



Missing From Home, Care or Education Protocol

Havering Children's Services

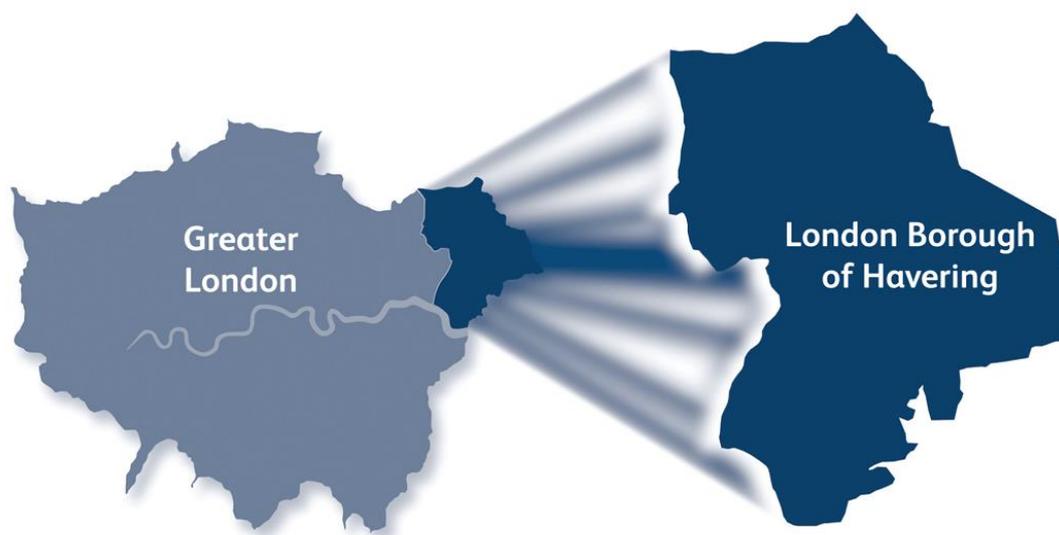


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Introduction

This protocol is important for the safeguarding of children and families in Havering, or those using services in the London Borough. Its purpose is to provide guidance and a framework for practitioners and managers across all services that come across or work with children/young people who go missing from home, care or education.

Havering Safeguarding Children Board expects all agencies working with children and young people who run away or go missing from home or care to implement this protocol and ensure that all relevant staff is aware of it and how to use it.

Going missing or running away can be symptomatic of wider problems in a child/young person's life, but whatever the reason, one thing is clear: children/young people who go missing or decide to run away are unhappy, vulnerable and in danger.

Principles

Our joint aim is to reduce the incidence of all children going missing. Children who go missing may place themselves and others at risk and each missing episode is potentially serious. The reasons for their absence are often varied and complex and cannot be viewed in isolation from their home circumstances or their experiences of care. Every "missing" episode should attract proper attention from the professionals involved, who must collaborate to ensure a consistent and coherent response is given to the child on his/her return.

Aims

1. The safety and welfare of the child is the prime aim and all relevant agencies, including the Health Service and schools will share in the responsibility for the safety and welfare of missing children.
2. Children's Services and Police agree to the definitions of various categories of "missing children" as set out in this protocol
3. Notification to the Police will take place in clearly defined circumstances set out in this protocol.
4. All children who go missing will be offered a Return Home Interview within 72 hours of their return to placement.
5. Support to parents/carers via parenting support services will be considered in order to prevent re-occurrences of missing episodes.
6. The Police will act on any report of a child missing from home or care in Havering.
7. CPP, CIN and Care plans will take account of any known risks and vulnerabilities linked to the child or young person running away

8. In circumstances where children are accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act children's parents or anyone else with parental responsibility should be informed wherever possible and share responsibility at every stage of the process.
9. Where the local authority has parental responsibility, parents and any other appropriate person should be informed and consulted in the same way with the local authority retaining ultimate responsibility for decisions in cooperation with the Police.
10. All agencies will work together to understand the underlying reasons that children go missing in Havering and will work together on preventative measures by monitoring, reporting and analysing missing from care or home incidents including trend analysis.

Scope

The primary focus of this protocol is children and young people who are reported to the Police as missing. This protocol is designed for all children and young people living in Havering area who go missing and for Havering children placed out of borough.

Legislation

Key elements of the framework

1. Anyone who 'takes or detains' a child under 16 without lawful authority may be prosecuted under the Child Abduction Act 1984.
2. Where a child/young person under 16 (or 18 if disabled) stays with a person (other than someone with parental responsibility or a close relative) for more than 28 days, this constitutes a private fostering arrangement and the local authority must be informed.
3. Anyone who unlawfully removes keeps away or assists a child to run away or stay away from their care placement may be liable to prosecution under the Children Act 1989.
4. Young people under the age of 16 have no legal right to claim benefits and live independently of adults with parental responsibility.
5. Young people aged 16/17 are able to claim benefits and work but by law are unable to live independently without their parents' consent. Legal and practice issues for young people of this age are likely to overlap with youth homelessness. Under the Southwark ruling 2009, all 16-17 year olds who present as hungry and homeless must be assessed as children in need by Children's Social Care under the Children Act 1989.
6. The Havering Safeguarding Children Board (HSCB) will hold all agencies to account for their response to children who run away or go missing from home or care and will want to be assured that the procedures are delivering positive

outcomes. Monitoring of the implementation of this protocol across all relevant agencies will be the responsibility of the Quality and Effectiveness sub group of the Havering SCB.

7. The CSE & Missing Co-ordinator will be responsible for highlighting trends (missing children at risk of CSE / gang affected / push / pull factors) and any possible action that may be needed. This will be shared with the local authority Performance Team to support quarterly reporting and in order to analyse trends and manage a strategic response to managing services for children who go missing.

Definitions

The reasons why children/young people run away or go missing from home or care are varied and complex, so it is important to define what is meant by "missing from home or care" and "young runaways".

Child

A child or young person under the age of eighteen years, with the exception of a former relevant child within the meaning of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000; these young people continue to be the responsibility of the Local Authority up to the age of 21 (24yrs if in receipt of full time education). A child aged 13 years and under will always be reported as missing.

Missing

The new ACPO 2013 definition of a missing person is:

“Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.” This also includes an unborn baby whose mother is missing.

Absent

“A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be.”

The ‘absent’ category should comprise cases in which people are not presently where they are supposed to be and there is no apparent risk. ‘Absent’ cases should not be ignored, and must be monitored over periods of time with consideration given to escalating to ‘missing’ if there is a change to the circumstances that has increased the level of risk.

Thus, absent is to be used in cases where there are grounds to believe that the absence involves no apparent risk, or the level of risk is a tolerable one not meeting the threshold for a police-led missing person investigation. In such circumstances

there will remain an expectation that reasonable enquiries will continue to be conducted by the reporting agency, after the report to the police. Should the circumstances subsequently develop to a determination that the person is in fact 'missing' an expedient police response will ensue. Hence, the police response is likely to differ between cases of 'missing' and of 'absent'. Typical examples of 'absent' may include:

- failing to return on time.
- staying at a known location, such as with a friend.

Runaway

A child who absents from their home or placement without permission for any length of time where their age and experience, background and ability make this a concern or who has been forced to leave by their parents or carers.

Unauthorised absence from residential care

Absent for a short period of time and after a careful and thorough risk assessment the absence does not raise concern for their immediate safety or that of the public. A constant review needs to occur.

Absconded

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

Child in our care / looked after child

A child is looked after by a Local Authority if s/he is "in care" by reason of a court order, or if s/he is provided with accommodation for more than 24 hours by agreement with her/his parents or with the child if s/he is aged 16 or more.

Accommodated

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

Sexual exploitation

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

Homeless 16/17 year olds

When a 16 or 17 year old runs away or goes missing they are no less vulnerable than younger children and are equally at risk, particularly of sexual exploitation or involvement with gangs.

When a 16/17 year old presents as homeless, local authority children's services must assess their needs as for any other child. Where this assessment indicates that the young person is in need and requires accommodation under section 20 of the Children Act 1989, they will usually become looked after.

Trafficking

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

Protecting children at risk of radicalisation

Children and young people can suffer harm when exposed to extremist ideology. This harm can range from a child adopting or complying with extreme views which limit their social interaction and full engagement with their education, to children being groomed for involvement in violent attacks.

Children can be exposed to harmful, extremist ideology in the immediate or extended family, or relatives/family friends who live outside the family home but have influence over the child's life. Older children or young people might self-radicalise over the internet or through the influence of their peer network – in this instance their parents might not know about this or feel powerless to stop their child's radicalisation.

Going missing is a risk factor in relation to radicalisation.

- A child may go missing because they have already been radicalised.
- A child's risk of being radicalised might increase because they are missing and are spending time with people who may seek to involve them in radical/extreme activities. The risk is heightened whilst they are missing, because the protective factors of family or care are not available to them.

Professionals should always assess whether a child who has gone missing is at risk of radicalisation.

Children at risk of offending

Children and young people who go missing from care, home and education also need safeguarding against the risk of offending. Children are playing a significant role, as victims and willing participants, in what is colloquially known as the 'county lines' issue. The 'county lines' issue involves London gangs running drug sales operations into the Home Counties and beyond.

Procedures for a Child / Young Person Missing from Home

Responsibility of parents/carers

Parents and those with parental responsibility are expected to undertake the following basic measures to try to locate the missing child if considered safe to do so. Anyone else who has care of a child without parental responsibility should take all reasonable steps to locate the child and ascertain their safety.

It is expected that the Police will be informed without significant delay when a child goes missing from home. Before a child is reported missing to the Police the following actions should be undertaken.

- make contact with the child/ young person by mobile and email
- search bedroom/ accommodation/ outbuildings/ vehicles
- contact known friends and relatives where child may be
- visit locations that the child is known to frequent, if it is possible

When it is established that the child or young person is missing from home, the child / young person needs to be reported as missing to police. Police will follow their safeguarding procedures and they are responsible for on-going enquiries, risk assessment and proportionate actions. A referral also needs to be made to the Local Authority MASH either by the parent / care giver or by police.

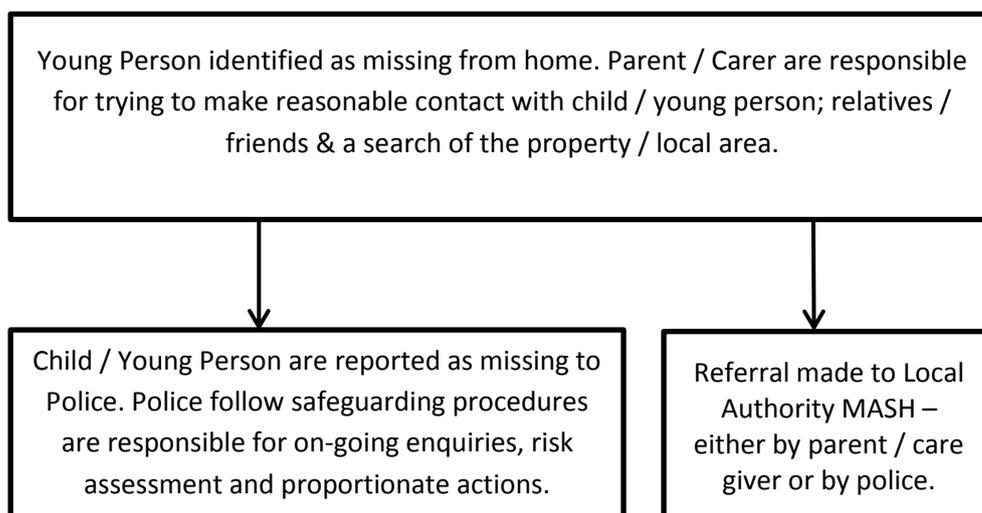
If a Havering child is missing from home, the MASH Business Support Officer (BSO) will establish whether the child is already known to the Local Authority and will send the missing notification to the allocated social worker and their line manager. Where a Havering child is not known to Social Care, the BSO will send the missing notification to MASH Triage for processing.

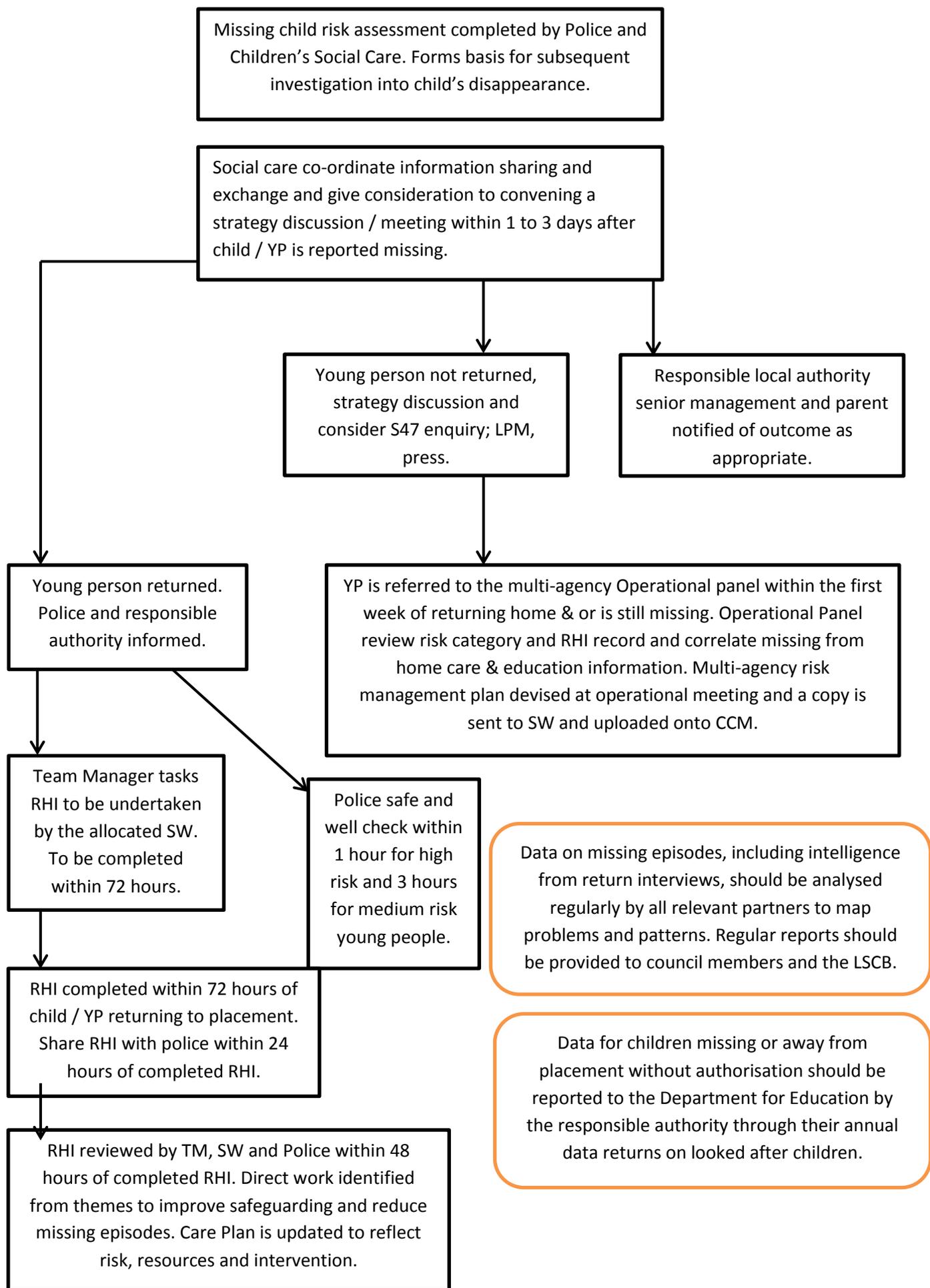
On the day a MERLIN notification is received, the child's social worker will contact the Police Missing Unit to ascertain if the child has returned. If not returned, the allocated social worker informs their Team Manager who reviews whether a strategy discussion or meeting is required based on the child's vulnerability, the number of

missing episodes to date; CSE indicators; their circumstances and the missing child risk assessment. Strategy meetings will be convened within 1 to 3 days depending on the risk of harm to the child or young person (as per London Child Protection Procedures – Significant Harm).

In all cases, if a child or young person goes missing from home and it is considered by Social Care and Police that they are at risk of significant harm, are subject to a Child Protection Plan then the London Child Protection Procedures (Sections 5 – 8) will be followed and the Supplementary Procedures for safeguarding children missing from care and home and MPS Policy 2016 on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons, 2013 should be followed.

MISSING FROM HOME FLOWCHART





Strategy meetings

The strategy meeting must address:

- last known whereabouts
- any intelligence relevant to the child/young person, their family friends or any other significant relationships
- plan of action and by whom
- any potential risk to the child and whether the circumstances warrant Child Protection enquiries when the child is located
- media strategy where appropriate
- follow up strategy meetings no more than 5 working days apart
- plan of action upon the return of the child in relation to contacting all parties, how and who will receive the child and confirming that the return interview will be undertaken by the Intensive Personal Adviser
- the return interview should trigger a final strategy meeting to consider the case, the risk factors and issues and a plan to prevent any further absconding behaviour
- updating the risk assessment and action plan (if there is not one available one must be considered).

The strategy meeting will also consider:

- whether other local authorities and agencies need to be contacted
- whether there is a risk that the child may be removed from the UK jurisdiction and what legal interventions need to be put in place (this includes circumstances where a child or young woman is being taken out of the country for the purposes of a Forced Marriage or for Female Genital Mutilation)
- Available intelligence and whether reference should be made to another protocol (e.g. Forced Marriage).
- Carers and the child's Social Worker will be responsible for liaising with the Police, taking an active interest in the investigation and passing on all information, which may help to inform the investigation and assist in protecting the child while absent.
- Once a child is reported missing to the Police, the Police will have primacy in respect of the investigation to trace the child. The Police will normally conduct all physical enquiries away from the premises from which the child is absent. In certain circumstances the Police may need to revisit the duties initially performed by care staff. When necessary they will do so in liaison with appropriate children's services staff and will do so sensitively, causing as little disruption as possible to the establishment and residents. Throughout the process in this protocol, residential carers, Social Workers and the Police must keep a full record of all actions taken and messages received and given.

Where a child or young person is determined by Social Care, Police and partner agencies to be at immediate or high risk, then the use of the press should be considered alongside other safeguarding measures for example, legal planning meeting.

Media Strategy

In some cases, particularly where a missing child is felt to be especially vulnerable or where they have been missing for a long period of time, it may be necessary to publicise the case via the media. Such an approach is not routine but is usually a response to very serious concerns for the child's safety. Either carers or the Police may suggest such an approach. Normally, such decisions to publicise will be jointly made, and where appropriate, in consultation with parents and Children's Services. However, for operational reasons primacy over such decisions must lie with the Police. The Police may also utilise the website facility of the Missing Persons Bureau (MPB) (www.missingkids.co.uk) to publicise the absence of the child/young person.

For all children and young people who have gone missing on one occasion, they will be referred to Havering's Early Help Service who will undertake the child or young person's Return Home Interview. Where appropriate, Early Help Services will be offered to the child, young person or family as a means to support the family at the first opportunity to prevent the child or young person from having repeat missing episodes and entering into statutory services.

Review of continued absence

If the child/young person continues to be missing for 7 days, (including the first 3 days) then a further Strategy Meeting will take place. Further Strategy meetings should take place fortnightly for the first 6 weeks, and then monthly to ensure all that should be done is being done. This should be reviewed up until 3 months, where it is then recommended for the Assistant Director of Children's Social Care to 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.

Where a child/young person has been missing from care for 12 weeks, the above will be adhered to. Following the information gathered from the strategy meetings, the Assistant Director of Children's Social Care will hold a case review meeting and review the case. 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.

Legal Orders:

Where a child or Young Person is deemed to be at significant risk of harm, the Local Authority will consider whether it is necessary to apply to Court for a Recovery or Collection Order to seek and find the child or Young Person.

Categories of Risk:

HIGH RISK

The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the subject is in danger through their own vulnerability; or may have been the victim of a serious crime; or the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger.

This category requires the immediate deployment of police resources. A member of the BCU senior management team or similar command level must be involved in the examination of initial enquiry lines and approval of appropriate staffing levels. Such cases should lead to the appointment of an IO and possibly an SIP and a POISA. There should be a press/media strategy and/or close contact with outside agencies. Family support should be put in place. The NPIA Missing Persons Bureau should be notified of the case without undue delay. CEOP and Children's Services should also be notified (only if missing person is under 18).

MEDIUM RISK

The risk posed is likely to place the subject in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others.

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

In addition to recording the information on the PNC, the police will advise the person reporting the disappearance that once all active enquiries have been exhausted, the case will be deferred to a regular review pending any further information coming to notice. In these cases, they may be filed on the computer system as 'inactive' provided the review process continues.

Return of the child

If the child has returned the allocated social worker will check if the police have conducted the safe and well briefing and if any safeguarding issues were identified by the police. If the whereabouts are known or suspected, it is the responsibility of the parents or carers to arrange for the child's return. In exceptional circumstances, in the interests of the safe and speedy return of the child, the Police may agree to requests from parents or carers to assist. The Police should not unreasonably withhold assistance in cases involving local recovery and transport missions for vulnerable children.

Once the child has been located, the Police will carry out a Police safe and

well check. It will not be conducted over the telephone. The purpose is to check for any indications that the child has suffered harm; where and with whom they have been; and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by, or against, them. This will lead to the Police closing the missing person report. This is not a return interview. The Police will notify the Local Authority of the return of the child and any relevant information.

If it is apparent, on the return of a child, that they have been the victim of a crime whilst absent, or that they may be in danger or at risk from any person arising out of circumstances that have occurred whilst they were absent then the Police will instigate further enquiries. This is vital for the protection of the child and for the speedy recovery of evidence.

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

As soon as Children's Social Care is aware that a child / young person has been located or returned home, the Team Manager will task the social worker with the responsibility for completing a return home interview. This return home interview must be completed within 72 hours and shared with police within 24 hours of completion. Where a child / young person specifically asks for the return home interview to be undertaken by an independent person, then this will be arranged by Children's Social Care.

Operational Panel for CSE and Missing

The Local Authority and partner agencies have created an operational panel for children at risk of CSE and missing, which is a multi-disciplinary team comprising of representatives of all core partner agencies. The function of the operational panel is to review all children who have gone missing from home, care and education or who are at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation. The Operational panel meets on a weekly basis and they review all children who have come to Children's Social Care and Police attention.

The Operational panel evaluates all information regarding a child or young person's missing episode(s); they will evaluate the risk to the child / young person and they will devise a multi-agency safeguarding plan which will be provided to the social worker after the meeting. The allocated social worker is expected to attend the Operational panel meeting to contribute to the information sharing and planning processes.

The Operational panel will review Havering children and young people as well as children placed in Havering by other Local Authorities. A notification letter will be sent to placing Local Authorities Heads of Safeguarding seeking confirmation of the plan for the child or young person and how the placing authority intends to ensure

that the child or young person will be kept safe from harm. Where a host borough child or young person continues to go missing or where the placing authority does not respond to the notification letter, then the concerns which the operational panel have in relation to the child will be escalated to the relevant Director of Children's Services. The operational panel's plan will be uploaded onto the child's record on CCM within 24 hours of the meeting taking place.

PROCEDURES FOR CHILDREN MISSING FROM CARE

On admission to placement

The Local Authority's approach to managing missing from care episodes is a key element of the authority's wider strategy to ensure that it is a responsible corporate parent, enabling all the children that it looks after to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Each looked after child has a care plan based on a full assessment of the child's current and future needs, including potential risk to self or others. The care plan and or pathway plan will therefore take account of any risk that the child may go missing in future and any factors which may increase the risk to the child should they go missing.

Children's residential and fostering service staff should contribute to this assessment. All information should be included in the placement plan and in the child's care plan. As part of this assessment it may be appropriate for the Local Authority to consult with the Police to share information that may be of relevance.

This assessment should include information on the following:

- The likelihood of the child going missing.
- The child's wishes and feelings.
- Consideration of the measures that can be taken to prevent the child going missing.
- The level of supervision/support that care staff propose to provide for the child.
- The views of parents/carers on their child needs and the action that needs to be taken if the child is absent.
- The risk of harm to the child and his/her vulnerability if he/she is absent.
- Consideration of any external influences which may result in a child's removal without consent.
- The likelihood of the child being harboured.
- A trigger plan (action plan), applicable to that child, should be formulated to cover the event of the child going missing.

The care plan will remain in the possession of the Local Authority. It is not a public document. It is not envisaged that the Police will need to view the care plan at any time. However, there may well be circumstances when it is necessary to involve the Police in aspects of the care planning process to safeguard the child.

Should a Looked After Child go missing it is vital to the safe recovery of the child that a recent photograph of the child is made available. The photograph must be a good likeness of the child. Most commonly the photograph will be used by local Police officers to help them recognise the child when patrolling or when actively looking for the child at relevant locations. In very serious cases, where the child is believed to be at severe risk, the Police and Local Authority may decide to use the photograph more widely and even involve publishing the photograph to national or local media. Therefore, it is very important for a photograph to be retained on the child's file. Consent from the person with parental responsibility should be obtained. If possible the child/young person should be encouraged to sign consent as well.

The safeguarding procedures which need to be followed for children missing from care are identical to the procedures for children who are missing from home (see page 6). For ease of reference, the **missing from care flowchart** is set out below.

MISSING FROM CARE FLOWCHART

YP's Care plan should include assessment of appropriate placement arrangements to protect the child from the risk of going missing, and strategies for dealing with any known risks of running away.

Social care pre incident risk assessment completed by allocated social worker for all LAC who have gone missing on one or more occasion and is on CCM; copy to provider and partner agencies. YP's photo will go on file subject to relevant consents as a medium to assist searches during missing period.

Young person identified as missing after residential staff/foster carers have made enquiries with relatives and searched accommodation/local area. Time spent searching is informed by pre-incident risk assessment and YP's care plan.

Unauthorised absence, inform allocated social worker.

Child / YP is reported as missing to police.
Police follow safeguarding procedures

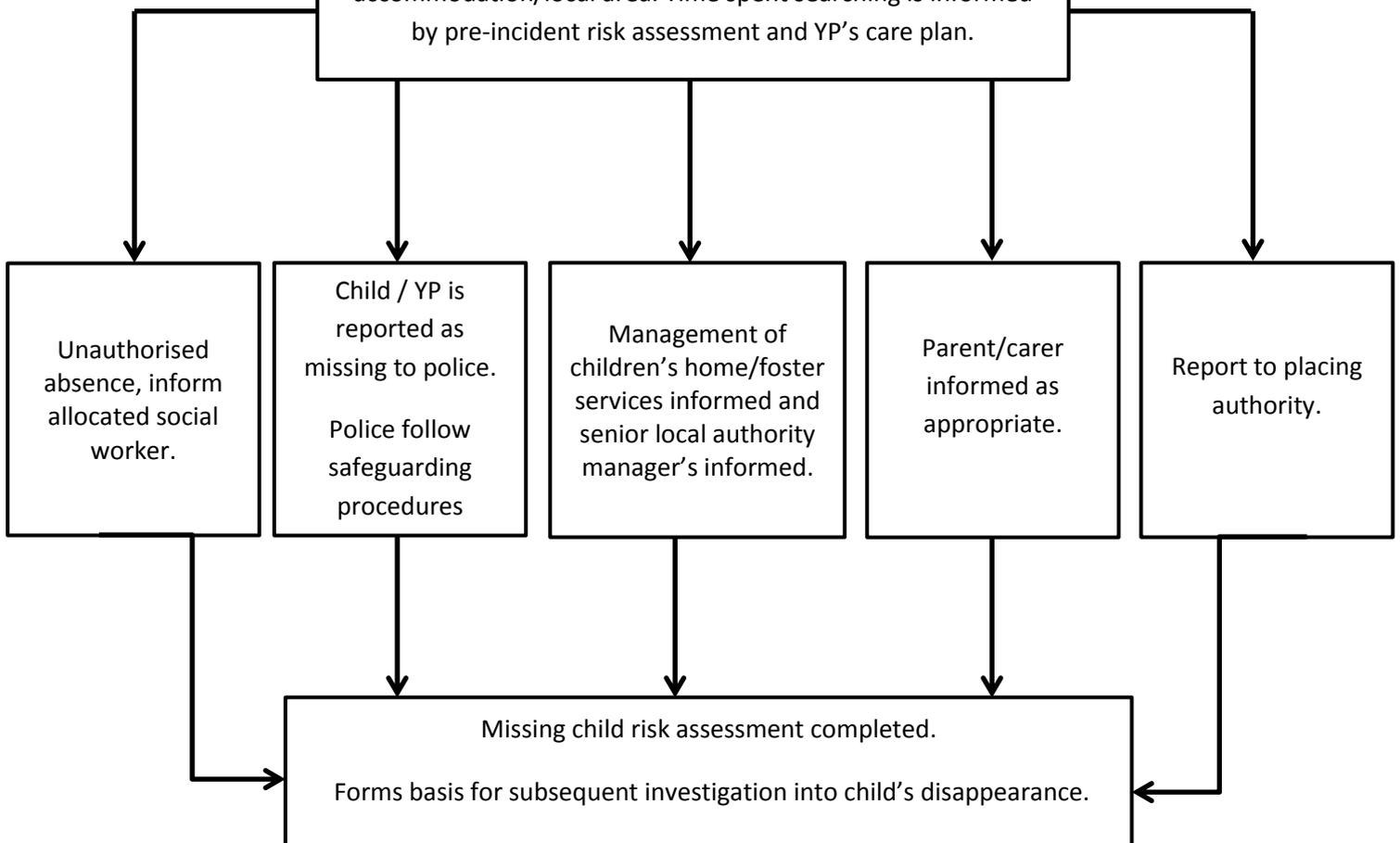
Management of children's home/foster services informed and senior local authority manager's informed.

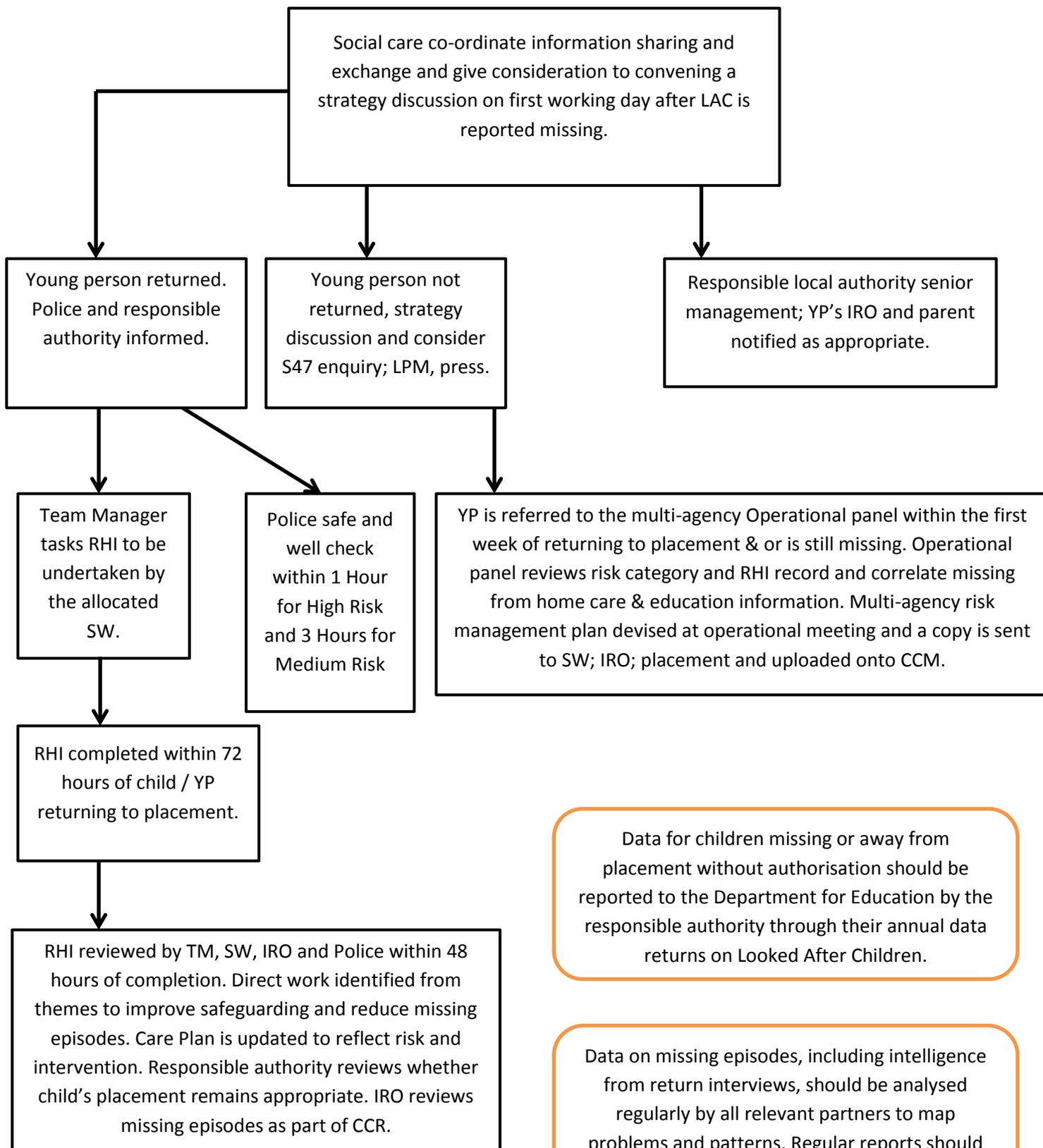
Parent/carer informed as appropriate.

Report to placing authority.

Missing child risk assessment completed.

Forms basis for subsequent investigation into child's disappearance.





Local authorities must ensure that all incidents where children go missing are appropriately risk assessed, and should record all incidents of looked after children who are away from placement without authorisation, missing or absent.

Children, who are looked after should have information about and easy access to help lines and support services including the Local Authorities Emergency Duty Team. Support should also be made available to families, foster carers and residential units to help them understand why the child has run away and how they can support them on their return.

Once a child or young person's return home interview (RHI) has been completed, the RHI must be reviewed by the Team Manager, allocated Social Worker, Independent Reviewing Officer and the Police. Once the child or young persons "push / pull factors" are understood, then direct work should be undertaken with the child or young person to improve their safety and reduce the need for them to continue to go missing from care.

The child or young person's Care Plan and or Pathway Plan should be updated after each missing episode to reflect the level of risk and intervention. The Local Authority should also review whether child's placement remains appropriate. The Independent Reviewing Officer must ensure that a child or young person's missing episodes form part of the discussion and planning during each Child in Care Review meeting.

Missing from Education

The Local Authority employs a Children Missing Education Officer (CME) who maintains a database in relation to CME cases. The data in the CME database is currently being transferred to the CCM system. A termly report is presented to the Children's Services Improvement Board by the Education Inclusion and Support Manager in relation to new cases, cases resolved and remaining open. The children missing from Education protocol explains the reason why children may be recorded, at times, as missing from education. It also sets out the protocols within Havering that exist to ensure any children reported as potentially 'Missing from Education' are quickly identified and appropriate actions are taken. Policy decisions around Children Missing from Education are discussed at the Child Sexual Exploitation & Missing working group, which in turn reports to the Havering LSCB.

Havering's Education Inclusion and Support Team has a dedicated Children Missing from Education (CME) Officer who logs all reports of children reported as missing education and investigates all such reports. The CME Officer works closely with the Elective Home Education Officer, who maintains a database of children whose parents have opted to educate outside the state funded education sector. We have also cross referenced these cases with our children and young people on care plans to again ensure a joined up approach.

Children and young people's school attendance is monitored via the Attendance and Behaviour Team, which includes a dedicated Gypsy/Traveller adviser, CME Officer and Child Employment/Entertainment Licencing Officer. Data show that fixed term exclusions are below national averages and permanent exclusions are falling this year. Attendance data all show improving trends over the past three years. EIS team officers work closely with Children's Services officers, including the Early Help team and Social Workers. The team have also recently been given access to CCM so that information about common children/families being supported can be shared more effectively.

The Virtual School has support from a specialist Looked After Children Attendance and Behaviour Officer who tracks any instances of exclusion of LAC pupils. Designated teachers are contacted and support is offered where needed by the AP co-ordinator and vulnerable children's co-ordinator to avoid disengagement from education.

Children who go missing from education are referred to the Local Authority and partner agencies Operational panel. The children and young people will be discussed at the Operational panel to determine their level of risk and vulnerability particularly in relation to Child Sexual Exploitation. A multi-agency decision sheet / plan will be completed at the conclusion of the Operational panel and provided to the lead professional for the child.

All agencies/voluntary organisations

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.

Healthcare professionals

Healthcare professionals have a key role in identifying and reporting children who may be missing from care, home and school.

Missing children access a number of services in a range of NHS settings, for example:

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

- **Maternity Services & Gynaecology Services**

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 a risk factor for vulnerable young people, is managed via the national 'Prevent' strategy'.

The NHS provides a comprehensive service for Looked After Children (LAC). 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 Looked After Child 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.

Police Powers

The Police have significant powers to safeguard vulnerable children. These include powers to enter premises, to recover children and to make Police Protection Orders. When a missing child is found or known to have been in company with an adult during any missing episode, in circumstances which afford reasonable grounds to suspect that an offence has been committed by that adult relating in any way to that child (i.e. child abduction, sexual offence, drug offence, assault, aid, abet, counsel or procuring child to commit an offence) the incident will be taken seriously throughout the process of reporting, investigation and provision of follow up care. The Police priority is the safety and well-being of the child; thereafter, the Police will take positive action against any perpetrators, hold them accountable for their actions and prefer charges where appropriate.

It is recognised that children who have been the victim of a serious offence may not always see themselves as victims or be willing to assist in the investigation, particularly in the early stages. Likewise those whom others have used for criminal purposes may not be willing to assist the Police. A complaint from a victim is not required to make an arrest. Usually reasonable suspicion is enough to arrest. When such an offence has occurred and a power of arrest exists, the offender should normally be arrested. An officer should be prepared to justify a decision not to arrest in these circumstances.

Without prejudice to the welfare of any child, the Local Authority will support the Police in taking appropriate action against those who commit crimes against children and/or involve children in their offending behaviour.

Absconders

An Absconder is a child who is absent from the placement without permission and who is subject to an order or requirement resulting from the criminal justice process (ie: remands, curfews, tagging, conditions of residence, other bail conditions, detention or ASBO's), or a secure order made in either civil or criminal proceedings. A child in this category must be reported to the Police without delay.

If an absconder is under the age of 16 years, or if the absconding does not involve a power of arrest, the Police will treat the case as both a missing child case and an absconder.

When the child is traced however, it is likely that they will also be arrested or dealt with by the Police in relation to any offence or breach. It is essential however, that they are also viewed as a child in need of protection and safeguarding, and any risks exposed to during their absence must be reviewed fully.

Out of Borough Placements

When a child is placed out of their local authority area, the responsible authority must make sure that the child has access to the services they need in advance of placement. Notification of the placement must be made to the host authority and other specified services. All children subject of a London pre-incident risk assessment should be notified to the local police service using the relevant form Appendix.

If children placed out of their local authority run away, this protocol should be followed, in addition to complying with other processes that are specified in the policy of the host Local Authority. It is possible that the child will return to the area of the responsible authority so it is essential that liaison between the police and professionals in both authorities is well managed and coordinated. A notification process for missing/ absent episodes should be agreed between responsible and host local authorities as a part of the care plan and the placement plan.

Return of the child

It is good practice and an expectation within this Protocol where it has been identified that the missing child is subject to a Child Protection plan, Child in Need or Looked After the relevant social worker must ensure that contact/visit is made with child/young person within 72 hours of their return. This is not included in the Police and Independent Return Interview visit.

Return interviews

The message we give when a child/young person returns to the home is important in helping them build a sense of worth and belonging. Looking at what children/young people tell us, it is perhaps not the best time to ask questions about their whereabouts and actions whilst missing. This can be done at a later date if appropriate. Showing genuine concern for their safety and offering food and drink are very basic but powerful messages that we care and a positive way of welcoming the child/young person back home.

When the Local Authority receives notification that a child/young person has been located and returned home, the allocated social worker will carry out a return interview within 72 hours of the child/young person being located or returning from an absence. This also applies to children who are in receipt of services or who are looked after.

The assessment interview and actions will:

- identify and deal with any harm suffered
- understand and try to address the reasons for the running episode
- try to prevent a repeat

It is especially important that a Return Interview takes place when a child:

- has been missing for over 24 hours
- has been missing on two or more occasions
- has engaged (or is believed to have engaged) in criminal activities during their absence
- has been hurt or harmed whilst they have been missing (or this is believed to have been the case)
- has known mental health issues
- is at known risk of sexual exploitation and/or
- has contact with persons posing a risk to children

The Social Worker will also ensure that key information is passed to the police for their database recording purposes. Information relating to return home interviews with CIN, Children subject to a CPP or Looked After Children will be logged on CCM. Where a child/young person refuses to see their social worker for a return interview, the worker will arrange for the return home interview to be undertaken by an Independent Person. The copy of the RHI will be sent to Police within 24 Hours of it being completed.

Prevention Strategy

The LSCBs expect all agencies and professionals working with children who are missing from home or care, or at risk of being missing from home or care, to implement this protocol to ensure that all staff are aware of it and how to use it. It should be considered by professionals and agencies in all new and existing contacts with children. Together we will take steps to raise awareness, ensure improved responses and practice thereby delivering better outcomes for children.

It is intended that this protocol will assist in developing robust responses to running away, which support developing good will practice within Havering. It should be used to engage partner agencies in developing preventative services for children and young people who are at risk of running away.

The Local Authority and Police will monitor the missing episodes of all children. This will be presented in a quarterly performance report prepared by the police and shared with the Local Authority.

The Metropolitan Police, the Local Authority will operate an escalating system of interventions to reduce the likelihood of a child repeatedly going missing.

LSCBs will undertake a local needs analysis to identify specific local prevention measures to support the working protocol. Local Safeguarding Children Boards are charged with ensuring children and young people 'stay safe from harm' (Children Act (2004) Section 11).

Missing Protocol Key Forms:

<https://www.havering.gov.uk/Pages/Services/Social-care-client-contact-problems.aspx>

The key forms contained within the Appendices of the Protocol are also available individually below for use by professionals

- [Social Care Pre-Incident Risk Assessment](#)
- [Missing Child Risk Assessment Record](#)
- [Looked After Child Information Sharing Form](#)
- [Missing Child Monitoring Form](#)
- [Return Home Interview Form & Guidance](#)

Other related procedures

1. London Child protection Procedures
 - www.londoncp.co.uk
2. The Missing Children and Adults strategy (2011)
www.gov.uk/government/publications/missing-children-and-adults-strategy
3. Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation: Supplementary Guidance (2009)
 - www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-children-and-young-people-from-sexual-exploitation-supplementary-guidance
4. The Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan (2011)
www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-child-sexual
5. Statutory guidance: Children who run away or go missing from home or care (2014)
 - www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-who-run-away-or-go-missing-from-home-or-care
6. Radicalisation
 - www.gov.uk/government/policies/protecting-the-uk-against-terrorism/supporting-pages/prevent
7. Trafficking
 - www.londoncp.co.uk/consultation/sg_trafficked_ch.html

Glossary of Terms

1. CSE – Child Sexual Exploitation
2. MASE – multi-agency sexual exploitation
3. LSCB – Local Safeguarding Children’s Board
4. CRIS – police database to record crime
5. CCM – Social Care data base to record service users
6. SAFEGUARD – CSE warning signs acronym
7. CBO – Criminal Behavioural Order
8. LAC – looked after children
9. RHI – return home interviews
10. HSCB – Havering Safeguarding Children’s Board
11. MASH – Multi-Agency safeguarding Hub
12. S47 Enquiry – Child Protection Enquiry
13. YP – Young person
14. SW- Social worker
15. TM – Team Manager
16. LPM – Legal planning meeting
17. BCU – Borough Command Unit
18. IO – Investigating Officer
19. SIO- Senior investigating officer
20. PNC – Police National Computer
21. PoISA - Specialist search trained officers
22. NPIA – National Policing Improvements Agency
23. CEOP – Child Exploitation and Online Protection centre
24. MSU - MPS – Metropolitan Police Service

