploitation panel

The Haringey Exploitation Panel provides a coordinated, multi-agency response and safety plan for Haringey's most vulnerable children and young people who are currently at risk, or likely to be at risk of MISSING, including Child Sexual Exploitation, Child Criminal Exploitation, County Lines and Gangs. The information, intelligence and data from this panel informs the Haringey PRE-MACE Meeting which then informs the Haringey MACE Meeting, where governance lies.

10.1 The Exploitation Panel contains a core membership (e.g. Social Care, Missing Police CCE Police, Operation Harkime, Youth Justice Service, Missing Person's Unit, Gangs Unit, Early Help, Education, Health, Safe Talk, MOPAC Safer London, Prevent Programme, Probation and Housing) able to commit resources and make decisions.

10.2 Missing children and young people perceived to be high risk, and a multi-agency plan is required are referred to the Exploitation Panel, who always consider cases referred by any agency. Please see EP Terms of Reference link in Appendix 2 for further information.

10.3 The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) - will have oversight of the arrangements in place in safeguarding children missing from home and care and review and approve this protocol annually to ensure it remains fit for purpose. The LSCB will scrutinise regular reports received from the local authority analysing data on children missing from home and from care within the local authority area, and on the effectiveness of their measures to prevent children from going missing.

11.0 Responding to Children Missing from Home

11.1 All practitioner's working with children at risk of going missing should discuss the dangers of running away with the child and if appropriate their family. They should be told about support services, helplines and independent return interviews for children.

11.2 If a child is at immediate risk this should be reported without delay to Metropolitan Police on 999, otherwise the Police should be informed by phoning the Police Hub on 101. Police will share the information through a single point of contact, the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) with Haringey's Children's Services.

11.3 Parents and those with parental responsibility are expected to try to locate the missing child. Anyone else who has care of a child without parental responsibility should try to locate the child and ascertain their safety. Professionals working with families will support parents and carers in taking the following steps:

- Search bedroom /accommodation / outbuildings / vehicles;
- Contact known friends and relatives where a child may be. Speak to other children in the family home to obtain relevant information about the missing child;
- Visit locations that the child is known to frequent or was known to be attending, if it is possible e.g. a friend's house or party;
- Call or text any mobile phone held by the child and leave a message asking them to make contact;
- Search the home for important leads (e.g. mobile phones, diaries, letters, notes explaining absence, emails and website activity) which may inform or assist the investigation in protecting and locating the child; and
- Contact the child's school or school friends to gather any available information regarding the child's whereabouts, check to see if any items are missing from the home.

11.4 At the point where a parent / person with parental responsibility considers the child to be missing, they should inform the police without delay on 101 or 999. The parent/carer should always ask for and record the Police Incident Number.

11.5 For children missing from home, it is expected that the parent / carer will inform the Police without delay. When referring to the Police, any relevant information that might help to find or support the child should be shared, including:

- Description of the child including their clothing;
- Details of where the child was last seen and with whom;
- Recent photograph;
- Relevant addresses, known associates and addresses frequented;
- Previous history of absenteeism and circumstances of where found;
- Circumstances under which the child is absent; and
- Any factors that increase the risk to the child.

11.6 If it comes to the attention of any agency that a child is missing, they should check that the parents / carer have taken steps outlined above to try and locate the child. They must advise the parent / carer of their need to report this matter to the police and they also need to check that the child has been reported to the police, if necessary, they should follow this up by contacting the police to verify that the child has been reported missing.

12.0 Response from the Police

12.1 Once a child has been reported as missing, the police are the lead agency in relation to finding and securing their safe return. However, all partner agencies are required to assist them to carry out this role. They are also required to ensure that practice within their own agencies makes timely and appropriate reports.

12.2 The police will investigate all cases of missing children and will respond in accordance with the College of Policing Missing Persons' policy. Other partner agencies will work collaboratively to assist them with their duties. For further information see the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice guidance College of Policing (2016): Missing persons.

12.3 When accepting a missing person report, the police will advise the caller that they will share information about the missing child and seek assistance from partner agencies to find the child. They will have the presumption that all missing children are vulnerable unless a risk assessment determines otherwise. The police have the ultimate responsibility for determining the action that needs to be taken and when it needs to be escalated.

12.14 Police will be alert to the potential significance of repeated missing episodes and will consider:

- The age of the child;
- Previous behaviour, risk taking history;
- The emotional needs of the child, e.g. whether there has been any variation in their mood or whether they have expressed any intention to harm themselves or others;
- Behaviour of the child as influenced by peer groups or others;
- Whether the child is perceived as running to / running from someone / something;
- The risk of offending; and

- The risk that the child may be targeted for economic or sexual exploitation.

12.15 Police Risk assessment should be guided by the College of Policing Risk principles, the National Decision Model and Police Code of Ethics. An appropriate level of police response based on initial and on-going risk assessment in each case.

13.0 Response from The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

13.1 All missing children that MASH becomes aware of via an electronic notification (MISPER) will contain initial information collated by Police Public Protection Desk (PPD) triage. Any new referrals of missing children will trigger a missing episode on LCS and a missing child risk assessment record will be completed on LCS in accordance with the MASH RAG rating (Red 4 hours, Amber 24 hours, Green 72 hours) with information collated from partner agencies.

13.2 MASH information should be used to inform risk assessment during a missing episode and on return home. On new referrals, information will be gathered and this will be completed by the allocated MASH social worker, if the child has a social worker already then this will be completed by their allocated social worker.

13.3 The facility to refer missing children episodes in other local authorities for the purpose of additional safeguarding checks will be available in each borough.

13.4 For missing episodes where the MASH manager believes that the child meets the criteria for a referral, the Local Authority will ensure that a Child and Family Assessment is completed.

14.0 Responding to Children Missing from Care

14.1 Where a child is looked after, a Missing Child Episode will be opened on the LSC recording system and the report will be notified to the allocated Social Worker, Team Manager, IRO / CPA and HoS. The missing episode should be the date the child left his or her normal placement or the date the child was last seen by a responsible adult (whichever was the latest). The allocated Social Worker will liaise with the Fostering, Placements and Independent Reviewing Services as necessary throughout the child missing episode. If the Child has been missing for 24 hours this should be followed with a referral to NYAS.

14.2 Where the child is looked after by another responsible local authority, a Missing Child form will be opened and sent to the responsible local authority. Haringey Children's Services will liaise with other responsible local authorities as necessary in relation to children placed in Haringey who are missing and follow this protocol in relation to them.

14.3 The missing child Risk Assessment record should be completed immediately (within 72 hours) on every occasion a child is 'missing'. The local authority should provide sufficient information to the Police to enable all risk factors be considered. Consideration should be given to the timeframes for children in both the absent and missing categories. The initial completion and updating of the Risk Assessment should be used to inform and review the level of escalation. This may include input from other practitioners/agencies currently involved in supporting the child such as the Social Worker, CAMHS, Education Welfare or the school.

14.4 The plan should outline any individual vulnerability and risk factors that could increase the chances of the child going missing as well as information to help manage any missing episodes and finding the child. All risk assessments should be regularly reviewed and updated and follow the steps outlined above in the Missing Prevention Strategy (Section 6) of this document.

15.0 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

15.1 There are many additional factors to consider when UASC children are reported missing and further practice guidance should be sought to ensure there is a coordinated approach to full information sharing. Close co-operation with UK Immigration and the Police will be important. The assessment of need to inform the care plan may be critical in these circumstances and an assessment should seek to establish:

- Relevant details about the child's background before they came to the UK;
- An understanding of the reasons that the child came to the UK;
- An analysis of the child's vulnerability to remaining under the influence of traffickers;
- A risk assessment as to the likelihood of the UASC going missing; and
- The appropriateness of information being divulged as to the whereabouts of the young person.

15.2 When UASC are reported missing, they will retain their status of Looked After unless one or more of the criteria are met.

- They return to a birth parent/someone with parental responsibility and cease to be Looked After;
- They are located in another country;
- The case is taken over by another local authority; and
- They are age assessed as being over 18yrs.

15.3 The Home Office should be informed of the child/young person's missing status.

15.4 Additional practice guidance on safeguarding UASC can be found in Safeguarding Children who may have been trafficked 2011. 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). The Trafficked Children Toolkit, developed by the London Safeguarding Children Board, has been made available to all local authorities to help professionals assess the needs of these children and to refer them to the National Referral Mechanism. See also Care of unaccompanied migrant children and child victims of modern slavery- Statutory guidance for local authorities, November 2017.

16.0 Children placed outside the Local Authority.

16.1 Where a child who is missing from one Local Authority area presents themselves in another Local Authority area, it is important for the two authorities to negotiate to ensure the safe return of the child. If any child protection concerns have arisen whilst the child was missing, the responsibility for making Section 47 enquiries is with the Local Authority where the alleged abuse took place, but this should be done in liaison with the placing Local Authority.

16.2 If a child is placed by Haringey in another Local Authority, this practice guidance and protocol should be applied in regular communication with the host authority.

16.3 If a child from another Local Authority is placed within Haringey, this practice guidance and protocol should be implemented in agreement with the child's Social Worker and with regular communication with them.

16.4 The placing authority and the placement provider should liaise regularly and take all reasonable and practical steps to establish the whereabouts of the child. This will include contacting any persons whom he/she is likely to be associating with and arranging for those places to be checked. If the location of the child is known or suspected, the placing authority and placement provider must liaise to agree responsibility for locating and returning the child. However, if there are thought to be specific issues of safety or public order difficulties in returning the child, then action should be agreed between the Police and Children's Services

17.0 Review of Continued Absence

17.1 Upon receiving a report of a child being missing from home, the Police will carry out enquiries (which are proportionate to the perceived risk) aimed at locating the child as soon as possible. A risk assessment will be carried out for each individual on every separate occasion they are reported missing to the Police. This risk assessment, usually conducted by the Initial Investigating Officer, and subsequently confirmed or revised by a supervising officer will form the basis for the subsequent investigation into the child's disappearance.

17.2 Throughout the missing episode, the Police are responsible for ongoing enquiries, risk assessment and proportionate actions. A strategy meeting should be convened dependant on the risks associated with the missing episode and the age and vulnerability of the child/ young person. **Dependant on the level of assessed risk, it may be necessary to convene an immediate strategy meeting following the notification of a missing child where the circumstances give rise to concern of significant harm.** These meetings are particularly important to collate and share information with Police and Health, Education and other partners about groups of young people who run away together.

17.3 Continual multi-agency Strategy Meetings should be held at a minimum of six weekly intervals or more frequently depending on the level of presenting risk to monitor and respond to missing episodes and to ensure all that should be done is being done until there is confidence that the issue has been resolved.

17.4 Strategy discussions should also consider:

- The need to initiate a missing child health alert which will notify all local health providers of the missing child and any particular vulnerabilities. This will be particularly important if the child/young person has identified health needs such as a mental health condition, substance misuse or a health condition. The Named Professionals within all NHS provider organisations can initiate these alerts;
- Alerting the National missing persons desk (parental consent required where child is not CLA);
- National Referral Mechanism where the child is missing and subject to exploitation, trafficking or modern slavery;
- Agreements on communication between agencies, other local authorities and with the parents / carers;
- Action required and agreed to locate the child;
- Updates to the Risk Assessment; and
- Agreements in relation to a Media Strategy

17.5 Missing children assessed to be a high risk should also be referred to the monthly Haringey Exploitation Panel to ensure multi-agency information, intelligence and data is being gathered and all possible powers and options available to agencies are being utilised to ensure locating and returning the child to a safe environment. All agencies involved in the Haringey Exploitation Panel should put alerts in their own electronic recording systems in relation to high risk missing children and young people and notify immediately Police and Children's services in the event the child or young person comes to their attention.

17.6 The Assistant Director of Children's Services should also receive notification of all CLA children who are missing for more than 24 hours from the Head of Safeguarding. The Assistant Director of Children's Social Care will formally review all cases where children/young people have been missing for 3 months to satisfy him/herself on the actions taken to recover the child/young person. A decision as to whether or not to end the accommodation placement must be an outcome of the meeting. If the decision outcome is to end the placement, then it will be recorded within the meeting minutes that should the child/young person be found then a placement will be sought. If a young person has not been found by their 18th birthday then a formal Missing Child Meeting should be held to determine whether the case should be closed. Any decision to close the case should be on the proviso that it is reopened if the young person is located and found to be in need of services as an eligible, relevant or former relevant child.

18.0 All agencies/voluntary organisations

18.1 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. 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.

19.0 Education

19.1 Haringey has identified key stakeholders both statutory and non-statutory to provide relevant information through the Haringey Children's Safeguarding Board. Haringey has publicised notification routes for all stakeholders nationally through DfE and locally through the West London Children Missing Education (CME) network. CME may become known to partner agencies that then have a duty to share this intelligence with the Participation Team within Early Intervention and Prevention Services to act upon this. This is particularly likely from all schools and academies, Police, CAMHS, Haringey Young Carers, YOS, Housing, Admissions, Border Agency, other boroughs and counties, Health A&E, Health Visitors, G.Ps and residents. For further information please see London Borough of Haringeys, "Children Missing Education Policy".

20.0 Planning for the Childs Return

20.1 Once a child has returned home, the Police will carry out a **Safe and Well Check** as soon as possible. The aim of this is to check for any indications that the young person has suffered harm; establish the reasons for their disappearance; find out where and with whom they have been; and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by, or against, them. Even where a young person is going missing frequently, there is a requirement to undertake the Safe and Well Check and every effort should be made to visit those young people missing from home on every occasion. If during the Safe and Well Check the police identify that there are immediate safeguarding concerns, then a referral should be made to Children's Services. In addition, if a private fostering arrangement is in place, this will also need to be reported to Children's Services.

20.2 When the Police locate a child who is reported as **missing from home**, they will normally return the child to the parent/carer and undertake a Safe and Well Check. However, there may be occasions when it is appropriate or necessary for agencies and the family to discuss who will be responsible for returning the child. If there are specific and identified issues of safety or public order associated with returning that child, then a coordinated approach to recover the child should be agreed with the Police. In some instances, it may be inappropriate to return a child to their home or placement and in such cases Police will liaise with Children's Services or the Emergency Duty Team (out of hours) for an evaluation of their safety.

20.3 Where there is reasonable cause to believe that a child could suffer significant harm, particularly if returned home, the Police can take that child into Police Protection and remove them to suitable accommodation which could include the home from which the child originally went missing (Section 46 of the Children Act 1989), please see Appendix 6 for a full range of police powers. However, the Police are not given the power to use force to take a child into Police Protection but "reasonable force" may be used to prevent a child suffering significant harm. For full information on safeguarding concerns, refer to the London Children Protection Procedures.

21.0 Independent return interviews

21.1 On return, from any missing episode, the child should be offered an independent return interview carried out by Safer London or someone deemed most suitable for the child. For Looked After Children, the person undertaking the Return Interview should be independent of the line management of the residential establishment or the foster home. This should allow the child to talk openly about why they went missing, where they were and any risks they experienced. This information should be gathered with a non-judgemental supportive approach and should be used to inform the current assessment/intervention.

21.2 The return interview should be carried out no later than 72 hours of the child's return. The child must always be seen on their own and consideration of an interview away from their placement to be seen separately as well as with their parent/carer and consent should be sought to share information with other services where appropriate. All efforts should be made to carry out the return Interview, however if this has not been possible due to the lack of response or engagement by the child/family, then this should be recorded.

22.0 Multi-Agency Response:

22.1 Sharing information is paramount to promote the safety wellbeing of all children. All practitioners should ensure that they pass on information which may be critical to keeping a child safe, please see Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015.

22.2 Following the safe and well check and independent return interview, local authority Children's Services, police and other agencies including voluntary services should work together and provide a multi-agency response through the Haringey Exploitation Panel to:

- Build up a comprehensive picture of why the child went missing;
- Understand what happened while they were missing;
- Understand who they were with when they were missing and where they were found;
- Decide what support they require upon returning to home or their care placement. See the Continuum of Help and Support (Threshold Document) and the Framework for the Assessment of Child In Need and their Families; and
- Ensure that there is a multi-agency plan to reduce repeat missing incidents.

22.3 Children Looked After by Haringey are closely monitored by the Virtual School utilising the support of an external provider, Welfare Call, who collect and collate attendance and exclusions of all those in the care of the local authority. Every Haringey Child Looked After also has an allocated Virtual School Officer who maintains regular contact with schools, social workers and foster carers to ensure that key information is shared, and the necessary strategies are implemented to address any concerns. This work is undertaken informally through telephone and email correspondence but also more formally through the termly PEP process, to ensure these young people continue to make progress and receive the necessary support.

23.0 Healthcare Professionals

23.1 The need to initiate a missing child health alert which will notify all local health providers of the missing child and any vulnerabilities. This will be particularly important if the child/young person has identified health needs such as a mental health condition, substance misuse or underlying health conditions. The Named Professionals within all NHS provider organisations can initiate these alerts.

23.2 Healthcare professionals have a key role in identifying and reporting children who may be missing from care, home, and school. Missing children access several services in a range of NHS settings, for example:

- Urgent Care Units;
- Accident and Emergency Departments.
- Genito-Urinary Medicine Clinics).
- Community Sexual Health Services; and
- Pharmacy Services.

23.3 Health professionals should have an understanding of the vulnerabilities and risks associated with children that go missing. Staff working in NHS provider settings should be aware of their professional responsibilities and the responses undertaken by the multi-agency partnership. Risks include sexual exploitation, trafficking, forced marriage and female genital mutilation. Radicalisation, also is a risk factor for vulnerable young people, is managed via the national 'Prevent' strategy.

23.4 The NHS provides a comprehensive service for Child Looked After (CLA). A Designated Nurse and Doctor for Child Looked After are located in each Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). They are statutory appointments and are responsible for the commissioning and delivery of appropriate healthcare, assessments, and services. Designated health professionals for a Child Looked After should share relevant information and intelligence relating to high-risk individuals or emerging themes and patterns indicative of organised and targeted abuse, to the NHS Patch Safeguarding Children Forum. They should also ensure that NHS staff within their locality knows how to identify, report, and respond to a child who is missing from care.

Appendix 1

2.1 Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018

2.2 Statutory Guidance on Children who Run away or go Missing from Home or Care, 2014.

2.3 Children Missing Education - Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities, 2016.

2.4 London Borough of Haringey's Children Missing Education Policy.

2.5 London Child Protection Procedures - Children Missing from Care, Home and Education.

2.6 College of Policing Missing Person's Policy, November 2016.

2.7 Safeguarding Children who may have been trafficked 2011.

2.8 Care of unaccompanied migrant children and child victims of modern slavery- Statutory guidance for local authorities, November 2017.

2.9 Child Sexual Exploitation Prevention and Intervention Strategy 2015.

2.10 Children missing education statutory guidance for local authorities September 2016.

2.11 Domestic Violence

2.12 <http://haringeychildcare.proceduresonline.com/>

2.13 Missing children: who cares? The police response to missing and absent children.

Appendix 2-Definitions

3.1 Missing: Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed.

3.2 Child: anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people' throughout this guidance.

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

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

3.5 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.

3.6 Responsible local authority: the local authority that is responsible for a looked after child's care and care planning.

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

3.8 Care leaver: an eligible, relevant, or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989.

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

3.10 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.

3.11 For the purposes of this protocol a child who has run away or who is missing will be defined as one where the episode has been reported to the Police and recorded on the Police COMPACT database. The Missing Persons Authorised Professional Practice was last updated in December 2017, consolidating, and updating previous ACPO guidance. It can be accessed at: Missing Persons Authorised Professional Practice.