

# CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME AND CARE POLICY AND PROTOCOL

## Children's Services

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## Scope of this Policy and Protocol

This protocol fully explores the issues around children who go missing or are absent and describes in some detail the process and protocols across this multi-agency area of concern. The protocol recognises that there will be situations when absence is a part of adolescent behaviour generally, but in others, it represents a serious concern. In some instances, children can be criminally exploited, sexually abused or trafficked – including exposure to Modern Slavery. It is key, therefore, that the full circumstances are known and evaluated to ensure carefully balanced decisions are made in each circumstance.

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

The protocol contains relevant tools to support the practitioner in undertaking their safeguarding role and includes a Return Home Conversation template.

## Relevant Guidance

The London Child Protection Procedures (LCPP) provides further information in relevant chapters which may help staff to recognise and/or manage circumstances in which children are missing may be experiencing harm or be at risk of harm. [www.londoncp.co.uk](http://www.londoncp.co.uk) Alongside the LCPP staff should be aware and familiar with the following:

- DfE Statutory Guidance on 'Children who go missing from home or care.'
- DfE, Care of Unaccompanied and Trafficked Children (2014)
- DfE, Children missing education: statutory guidance (2016)
- DfE, Child sexual exploitation: definition and guide for practitioners (2017)
- Home Office, [CountyLinesGuidance](#)
- London Child Protection Procedures: Children Missing from Care, Home, and Education [http://www.londoncp.co.uk/chapters/ch\\_miss\\_care\\_home\\_sch.html#intro](http://www.londoncp.co.uk/chapters/ch_miss_care_home_sch.html#intro)

## Relevant Protocols

- Wandsworth Multi-Agency, Risk, Vulnerability and Exploitation ToR
- Police Philomena Protocol

## Introduction

Children going missing from home is a key safeguarding issue for the London Borough of Wandsworth. When a child goes missing from home or care, it is often symptomatic of wider problems in their lives. Children who go missing are at risk of harm in the short term which can often have long term implications. There are concerns about the links between children going missing and the risks of Child Exploitation. Studies such as those by the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC, If Only Someone Had Listened, 2013) found that Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is much more prevalent than previously thought. A study also by the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC Keeping Kids Safe, 2019) has found that children and young people associating with and being groomed for criminal exploitation is a significant and pressing issue facing young people today.

This protocol is designed to support an effective collaborative safeguarding response from all agencies involved when a child goes missing. It aims to provide guidance and set the minimum standard for assessing both the risk of the child going missing and the risk to the child when they are missing. This guidance sets out the actions that should be taken by professionals to locate the child, to assist with their return and to identify the issues which caused, and may continue to cause, the child to go missing.

The protocol covers all children (defined as under 18 years old) who are missing from home or care, and for whom the authority has continuing responsibilities for under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

**Please see the protocol flow chart at the end of the document (Appendix 5) as a quick reference guide for the processes contained within this policy.**

## **Lead Responsible Persons**

- Children's Social Care – Assistant Director Family Help Services
- Metropolitan Police - Detective Chief Inspector Safeguarding Partnership
- Children's Social Care – Service Manager Family Help, including services for Adolescents
- Metropolitan Police – Detective Sergeant for Missing
- Children's Social Care – Assistant Director Children We Care For
- Children's Social Care (Evolve) – Senior Information Analyst and Missing Lead
- All lead and key professionals in a child's network

## **Agency Roles and Responsibilities**

### **Police**

The police will:

- Collect and collate missing persons reports via the Police National Computer (PNC).
- Carry out investigations in relation to missing children.
- Notify other agencies of missing children reports via Merlins.
- Use police powers under the Children Act 1989 as required to safeguard missing children who are located.
- Carry out safe and well checks as soon as possible when the child returns.
- Where there are child protection concerns, the Police Child Abuse Investigation Team will be informed and involved in strategy discussions and enquiries as appropriate.
- Where there are concerns of child exploitation, the Police Exploitation Team will be informed and involved in enquiries as appropriate, including applying appropriate markers on the Police database.
- Attend strategy meetings and agree trigger plans.

### **Foster Carers and Residential Support Workers**

Where the child is Looked After by Wandsworth or is a Wandsworth Care Leaver, their foster carer, residential worker, housing support worker or Personal Advisor (Future First) will:

- Respond to missing incidents in line with this protocol.
- Comply with the Philomena Protocol.
- Notify the Police, CSC, and parents of any episode of missing.
- Work with the police and CSC to ensure the child safe return to placement.

- Inform all relevant agencies of return from missing episodes.
- Provide accurate records of incidents to inform thematic analysis of missing.
- Work closely with partner agencies to complete missing 'grab packs'.
- Contribute to missing 'trigger plans'.

## Schools/Educational Provisions

Schools, alternative provisions, and colleges will:

- Inform relevant agencies (CSC, Police) if they become aware of a child who is missing or absent.
- Identify children for whom there are concerns around going missing and share information with relevant agencies.
- Help children returning from a missing episode to settle back into education.
- Work closely with partner agencies to complete missing 'grab packs'.
- Contribute to missing 'trigger plans'.

## Health

Health will:

- Provide support in identifying and reporting children who may be missing from home, care, or school.
- Help children returning access a range of health services including making appropriate referrals.
- When a child attends a Primary Care and identifies themselves as being missing the clinical team to notify partner agencies.
- When a child attends sexual health and identifies themselves as being missing the clinical team to notify partner agencies.
- When a child attends hospital for emergency treatment and identifies themselves as being missing the clinical team to notify partner agencies.
- Colleagues from LAC Nursing Team and St Georges Hospital Safeguarding / Redthread to contribute to the Daily Intelligence Briefing where missing children are reviewed and place flags on the clinical system as appropriate.
- Work closely with partner agencies to complete missing 'grab packs'.
- Contribute to missing 'trigger plans'.

## Out of Hours Team

Wandsworth's Out of Hours Team provides a social work service to cover emergency situations arising out of office hours and will:

- Respond to missing children or those who are considered to be absent without authorisation who are identified outside of normal working hours.
- Provide support in relation to returning missing children to their home or placement if they are located outside of normal working hours.
- Record any work in the relevant Mosaic episode and pass to existing network.

## The Daily Intelligence Briefing (DIB) Meeting

The Daily Intelligence Briefing (DIB) is chaired by Children's Services and in attendance are multi-agency partners including police, education, community safety partnership (CSP), health and YJS. The purpose is to discuss children who have come to the attention of police, the preceding night. The objective is to ensure that children receive support at the earliest possibility, mitigate risks, and enable the network around children to be made aware of concerns. During this meeting, there is tracking of thematic data, including places or spaces of concern, these are fed into the MARVE and strategic MACE meeting by the chair. The community safety partnership being a key partner, enables decisive action in the community to keep children safe when concerns are raised.

## Wandsworth Safeguarding Children's Partnership

The WSCP will:

- Scrutinise the multi-agency response to children who go missing.
- Support agencies to examine the links between missing and child exploitation.

## Principles

The following principles should be adopted by all agencies in relation to identifying and locating children who go missing:

- The safety and welfare of the child is paramount.
- Locating and returning the child to a safe environment is the main objective.
- Child Protection Procedures will be considered whenever there are concerns that a child who is missing may be at risk of significant harm.
- Police will act on all missing notifications as defined by the parameters of the missing definition.
- The completion of a full and holistic risk assessment is paramount.
- Specific risk assessment in relation to missing, particularly if there are multiple episodes is required.
- Every child who returns will be offered the opportunity to speak to someone independent from their direct carer.
- The information gathered in the Return Home Conversation (RHC) must be reviewed by the child's network and used to influence future support and intervention.
- Where any safeguarding concerns are identified these must be flagged to and investigated by the relevant agencies (CSC and Police).
- The child's view will be a crucial consideration in determining the best method of engagement and intervention.

This protocol should be read as guidance as it cannot anticipate every situation. Anyone working with children in a professional capacity should use their judgment to take whatever action is deemed necessary to protect and safeguard the child.

## Definitions

The Police definition of 'Missing' is: -

**Missing:** Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed. All reports of missing people sit within a continuum of risk from 'low risk' through to high-risk cases that require immediate, intensive action.

## High Risk Children and Young People

Risk ratings (low, medium, high) are provided by Police. These can and should be challenged by CSC if they are felt to not accurately reflect the level of risk. This can be escalated via Assistant Directors and is considered in the DIB meeting.

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

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

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

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

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

- This category almost always requires the immediate deployment of police resources – action may be delayed in exceptional circumstances, such as searching water or forested areas during hours of darkness. A member of the senior management team must be involved in the examination of initial lines of enquiry and approval of appropriate staffing levels. Such cases should lead to the appointment of an investigating officer (IO) and possibly an SIO, and a police search adviser (POLSA). There should be a press/media strategy and/or close contact with outside agencies. Family support should be put in place where appropriate. The UKMPU should be notified of the case without undue delay. Children's services must also be notified immediately if the person is under 18.

## High Risk Cases (Police)

Risk of serious harm has been defined as (Home Office 2002 and OASys 2006):

**“A risk which is life threatening and/or traumatic, and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be difficult or impossible.”**

The following children/young people should automatically be considered as high risk and reported to the police:

- The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the child is in danger through their own vulnerability; or
- The child 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.

## Missing Strategic Oversight and Governance

- All missing children must be reviewed at the Daily Intelligence Briefing (DIB) to ensure oversight of the actions/arrangements in place to safeguard the missing child and promote their safe return home. The DIB Chair will direct the network to this protocol and give clear actions around convening a missing strategy discussion (after 3 days) and completing a Need to Know for Senior Management. The child's network is expected to act on any information shared and follow up accordingly.
- A Weekly Missing list is circulated to Senior Management including Assistant Directors and the Director of Children's Social Care, to inform and ensure strategic oversight of all missing children.

- The partnership will have a monthly missing meeting which will cover the following: - Missing episodes, Thematic data from RHCs, Missing protocol and adherence to this, Missing practice, and Service updates. Information will be provided and shared by at least the following agencies: Police, Education and Children's Services. The purpose of this meeting is to improve compliance around missing process and protocol and to ensure better outcomes for children who experience missing episodes.
- The Strategic MACE panel will review quantitative and qualitative data reports on a quarterly basis, including themes and trends related to missing children.
- The Assistant Director of Family Help has strategic responsibility for Missing Children and will ensure regular reports on children who go missing are presented to senior management and are governed by the Strategic MACE of the WSCP.

## Responding to a Missing Child

- All practitioners working with children and young people should be aware of the multi-agency missing arrangements. They should consider the risks of going missing and complete safety planning alongside the child and their family. This should be reviewed regularly.
- If a child has been missing for 72 hours (3 days) a **Missing Strategy Meeting** must be convened. These strategy meetings must be repeated every 5 days for the duration of the missing episode.
- If a child has been missing for 72 hours (3 days) the allocated Social Worker, Team Manager or Service Manager must ensure that an 'Alert' - **Need to Know (NTK)** form is completed on Mosaic within **24 hours** notifying the Director of Children's Social Care of a missing child or any child where the circumstances give rise to concern of **significant harm** (child exploitation, gangs, trafficking etc.)
- A **NTK form** is also required for any child that is 12 years old or younger who has been reported as missing and their whereabouts are unknown.
- If a child is repeatedly reported as missing (3 times within 28 days) the network should complete a '**trigger plan**'. See **Appendix 2 for Trigger Plans**.
- If a child is repeatedly reported as missing (3 times within 28 days) the network should convene a '**Strategy Meeting**'. See **Appendix 3 for Strategy Meeting Guidance**.
- If you are made aware of a missing child, via a missing alert/notification sent directly from Police and MASH have not been included and/or the missing lead – Please ensure you forward this notification to both **MASH & the Missing Lead**.
- If you are aware of a Missing child and they have not been reported as 'Missing' to police. **You must encourage the placement/parent/guardian to report them as missing to police. If they are unable or unwilling to do this, then the onus is on the professional network to report that child missing to police.**

- If you are in the presence of /aware of a Missing child that has returned from their missing episode, and this has not been reported to police by their placement/ parent/guardian. **You must encourage the placement/parent/guardian to inform police of their return. If they are unable or unwilling to do this, then the onus is on the professional network to inform police of their return.**

## Children Missing from Home

**There is an expectation that parents/carers will take appropriate action and will report that their child is missing. If they are unable or unwilling to do this, then the onus is on the professional network to report the child missing.**

Parents/carers are also encouraged to undertake actions to try and locate their child before reporting them to the Police as long as it is safe to do so. The usual course of action for reporting a child missing is to call 101 or report online. However, if the parent/carer has concerns the child is at immediate risk then they should call **999**.

**The actions parents/carers might take prior to reporting missing include:**

- Fully searching the accommodation and surrounding area/vehicles.
- Search the home for any relevant information – did they take their phone, have they left a note etc?
- Making all appropriate enquiries regards the whereabouts of the child.

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.
- The name of the school and the school setting.
- Previous history of and circumstances of where found.
- Circumstances under which the child went missing.
- Any factors that increase the risk to the child.

## Children Missing from Care

Whoever discovers that a child is missing from a residential unit or foster family, should immediately inform the Residential Unit Manager/Shift Leader/Supervising Social Worker on duty and notify the police the child is missing.

The Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) should address the missing episodes in statutory reviews, with consideration to bring a review forward to talk about this issue. The IRO will consult with **Chapter 6 of the IRO Handbook** and commence the local escalation procedure in situations where the local authority's response to missing episodes is not in line with this protocol.

## Children Open to Children's Social Care

The parent/carer should notify the police as soon as they know their child is missing. The parents should then contact the child/young person's social worker or Out of Hours.

## Children Not Open to Children's Social Care

If the young person does not have an allocated social worker, the Misper report will still be recorded on Mosaic as a contact which will be reviewed by the MASH manager.

**In cases, where a child is not known to social care and there are repeated missing incidents (3 times in 28 days), Children's Social Care will consider initiating a Child and Family Assessment (dependent on risk this will be completed under S17 or S47 Children Act 1989).**

## Children Missing Education: Notifying Children Missing

Children who are missing from school (CME) and/or Electively Home Educated (EHE) may also be at greater risk of missing from care or home due to reduced professional contact.

**This section needs to be read in conjunction with the:**

- DfE's Statutory Guidance: Children Missing from Education (2016).
- London CP Procedures: Not Attending School.
- Children Missing from Care, Home, and Education.
- Wandsworth Carousel Policy (Children at Risk of Unsuitable Education 2019)

For queries relating to those children who are defined as CME please contact

[cme@wandsworth.gov.uk](mailto:cme@wandsworth.gov.uk)

## Strategy Meetings

A strategy meeting should be convened after 72 hours (3 days) of the child going missing. These strategy meetings must be repeated every 5 days for the duration of the missing episode.

## Strategy Meetings/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 vulnerabilities. This will be particularly important if the child/young person has identified 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 likely to be 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.
- Agreements in relation to a Media Strategy.

Whenever a child is missing for more than 28 days, regular strategy meetings should be arranged by Children's Social Care. Where the child has a Child Protection Plan officers from the Child Abuse Investigation Team and the Police Missing Person Unit Should be invited. The frequency of the strategy meetings should be jointly agreed by the multi-agency partners and increased or decreased as required based on the information presented. The frequency and planning should be reviewed at each strategy meeting.

The Director of Children's Social Care will formally review all children/young people have been missing for more than 3 months to satisfy him/herself on the actions taken to recover the child/young person. A decision on whether to end the accommodation placement must be an outcome of the meeting. If the decision is to end the placement, then it will be recorded within the meeting minutes and on the child/young person's case recording that should the child/young person be found then a placement will be sought.

**Appendix 3: Strategy Meeting Guidance** to ensure that all information is shared, and risks assessed.

## Working with The Police

Agencies must provide enough information to the Police to enable all the risk factors to be considered. Following this a full investigation should be conducted by the Police. The Police will want to search the address at which the missing child was last seen, this should be negotiated to cause minimum disruption to the child's family home/placement.

Police are the lead agency for the investigation of missing children. Children's families and professional networks should work in partnership with Police as much as possible, to secure the safe return of the child. Actions from strategy discussions need to be urgently progressed by the relevant agencies. Until such time as a child is no longer missing, regular liaison and communication should take place between the Police and referring/involved agencies.

## Publicity

When publicity is appropriate to safely locate and safeguard a missing child, the police will liaise with the child's parents/carers to get permission to seek publicity. The child's network will need to liaise with police to ensure that any publicity in relation to missing children is appropriately worded and contains an up-to-date photograph (not a custody image). Consideration should be given to relevant platforms and mechanisms of information sharing – social media, briefing slides etc.

For Children Looked After the Director of Children's Social Care's approval will also need to be sought.

If the child is subject of care proceedings the court will need to be fully apprised of the situation. Where media publicity is required, any statements made between agencies will normally be agreed through the Local Authority's press office in accordance with local guidance.

## Mosaic Recording and Data Monitoring

- It is the responsibility of the identified Lead Professional (Social Worker/ Early Help Practitioner) to open the Mosaic Missing Episode. For unallocated children / children 'not open' to social care this will be completed by the MASH BSO.
- It is very important that all missing episodes are added to Mosaic **within 24 hours** of the missing notification. All sections of the missing workstep need to be completed on Mosaic.
- During the missing episode there should be regular updates recorded on Mosaic including any meetings, correspondence, contact with the child or parent/carers.
- Trigger plans and/or 'grab packs' should be uploaded to Mosaic along with any associated risk assessments and safety planning.

- All Missing strategy meetings and Need to Know (NTK) forms must be uploaded on Mosaic.
- DIB discussions and copies of missing notifications (Merlins) must be uploaded to Mosaic by the MASH BSO.
- All Return Home Conversations should be offered **within 72 hours** of the child returning from being missing. These must be recorded on the Mosaic missing workstep and referenced in case notes.

## Missing Child Risk Assessment

All practitioners should use their professional judgement when carrying out the Missing from Home/Care Assessment and Plan form on Mosaic and should take into consideration any factors, which might have a bearing on the level of risk to the child or to others. This risk assessment can be filled in by social workers/early help practitioners/Evolve specialist missing practitioners and contributed to by foster carers/residential workers.

The risk assessment is an aid to action, and to information sharing and recording. As an action tool the purpose of the Risk Assessment form is to inform single agency and multi-agency decision making and planning to locate a missing child but also link and be curious about other vulnerabilities that may be present for the child. The risk assessment can also be used for when a child is likely to go missing. This is crucial for police and saves time on their investigation once a child goes missing. The allocated worker should share the outcomes of the risk assessment with their manager and the risk assessment should be provided at any strategy meeting held. The risk assessment form should be appropriately updated with new information between missing episodes including information from RHC's.

In situations where new information becomes available and/or the child remains missing for a protracted period, the risks should be re-assessed and led by the agency which has current or most recent responsibility for the child and shared with other agencies. The most recently completed Risk Assessment Form should remain on the child's file on Mosaic and be shared with those agencies most relevant working with the child. This can be done at the strategy meeting.

In responding to and managing a child's absence from home/care, agencies should be alert to the potential significance of repeat missing/absence episodes of a child. Often children who repeatedly go missing are viewed as a 'problem' and insufficient consideration is given to the reason why they keep absenting themselves and the additional risk factors/vulnerabilities to exploitation, trafficking, gangs, and crime.

## Information Sharing Form

The Missing Incidents and Information Sharing form on Mosaic (alternatively termed 'grab pack') can also be used where there are concerns that a child may go missing. Residential workers, foster carers, social workers, or parents must assess the risks of the child absenting him/herself. This form includes information that social workers may not know such as nicknames, social media accounts, and an up-to-date photograph. This is to be kept updated and shared with police once a child is missing. This form can be important in keeping track of information such as friendships/associations, addresses frequented and other vulnerabilities that may contribute to risk to the child. Any information that emerges from tracked data via the missing meeting that is of concern will be brought to the attention of the Multi-Agency Risk Vulnerability Exploitation (MARVE) Panel to ensure appropriate action is taken. Tasking should not wait until MARVE Panel and all

concerns for a young person including intelligence should be shared appropriately at strategy meetings to ensure tasking around disruptions and activity is appropriately undertaken as soon as possible. When children who are missing/absent have wider vulnerability concerns this will be discussed and incorporated into risk management plans via the weekly missing meeting if not already captured in daily planning.

## **Care Leavers**

Local authorities continue to have a range of responsibilities towards children leaving care until the young person's 21st and in some instances their 25th birthday. It is good practice to follow the guidance set out below whilst a young person remains 'leaving care'.

Care leavers are often vulnerable to Child Exploitation and may go missing from their home or accommodation. Local authorities must ensure that care leavers live in "suitable accommodation" as defined in Section 23B (10) of the Children Act 1989 and Regulations 9 (2) of the Care Leavers Regulations [28]. Young people should feel safe in their accommodation and the area where it is located. Local authorities should ensure that Pathway Plans clearly assess whether a young person may be vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking or going missing, and that they put in place a range of support services to work with the young person in relation to keeping safe, appropriate relationships, and positive activities, to minimise this risk.

It is also important to provide clear specific advice in individual young people's placement plans as to the actions to be undertaken and urgency of response should a young person stay away from their placement as an 'unauthorised absence'. For example, where a young person has regular staying contact with a relative and this is considered safe and appropriate, should they fail to return to placement, and it is confirmed that they are staying with this relative, it may be agreed as part of the Placement Plan that the young person does not need to be reported to the police, but could be offered a further time to return prior to being reported. Equally, young people may choose to stay with friends or partners, and while they may be reluctant to provide details of these friends, they may not necessarily be at risk of harm. However, if a young person was staying/thought to be staying with an unsafe person, or otherwise at risk of harm, it may be that the young person should be immediately reported to police, even though their whereabouts are known, and they are in communication with the carer.

Professional judgement, in combination with having good knowledge of the child, is key.

## **Out Of Area Placements**

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 work together 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 home Local Authority.

If a child is placed by Wandsworth in another Local Authority, LBW will require the placement provider to comply with the protocols for their local area supplemented by this protocol. It is very possible that the child will return to the Wandsworth area, so it is essential that liaison between the police and professionals in both authorities is well managed and coordinated.

If a young person has been presented to MARVE, this should also be communicated so that the host authority can decide whether to share information at their own panels. Should a child placed

in Wandsworth by another Local Authority be known to MARVE, where appropriate a referral to Wandsworth's MARVE will be made so the child's circumstances can be monitored locally. This is in line with the Pan London Safeguarding Children from Sexual Exploitation Protocol. Where reports are received that a young person Looked After to another local authority has gone missing within Wandsworth, but no information has previously been received the DIB Chair will ensure that these are passed to the relevant authority.

## Police Safe and Well Checks

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.

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.

Safe and Well Check/Prevention interviews are essential if the police, along with partners, are to enable problem solving in cases of missing child/young person.

High Risk cases will continue to demand a face-to-face **prevention interview**, and this will be conducted by police upon the child's return.

## Return Home Conversations (RHCs)

Independent Return Conversations should take place with all children who have been reported missing **within 72 hours of their return**. See **Appendix 4: Return Home Conversation (RHC) Template**.

The purpose of the conversation is to give the child an opportunity to speak to someone about why they went missing, explore what help and support they need to address their reasons and provide them with information on how to stay safe. It is also an opportunity to identify and understand any risks, gather information which can help assess the risk to be used in the event of them going missing again and helps the police and social care see patterns and trends emerging.

It is important that the interview is carried out by someone independent of the child's parents/carers and who the child feels comfortable talking to. Information from the Return Home Conversation should always be used to inform risk assessment, safety planning and case trajectory.

Where a child declines an RHC, it should be explored if they would prefer to talk to another trusted person within the network. If a child is repeatedly declining RHCs, a minimum of 3, a professionals/strategy meeting should be considered to explore this.

Due to information sharing it is crucial that the interviewer goes through confidentiality with the child before the conversation commences.

If a child refuses an RHC then this needs to be recorded on Mosaic, and as above every effort should be made to seek to continue to explore the issues with the child.

## Appendix 1: Prevention and Push/Pull Factors

Preventing children from going missing and understanding why children may go missing.

It is important that children who are thinking of running away can speak to someone about their situation and get support to help them deal with issues that may cause them to run away.

Professionals who are concerned that a child they work with is at risk of running away should work with the child to understand why they have run away or are thinking of running away, work with the child and family to address these issues, and if there are safeguarding concerns a referral to MASH be made. If the child is already open to Children's Social Care and is at risk of running away, social workers and the professional network will also have an opportunity to work with the child to understand why they have run away or are thinking of running away, to reduce the risk and plan for any incidents. If there is a risk of missing/unauthorised absence, then strategies need to be incorporated into the Child in Need / Child Protection / Care/ Pathway Plan for the child and family. It should also include strategies to reduce the duration and risk of missing episodes.

Some examples of the reasons children and young people may run away are:

### Push factors

**Problems at home** – ranging from arguments with parents to long-term abuse / maltreatment to bereavement.

**Family break-up** – young people drawn into their parents' conflicts are less likely to do well at school and more likely to truant or to run away from home.

**Mental health problems** – a disproportionate number of young people who run away from home have mental health problem.

**Bullying** – children who are being severely bullied are more likely to run away from school and home or care.

**Personal Problems** – running away to escape a relationship, teenage pregnancy – some young women run away or are forced to leave home because they become pregnant, or fear that they may be pregnant. Those working with them will need to ensure they have access to sexual health services.

### Pull factors

**Children may run to be near friends or family** – especially when a young person is in care and there are problems in contact arrangements with family and friends.

**County Line involvement** – gangs and/or older organised criminals recruit vulnerable young people to act as couriers and sell drugs. There are various 'lines' out of London. This deliberate movement of a child can be a form of child trafficking.

**Being gang associated** – involved in criminal activity, potential drug running and exploitation.

## Appendix 2: Practice Guidance for Trigger Plans

This trigger plan should be agreed by all relevant parties including the local authority, police and placement provider should a child goes missing. This should be clearly recorded on Mosaic in case notes and emailed to OOH (Out of Hours). The guidance below is not an exhaustive list of considerations but acts as a guide for these discussions.

### **Trigger Plan:**

**History of Missing Episodes:** Identify what the history of reported missing episodes and frequency?

**Triggers for Missing Episodes:** Identify any known triggers for the child/young person going missing, including push and pull factors?

### **Risks and Vulnerabilities**

#### **Are there risks of:**

- CSE
- Gang involvement? If so, what is the name of the gang?
- Do they have any medical health needs?
- Do they need essential medication that is not available to them?
- Is the person known to use any drugs or alcohol?
- Is the person involved in any crime?
- Is there any history of self-harm, suicidal thoughts, or attempts?

**Friends/Associates:** Identify known friends/associates.

**Place frequented that the child/young person may go to when missing?** Is the child/young person known to go to certain places, if so where and with whom?

**Family members that the child/young person may go to when missing?** Who are they? (To include name, relationship, and contact details)

**Friends/associates that the child/young person may go to when missing?** Identify known friends/associates who the child/young person may go to when missing? (To include name, relationship, and contact details)

**What is the legal status of the child?** Is the child looked after under a full care order?

**What is the plan when the child/young person goes missing?** What action needs to be taken, when, how, and by who?

**What address should the child be returned to?** Is this the parental home/placement, please specify.

## **Appendix 3: Strategy Meeting - Agenda Guidance**

1. Brief information on child and family and presenting risks, including history of missing episodes and background of child.
2. The chair should request copies of the most recent risk assessment and information sharing forms completed, to check that these have been completed and updated appropriately and shared with all agencies. They will hold useful information to review in the meeting also.

Additional risk factors including risks from known adults /CSE/ offending/ abduction abroad/substance misuse.

3. Actions taken to date to locate/ recover the child, including as appropriate:
  - a. Methods used to seek to contact the child, and any relevant information obtained via their social media.
  - b. Visits to known address.
  - c. Contacting family/ friends, parents, and professionals.
  - d. Where the child is thought to be in another local area, contact made with local police/missing coordinator.
  - e. Police - (risk level dependent) tracing of phone, social networking sites and oyster card.
  - f. Use of the media to publicise details of the case.
  - g. Application of recovery orders and serving of abduction orders.
  - h. Notifications to local authorities, hospitals, ports, airports.
4. Further actions to be taken, including the above as appropriate. Please refer also to the Example Plan, and ensure to cover all the areas of:

### **Investigate, Disrupt, Protect, Prevent, and Divert**

5. Parental involvement/ notification.
6. Plans once the child is located including the safe and well check, Return Home Conversations, medical attention, and social work visit.
7. Plans to prevent a repeat missing episode.
8. For Looked After Children, whether the Assistant Director has been informed and updated, or when they will be informed and by whom.
9. Consideration of whether any young people have been identified as at risk based on the information shared, and how relevant police and/or social care staff will be informed.

10. Actions and next meeting, to include any further persons that should be sent minutes and invited to the next meeting, who were not invited previously

A list of actions should be completed during the meeting, signed by involved agencies, and copies provided.

Minutes should be typed up and distributed as soon as possible, and within 3 working days. They should be uploaded to Mosaic under a Strategy Discussion, with a note placed in case notes to show.

## Appendix 4: Wandsworth Return Home Conversation

### RETURN HOME CONVERSATION

Date of Return Home Conversation:

RHC completed within 72 hours? YES  NO

If 'No', please state why: -

Name of young person	
DOB:	
Name, Role, and Contact Email/Tel of Practitioner:	
Missing episode dates discussed in the visit:	
Multiple Episodes? YES <input type="checkbox"/>	

**Confidentiality & Consent:** *Please go through with young person.*

This visit is to talk with you about why you were missing and what happened during that time. We keep a record of what you say, and this will be accessible to social care professionals. We want you to be comfortable to talk about what happened but, if we are worried that any details you have shared means there is a risk to you or another person, we will need to share what you have said with other services. We will tell you if we need to do this. Please ask any questions you would like about how/why this information is taken.

Do you consent to talking with me about when you were missing? YES  NO

**RHC:**

**1. Can you tell me what happened leading up to you going missing and what happened when you were missing?**

*Prompts if needed – Push/pull factors (Please consider Social Graces), Where did you go? Were you with anyone? Did anything happen that you were worried about etc? It is helpful if you ask 'Open Questions' to enable the discussion to be conversational instead of Q&A.*

**2. What would help to prevent this happening in the future?**

*Have a Safety Planning discussion with young person to prevent future episodes, Involve parent/carer/placement if relevant. Detail plan below and ensure young person and key adults have this information.*

**3. Is there anyone you would like me to talk to about what you have told me?***Parent, carer, placement, social worker etc*

--

**Practitioner Section****Themes related to this missing episode****Please tick ALL relevant boxes that apply**

Missed Curfew and came home late	Suspected substance misuse whilst missing
Visiting with family whilst missing	Suspected CSE whilst missing
Visiting with friends whilst missing	Late for school
Visiting with boyfriend/Girlfriend whilst missing	Arrested
Went to a party	Transport Problems
Argument with parents/carer	Did not have money to return
Suspected trafficking/county lines whilst missing	Got lost
Suspected involvement in crime whilst missing	Lost track of time
Unhappy in placement	Unhappy at home
Identity, including sexuality and race	

**Are there safeguarding concerns that need to be followed up? Please briefly detail and state any follow up action:**

--

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Now please upload this form to Mosaic, complete the missing incidents and Information Sharing episode, Section 4 and Case Note that a Return Home Conversation has taken place and to see uploaded document. The case note should highlight any follow up action taken in relation to safeguarding concerns.

If you are a Social Worker/Lead Professional who has completed this RHC form – Have you liaised/ confirmed this with the allocated Missing Practitioner. YES

## Appendix 5: Flow Chart: Missing Processes & protocol

1. Has the Child/young person been reported as 'Missing' to police by Parent/Guardian or Carer?

**No** – go to step 2a.

**Yes** – go to step 2b.

**2b.** Please ensure you Open/Update the 'Missing from home or Care Assessment & Plan' on Mosaic within 24hrs of receiving the Police Merlin. **THIS IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ALLOCATED WORKER/ MASH IF UNALLOCATED**

**2a.** If the Child is Missing and they have not been reported to Police. You must advise the parent/carer to contact 101 or alternatively contact Police directly yourself to report the Child as Missing.

\* Unsure of the Missing Merlin/Details (date/Time) ...? Please liaise with the **Missing Lead** \*

3. HAS THE CHILD BEEN **MISSING MORE THAN 3 DAYS?**

**Yes** – go to step 4.

**No** – go to step 5.

4. If the child is missing for **MORE THAN 3 DAYS**. You must complete an 87a strategy meeting request & send to Police. Be clear about wanting a **Missing strategy meeting**, so correct Police attend.

4a. If a child is missing for **MORE THAN 3 DAYS**. You must complete a **Need to Know (NTK)** and send to **TM, SM & HoS**.

If a child is rated as **'High Risk'** by Police a **NTK** must be completed!

During the missing episode, if a child remains missing a **Missing Strategy meeting must be completed every 5 days** until the child returns.

5. HAS THE CHILD RETURNED / BEEN LOCATED?

**Yes** – go to step 6.

6. When the child returns – you must **update the Missing episode on Mosaic** with the return details and complete an **RHC – Return Home Conversation** **within 72 hours** or at your earliest convenience.

\* If you're unsure whether a child is missing, or you have a general enquiry about a missing child – please liaise with **Missing Lead** and this can be looked into or raised at the Daily Intelligence Briefing. \*

- ❖ **Multiple Missing Episodes (MASH – Unallocated cases only)** – If a child is reported missing more than 3 times in 28 days. A **Child & Family Assessment (CAF)** should be considered.
- ❖ **Multiple Missing Episodes** – If a child is repeatedly being reported as missing, **a joint trigger plan** should always be considered with Police & Social care.
- ❖ **A joint Trigger Plan** should be identified by **police and social care** to agree the plan to find the child, how to engage with them and what actions should be undertaken in the event of a missing episode. This should be clearly recorded on Mosaic and discussed with the child's parents/carers. The joint trigger plan should be completed as part of or in time for the first strategy meeting and distributed to the police alongside the missing child risk assessment.
- ❖ **Repeat RHC Declines** – Engagement in the Return Home Conversation process is voluntary, however, young people who persistently go missing and repeatedly decline RHCs may also be at high risk. A **strategy meeting** should always be considered for young people who have declined more than 3 RHCs.
- ❖ **Update Risk Assessment** – When a child goes missing – the risk assessment within the 'Missing from Home & Care Plan Assessment. The risk assessment should be appropriately updated with new information between missing episodes including RHCs. This should be led by the allocated social worker/lead practitioner.
- ❖ **Update Safety Plan** – This should include strategies to avoid unauthorised absences and/or the child going missing, where this is an identified risk. It should also include strategies to reduce the duration and risks associated if the child does go missing.

#### Useful contacts

**Missing Police** - [SouthWestSWMailbox-.SafeguardingMisper@met.police.uk](mailto:SouthWestSWMailbox-.SafeguardingMisper@met.police.uk)

**Missing Lead (Wandsworth)** – [Elisha.myton@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk](mailto:Elisha.myton@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk)

**MASH** - [MASH@wandsworth.gov.uk](mailto:MASH@wandsworth.gov.uk)