

---

# CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME AND CARE POLICY AND PROTOCOL

---

Wandsworth Safeguarding Children Partnership



<b>Author:</b> Leah Hilt <b>Lead:</b> Paul Angeli	<b>Date:</b> December 2019	<b>Approved By WSCP:</b> January 2020	<b>Review Date:</b> June 2020
------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------	---------------------------------------	-------------------------------

SCOPE OF THIS POLICY and PROTOCOL .....	3
RELEVANT GUIDANCE .....	3
RELEVANT PROTOCOLS .....	3
INTRODUCTION.....	4
LEAD PERSONS RESPONSIBLE .....	4
AGENCY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES .....	4
Police.....	4
Foster Carers and Residential Support Workers.....	5
Emergency Duty Team.....	5
Wandsworth Safeguarding Children's Partnership.....	5
Schools/Educational Provisions .....	5
Health.....	6
PRINCIPLES .....	6
DEFINITIONS.....	7
Missing.....	7
Absent .....	7
Unauthorised Absence.....	8
High Risk Children and Young People .....	8
High Risk Cases (Police).....	8
High Risk Cases (Children’s Social Care).....	8
RESPONDING TO CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME .....	9
CHILDREN LIVING AT HOME WHO ARE SUBJECT TO A CHILD IN NEED OR CHILD PROTECTION PLAN WHO GO MISSING?.....	10
Longer Absences and Keeping Cases Open .....	10
Children not Open to Children's Social Care.....	10
Responding to Children Missing from Care .....	11
PREVENTING MISSING FROM CARE AND UNAUTHORISED ABSENCES.....	12
MISSING CHILD RISK ASSESSMENT .....	13
CHILDREN MISSING EDUCATION: NOTIFYING CHILDREN MISSING .....	14
CHILDREN WHO GO MISSING DURING EXTERNAL ACTIVITIES?.....	14
WORKING WITH THE POLICE .....	15
PUBLICITY .....	15
STRATEGY MEETINGS.....	16
Children’s Social Care must, call a face to face Strategy Meeting in the following cases: .....	16
Strategy Meetings/Discussions should also consider: .....	16
CARE LEAVERS.....	17

OUT OF AREA PLACEMENTS.....	18
LOCATING THE CHILD AND PLANNING THEIR RETURN.....	19
POLICE SAFE AND WELL CHECK/PREVENTION INTERVIEW.....	19
RETURN HOME INTERVIEW (RHIs).....	20
RETURN HOME INTERVIEW – REVIEW AND INFORMATION SHARING.....	21
SUPPORT BEYOND RETURN HOME INTERVIEW.....	21
NON-ENGAGEMENT IN RHI PROCESS .....	22
CHILDREN MISSING IN SPECIFIC CIRCUMSTANCES.....	22
Homeless 16/17-year olds .....	22
Trafficking/Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children.....	23
Harbouring .....	24
Abduction.....	24
Forced Marriage.....	24
Female Genital Mutilation .....	24
Radicalisation .....	24
Child Exploitation (CE).....	25
COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS .....	25
STRATEGIC OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNANCE.....	26
DATA COLLECTION AND MONITORING.....	26
INFORMATION SHARING WITH OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES.....	26
MASH WEEKLY MISSING MEETING .....	27
THE MONTHLY MISSING MEETING .....	27
APPENDIX 1: PREVENTION AND PUSH/PULL FACTORS.....	29
APPENDIX 2 PRACTICE GUIDANCE FOR TRIGGER PLANS .....	30
APPENDIX 3: STRATEGY DISCUSSION AGENDA GUIDANCE .....	31
APPENDIX 4-RETURN HOME INTERVIEW TEMPLATE.....	34

## 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 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 Looked After Children by the Council. LBW retains responsibility for Looked After 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 interview 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 run away or 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, [County Lines Guidance](#)
- 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 Children's Social Care Child Exploitation Protocol
- Wandsworth Multi-Agency, Risk, Vulnerability and Exploitation Protocol
- Wandsworth Harmful Sexual Behaviour Protocol

## INTRODUCTION

Children running away and going missing from home is a key safeguarding issue for London Borough of Wandsworth. When a child goes missing from home or care, it is symptomatic of wider problems in their lives. Children who go missing or runaway are at risk of harm in the short term which can often have long term implications. Current research findings estimate that approximately 25% of children and young people who go missing are at risk of Significant Harm (Ofsted Missing Children 2013) There are particular concerns about the links between children running away 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 recent 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 gang and 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 run away or 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 PERSONS RESPONSIBLE

- Children's Social Care-Head of Service MASH
- Metropolitan Police-Detective Chief Inspector Safeguarding Partnership
- Child Exploitation-Service Manager
- Children's Social Care-Head of Service Looked After Children

## AGENCY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### Police

The police will:

- Collect and collate missing persons reports via the Police National (PNC);
- Carry out investigations of missing children;
- Notify other agencies of missing children reports via MERLIN;
- 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 CSE 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 or housing support worker will:

- Contribute to any plans designed to reduce the risk of running away within the care or pathway planning forum;
- Respond to missing incidents in line with this protocol;
- When a child goes missing notify the Police, CSC and parents where appropriate;
- Work with the police and CSC to ensure the child's safe return to placement;
- Provide accurate records of incidents to inform data gathering on individual and group patterns of running away.
- Residential units should have in place procedures to both prevent LAC going missing and to locate, return and support Looked After Children who have gone missing.

## **Emergency Duty Team**

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

- Respond to notifications from foster carers, residential workers, and housing support workers on behalf of CSC where a looked after child is reported as missing or where there are concerns for the safety of a child who is absent without authorisation;
- Provide a response for any runaway who is located by either ensuring their safe return home or to their placement or where necessary arranging for emergency overnight accommodation;
- Pass on all relevant information to CSC or other services for further action.

## **Wandsworth Safeguarding Children's Partnership**

The WSCP will:

- Co-ordinate the development of a multi-agency Vulnerable Adolescent Strategy on children
- Collate and analyse quarterly data on children missing from home and care in order to improve responses and service provision;
- Scrutinise the multi-agency response to children who run away or go missing;
- Support agencies to examine the links between missing and child exploitation.

## **Schools/Educational Provisions**

Schools and colleges will:

- Notify the specific and relevant team, as set out below, of children who are missing from the school roll under the "Missing from Education" policy;
- Make referrals for children whom it is thought are at risk of running away;

- Notify Wandsworth of any child who is removed from the school roll to be educated at home and arrange a meeting at the school inviting the parents and a representative of the Education Welfare Service before any change to the roll is made;
- Help children returning from a missing episode to settle back into education;
- Those children open to the MARVE Panel or considered vulnerable due to frequent missing/absent episodes or additional vulnerabilities for example child exploitation, gangs, county lines, mental ill health, etc school to contact person with parental responsibility. If this is unsuccessful then the school should report the child or young person missing to Police and to Children's Social Care if there is an allocated social worker.

## 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;
- Designated health professionals for LAC and safeguarding should share relevant information and intelligence relating to high risk individuals or emerging themes and patterns;
- Contribute to any plans designed to reduce risk by contributing to strategy/multi-agency professional meetings;
- Contribute to trigger plans.

## 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 initiated 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 Risk Assessment is paramount to guide collaborative working and sharing of information with the police;
- Every '*missing*' child who returns will be interviewed by someone other than the direct carer;
- Where the child is known to Children's Social Care or meets the criteria for referral to Children's Social Care, the Local Authority will ensure that there is a range of service options to address the child's needs when they return;
- Interventions are important in attempting to address repeat missing episodes and must be reflected in any care plan. 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

There are a range of definitions used concerning missing children across agencies for the purposes of referrals, risk assessment and recording of data. In determining the definition to apply to any form of absence, the Police and Social Care practitioners should be aware that some children absent themselves from home or placement for short periods with minimal risk to themselves or others. The level of risk will be determined by the age, understanding and vulnerability of the individual child. Missing episodes in respect of absent and missing children should be reviewed within 24 hours to determine the level of seriousness that should be attached to any absence.

**NB: Additional details of definitions used in the various agencies can be found in Appendix 2 at the end of this document.**

The Police definitions of 'missing' and 'absent' are:

**Missing:** Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another'.

**Absent:** A person is not at a place where they are expected or required to be' and there is no apparent risk.

The police classification of a person as 'absent' and 'missing' are based on continuous monitoring and risk assessment of the young person's situation.

**For the purposes of this protocol the following definitions apply:**

### Missing

- The whereabouts of the child/young person cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the child may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or others;
- Any child aged 12 or below whose whereabouts cannot be established would automatically be classed as missing;
- A child in this category must be reported to the police;
- The child will be considered missing until that child has been found and their wellbeing confirmed.
- Irrespective of age, if the subject has only been reported missing once or never before (regardless of circumstances) then they must be classed as missing. (MPS SOP)

There may be circumstances when a child who goes missing from home/care is experiencing harm or is at risk of harm. This includes but not limited to children subjected to fabricated or induced illness, female genital mutilation, abuse by children, abduction by family or others, domestic violence, sexually exploited children, suspected involvement in criminal activity such as county-lines, trafficked children and asylum-seeking children.

### Absent

- Child/young person (aged 13 or over only) is not at a place where they are expected or required to be (whereabouts unknown). Following a risk assessment, the absence does not raise concern for their immediate safety or that of anyone else;



- Where a child has been reported as absent and new information comes to light or if the child has not made contact (within the maximum timescale of 24 hours) the case can be categorised as 'missing'.

Some children absent themselves from home or care without permission for a short period and then return, often their whereabouts are known or may be quickly established through contact with friends or family or are unknown, but the children are not considered at risk.

### Unauthorised Absence

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

Sometimes children stay out longer than agreed as a boundary testing activity which can be considered normal teenage behaviour. An example of this may be a teenager who stays out beyond a curfew but whose whereabouts remains known to their parent or carer and/or whom remain in touch during their absence. These children have taken '**unauthorised absence**,' and would not usually come within the definition of 'missing' for this policy.

### High Risk Children and Young People

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

#### High Risk Cases (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.

#### High Risk Cases (Children's Social Care)

- Any child who is 12 years old or younger whose whereabouts are unknown
- Any child deemed vulnerable due to special educational need (such as learning and/or physical disabilities, mental, emotional, or physical health difficulties, including substance/alcohol misuse);
- Any child/young person who is a Looked after Child;
- Any child/young person who is subject to a Child Protection Plan or is considered as a Child in Need;
- Any child/young person where there are concerns relating to child exploitation; including sexual or criminal exploitation, gangs or county lines;
- Any child/young person who is abducted from care and/or where there may be concerns in relation to possible radicalisation;
- A history of prolonged or frequent absences/missing episodes that may increase risk of harm.

**Children who go missing frequently are at risk of exploitation. Any child that is at risk of CSE/CCE whose whereabouts cannot be established should be classed as missing although there should be sufficient risk indicators to support the belief that the child is at risk, until the child can be assessed by the Police. The child's safety must be prioritised over any requests to keep information confidential.** For further detail regarding children and young people at risk of CE please see the Wandsworth Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Protocol. It may be necessary for a Child Exploitation Risk Screening Tool to be completed to effectively assess any risks around exploitation if professionals are unsure. A consultation can also be completed with the MET Hub in MASH.

## RESPONDING TO CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME

All practitioner's working with children at risk of going missing should discuss the dangers of being missing with the child and their family. Parents and young people should be informed of support services, helplines and independent return home interviews for children.

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

**There is an expectation that parents/carers will take appropriate action and will report that their child/young person is missing. Failure to do so may be raised as a child protection issue and the London Child Protection Procedures must be followed.**

It should always be remembered that children missing from home face similar risks to those faced by children missing from care and local agencies should treat all instances where children are missing seriously.

Parents/carers are also encouraged to undertake several actions to try and locate a child who is missing before reporting them to the Police as long as it is safe to do so. If the parent/carer is aware or has concerns the child is at immediate risk to themselves or others, then they should contact 999 immediately.

### These actions include:

- Fully searching the accommodation and surrounding area/vehicles.
- Search the home for any important leads e.g. mobile phones, diaries, letters, notes explaining absence, email and website activity etc.), which may inform the investigation and/or assist in protecting or recovering the child.
- Speaking with other children in the family or who live in the home to obtain relevant information about the missing child.
- Making all appropriate enquiries regards the whereabouts of the child. This will involve trying to contact the child themselves, friends, family, associates, appropriate locations, local hospitals and the local police custody office and the school.

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 absenteeism and circumstances of where found.
- Circumstances under which the child went missing.
- Any factors that increase the risk to the child.

Professionals working with a child who is believed to be missing from home have a duty to support the parent to report the child as missing. **If, for some reason, the parent does not undertake this action then the professional should contact the police themselves and have the above information to hand.**

**In cases, where a child is not known to social care and there are repeated missing incidents (three 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 LIVING AT HOME WHO ARE SUBJECT TO A CHILD IN NEED OR CHILD PROTECTION PLAN WHO GO MISSING?**

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 EDT. If the parents have not contacted Police and/or EDT then the social worker should consider their duty to phone the police and address the parent's lack of action appropriately as outlined above.

### **Longer Absences and Keeping Cases Open**

For children subject to child protection plans, the decision to end a child protection plan can only be made by the chair, and it is very unlikely that a missing/absent child subject to a child protection plan would not continue to remain at risk, with the case remaining open to Children's Social Care until the child is found.

For other children known to Children's Social Care, whilst the child remains absent/missing, his/her case should remain allocated with regular strategy meetings and actions to seek to find and safeguard the child for at least three months. If the child continues to remain missing, and there are no further actions that can realistically be undertaken by Children's Social Care, a Head of Service should review the case before any decision for closure to satisfy him/herself on the actions taken to recover the child. The Head of Service will discuss the decision to close the case with the Assistant Director of Children's Social Care.

In such cases, the MET Hub in MASH should be notified that the case has been closed to Children's Social Care. The case will remain open to the police until the child or young person is found. The Police and CSC should agree which agency will notify the national Missing Persons Bureau; this should be done **28 days** after the child goes missing. The Missing Coordinator in the MET Hub will continue to have regular liaison with the police on a minimum monthly basis and can provide any requested information or attend any strategy meetings called by the police. When the child is found the case would be re-opened and allocated for a Child and Family assessment.

### **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 the system as a contact which will be considered by the MASH manager. Police MISPER reports will also be passed by the duty manager to the MET Hub (Missing, Exploited and Trafficked Hub) in the MASH to record the child's missing episode on Mosaic. The MET Hub along with the

MASH Manager will determine the offer of an RHI and needed actions such as a referral to Early Help services, allocation for a Child and Family Assessment or the requirement for a Section 47 investigation and strategy meeting.

Where a Section 47 investigation is initiated on a new referral, a Missing Strategy Meeting must be held as soon as possible, and within 3 days.

If a child has been missing and whereabouts unknown for over 24 hours, without an immediate concern warranting a Section 47, a strategy discussion should still take place and should be booked to be held within 3 days if the child does not return home. If the child remains missing for over 5 days, but returns within 7 days, it is recommended that the strategy meeting still goes ahead, and in these circumstances the missing police should attend to provide information and inform decision making. At the strategy/professionals meeting, information can be provided by all involved agencies and a decision taken as to whether there are sufficient concerns to undertake a Child and Family Assessment.

If a child goes missing 2 or more times in 28 days, the case will be allocated for a Child and Family assessment – it will be very important as part of this assessment that information is sought from all agencies. It may be helpful to hold a missing strategy/professionals meeting as per **Appendix 3: Strategy Meeting Guidance** to ensure that all information is shared and risks assessed. When a report of a missing child is received from police, Mosaic records should be checked by the MET Hub in MASH to see if a child has previously been reported missing. This will also be monitored by the Missing Coordinator, and any repeat missing episodes or other concerning cases will be recommended for a Child and Family assessment.

If the child is returned within 24 hours but the police believe there are concerning issues, they should make a referral to CSC even after the child is returned home.

## Responding to Children Missing from Care

Whoever discovers that a child is missing from a residential unit or foster home, should immediately inform the Residential Unit Manager/Shift Leader/Supervising Social Worker on duty and notify the police the child is missing. The allocated social worker in consultation with the residential unit/Foster Carer to ensure clear information on when the child/young person went missing (date/time) and should complete the Missing Child Alert & Risk Assessment on Mosaic and immediately upon completion forward the form to police via strategy meeting.

Where a child is looked after by the Local Authority, the MASH will activate a Missing Child Episode on the Mosaic recording system and notify the allocated social worker, team manager and service manager. It is then the responsibility of the allocated social worker to complete the Missing from home/care assessment and plan. The details of the Police MISPER will be saved to the documents section on the case file. The missing episode should be the date the child left his or her normal placement or the date the child was last seen by a responsible adult (whichever was the latest). The allocated Social Worker will liaise with the Fostering, Placements and Independent Reviewing Officer as necessary throughout the child's missing episode.

A referral to MASH for an independent return home interview should be sent once the child goes missing so they are more likely to be seen in the 72-hour window. Once they return then a quick phone call or email can be made to MASH by the allocated social worker to ensure the RHI proceeds.

A joint trigger plan should be identified by police and social care to agree the plan to find the young person, 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 and should include detailed information about the responsibilities of all services, the child's parents, foster carers and other adults involved in the child's network. 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 risk management plan. If there is information that the missing child is going missing in another borough then the trigger plan and risk management plan should be shared with the other borough's MASH team, EDT and local police.

The allocated social worker should alert the Independent Reviewing Officer when a child or young person is reported as missing from their placement and the Named Nurse for Looked After Children.

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

## PREVENTING MISSING FROM CARE AND UNAUTHORISED ABSENCES

As well as assessing the risks to include understanding the reasons why a Looked After Child is going missing, Local authorities have a duty to seek to place a looked after child in the most appropriate placement to safeguard the child and minimise the risk of the child running away. The care plan and the placement plan should include details of the arrangements that will need to be in place to keep the child safe and minimise the risk of the child going missing from their placement. Remember:

**The Care Plan** – should include strategies to avoid unauthorised absences and/or a child going missing including disrupting, where this is an identified risk. It should also include strategies to reduce the duration and risks associated if the child does have unauthorised absences/go missing;

**The Placement Plan** – should include strategies for preventing/disrupting activity of the child from taking unauthorised absences/going missing; and clear advice to the carers as to the steps to take and persons to be contacted if a child is absent or missing from placement;

Where a child has previously gone missing prior to becoming looked after, this risk should be appropriately planned for and considered as part of the child's care plan. Any risks/vulnerabilities that the child could go missing in the future along with factors that could increase those risks to the child should they go missing need to be accounted for in the care and placement plan. The allocated social worker for all children for whom there is concern that they may run away, should share the missing child risk assessment in advance with the foster carer, fostering agency, police, school, EDT, and other local authorities as appropriate. Distance from home, family and friends should be considered as a risk factor;

Provide the child with advice about an independent advocate and take the child's views into account.

Statutory reviews should consider any absences and revise strategies to prevent repeat absences and/or missing incidents and the care plan should be revised accordingly.

## MISSING CHILD RISK ASSESSMENT

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 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 from RHI's.

In cases where new information becomes available and/or the child remains absent 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 a '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.

If there are additional risks/vulnerabilities around child exploitation the social worker and manager should consider the need to trigger/update the CE Screening tool.

**N.B: If a child has been screened as high risk by Police or CSC a 'Need to Know Form' should be completed and sent to appropriate Senior Managers. Please see definitions of high risk in this document.**

## INFORMATION SHARING FORM

The Missing Incidents and Information Sharing form on Mosaic 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/absence 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.

## CHILDREN MISSING EDUCATION: NOTIFYING CHILDREN MISSING

Children who are missing from school may also be at greater risk of missing from care or home and vice versa.

Children missing education are defined as those who are not on a school roll or receiving suitable education otherwise than at school. Those who are regularly absent or have missed 10 school days or more without permission may be at risk of becoming 'children missing education'.

Where a child fails to attend school or goes missing from the school roll for 10 days the school must notify the Monitoring and Inclusion Officer who will act to ensure that the child is safe and well and to plan for them to return to full time education. If a child is removed from a school to be educated at home, schools must notify the Education Welfare Service so that the Home Education Officer can contact the family to ensure the home education offered is of a good enough standard and to ensure the child's safety and welfare.

If a member of Education staff becomes aware that a child may be missing, and they should follow the procedures outlined in local Children Missing Education Policy They should try to establish what has happened with the parents or carers. If this is not possible, the Designated Safeguarding Children Teacher should, together with relevant staff and teachers, assess the child's vulnerability.

Education staff noting the return of a missing child should establish whether Police or Children's Social Care were involved in the return and if not, inform Police and/or Children's Social Care and follow this missing protocol as required. The Children Missing from Education Panel (CAROUSEL) reviews all young people who are missing from Education, including those who are also missing from home or care. This allows risks to be monitored and appropriate actions to be agreed. The missing from home and care list is provided monthly to the panel to check names on both lists. This only shares the information with those attending the panel. An education representative also attends the weekly missing meeting to ensure appropriate sharing of information on missing children across both CSC and Education.

**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 due to not having a school place please contact [EWS@wandsworth.gov.uk](mailto:EWS@wandsworth.gov.uk)

## CHILDREN WHO GO MISSING DURING EXTERNAL ACTIVITIES?

If a child goes missing whilst involved in an external activity, including school trips, the person in charge of the activity will:

- Notify the local Police in that area where the child went missing. The investigation will be conducted by the missing persons unit where the child went missing unless there is a belief that the child returned to the borough they normally resides; in which case the bulk of the

enquiries would be undertaken by Wandsworth with assistance of the local Police in the area the child originally went missing.

- Notify their Manager.
- Notify the manager and arrange to ensure the child's parents are contacted. If the child is a Looked After Child, those who care for/have responsibility for the child – Residential Unit Staff/Foster Carer/ must be informed.
- If the child is a Looked After Child, notify the Social Worker with case work responsibility for the child.
- If the child is a Looked After Child, notify the Social Care Emergency Duty Team for any Local Authority which holds case responsibility for the child.
- Look around the local area, known favourite locations as staffing levels permit.

If the child is a Looked After Child, the Manager of the Residential Unit and Supervising Social Worker for the Foster Carer will be responsible for ensuring the general procedures in relation to a child going missing are followed.

## WORKING WITH THE POLICE

Relevant 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. However, where the child is a Looked After Child then Children's Social Care are responsible for children in their care at all times, and this responsibility is not absolved when a child is reported missing to the Police. Social workers, foster carers, and other professionals should do all that a good parent would do to find their child, including undertaking their own searches as far as is possible, safe and appropriate. Actions from strategy discussions and meetings need to be urgently progressed.

Until such time as a child is no longer missing, regular liaison and communication should take place between the Police and referring/involved agencies.

If the Police or other referring agency additionally believe that the circumstances surrounding the child's going missing put the child at risk of Significant Harm, then they should discuss these concerns with Children's Social Care.

Children's social care should provide relevant information about the missing child to the police to enable all the risk factors to be considered. Early completion of **Pre and Current Missing Child Risk Assessment Record and Information Sharing Form** for children who are missing from care, or are at risk of going missing or unauthorised absence will greatly aid this process. When a child is missing best practice would be for the social worker to ensure that these forms are shared with the police.

## PUBLICITY

When publicity is appropriate/needed in order to safely locate and safeguard a missing child, the police will liaise with the child's parents to get permission to seek publicity. For Looked After Children the Director's approval will also need to be sought. The Social worker will need to liaise with police regarding publicity and if this is appropriate and agreed the social worker may need to help police identify areas where putting up publicity may be useful. Electronic publicity pictures can also be sent to relevant agencies.



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 officer in accordance with local guidance.

## STRATEGY MEETINGS

A strategy meeting should be convened dependant on the risks associated with the missing episode and the age and vulnerability of the child/young person. **Dependant on the level of assessed risk, it may be necessary to convene an immediate strategy meeting following the notification of a missing child where the circumstances give rise to concern of significant harm.** Otherwise the strategy meeting should be held within **3 days**. These meetings are particularly important to collate and share information with Police and Health, Education and other partners and should include mapping of any known associates.

### Children's Social Care must, call a face to face Strategy Meeting in the following cases:

- Where young people are missing for more than 48 hours;
- Where the young person is aged 12 or under;
- Where there are significantly high and complex risks;
- As directed by MASH following the weekly missing meeting;
- Where young people persistently go missing and persistently fail to engage with the RHI process;
- Where there is reason to believe the parents are not acting accordingly – follow usual safeguarding procedure;
- Where children have a Child Protection Plan or who are subject to a Section 47.

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

### 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; and
- Agreements in relation to a Media Strategy.

The allocated social worker, team manager or head of service should ensure that an 'alert' (Need to Know) form is completed on Mosaic **within 24 hours** notifying the Assistant Director and Director of Children's Services of missing children or any children where the circumstances give rise to concern of significant harm (child exploitation, gangs, trafficking etc)

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 Child Abuse Investigation Unit 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.

If a young person has not been found by their 18th birthday then a formal Missing Child Meeting should be held to determine whether the case should be closed to Children's Social Care. Any decision to close the case should be on the proviso that it is reopened if the young person is located and found to be in need of services as an eligible, relevant or former relevant child.

The Assistant Director of Children's Services will formally review all cases where 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.

## CARE LEAVERS

From the age of 16 young people in care are referred to as care leavers, however, it is important to note that local authorities have very similar duties and responsibilities towards 16 and 17 year old care leavers as they do to children in care, and for the purposes of this guidance, the response to a missing child age 16 and 17 year old should be the same.

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, particularly 16 and 17 year olds, 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 areas 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, in order 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. However, risk factors that might increase their vulnerability include:

- Where they are and who they are with; is the child in danger of being abused or exploited or in contact with a person who poses a risk to children? Are they at risk from involvement in gangs, criminal activity, CSE?
- Their state of mind; are they vulnerable due to emotional or mental health difficulties or substance misuse?
- Whether they have learning difficulties, medical conditions, or other vulnerabilities;
- A history of prolonged or frequent absences/missing episodes that may increase risk of harm.

## 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 a MASE/MARVE, where appropriate a referral to Wandsworth's MARVE will be made so the case can be monitored locally. This is in line with the Pan London Safeguarding Children from Sexual Exploitation Protocol. If needed, support for how to contact other authorities and police forces can be sought from the MET Hub in the MASH.

It is also possible that the area of the placement may contain new or further risks to young people, particularly those already identified as at risk of CSE or youth crime. As far as possible, when considering placement options, the social worker should seek information about the local area and local risks. If it is not possible to risk assess information in advance, this should still be sought once a placement has been made.

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 from the responsible local authority, the MET Hub will make contact with the local Missing Coordinator to request any relevant information in relation to risks to the young person, or towards others, including child exploitation. This information will be used to best support local understanding of risk, and to best consider risk to any other local young persons that may be in placement as appropriate.

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

## LOCATING THE CHILD AND PLANNING THEIR RETURN

### Planning the return when the Child is Located

If a child is 'missing' the police and parents, social worker, residential unit/foster carer should commence contingency planning for when the child is located. Plans should include:

- Will the child return to the placement/home address or are they safe in the location where they are found?
- If the child is to return, how will s/he be conveyed to their placement/home address?
- Where and when will the police conduct the safe and well check?
- **Confirm who will conduct the Return Home Interview** when s/he is located/returned and liaise with that person to do so
- Informing the police where an agency meets with a child or young person who is known to be 'missing'. The child should be informed that this will happen.
- Children who have repeated 'unauthorised' absences should also be offered a Return home Interview.

Normally the Residential Unit Staff/Foster Carer or Social Worker/Emergency Duty Team/Out of Hours will plan for the transportation of a child to his/her placement/home address.

For children missing from home, the social worker should discuss this with them, or other key professional if this is more appropriate to the young person's needs and wishes. For a Looked After Child, unauthorised absences should still be discussed by the social worker, however if the young person does not engage with this, and concerns remain, and/or the child has repeated unauthorised absences, a referral for a return home interview should be considered.

There will be occasions when a child is found in a location that may be considered unsuitable, but where there would be no legal grounds for taking them into Police Protection or where to do so would be unsustainable because of the child unwillingness to co-operate. In these cases, police and the accountable manager from Children's Social Care will need to liaise to discuss what steps may be necessary in order to safeguard the child's welfare. If orders will need to be sought to safeguard the child, Legal will need to be informed and consulted.

**The child's parents/carers and all agencies informed of the missing episode should be advised of the child's return without delay. This will be the responsibility of the allocated worker.**

## POLICE SAFE AND WELL CHECK/PREVENTION INTERVIEW

Once a child has returned home, the Police will carry out a Safe and Well Check as soon as possible. The aim of this is to check for any indications that the young person has suffered harm; establish the reasons for their disappearance; find out where and with whom they have been; and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by, or against, them. Even where a young person is going

missing frequently, there is a requirement to undertake the Safe and Well Check and every effort should be made to visit those young people missing from home on every occasion. If during the Safe and Well Check the police identify that there are immediate safeguarding concerns, then a referral should be made to Children's Services. In addition, if a private fostering arrangement is in place, this will also need to be reported to Children's Services.

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. They are also an essential part of the return process to recognize vulnerability and criminality that missing children may have been exposed to, and to be able to respond and plan accordingly.

Within **24 hours** of police locating the missing child or being notified of their return the Police will attempt to undertake a safe and well check. This is usually very brief and is not a Return Home Interview. The safe and well check will also look at whether the child:

- Has suffered any harm;
- Try and establish reasons for missing;
- Find out where and with who the child has been;
- Disclose any offending by or against them.

If the child is returning home, the police should also establish whether there are any child protection issues and if it is safe for the child to return there. As a result of these checks, and any disclosures made, the police will decide what further action to take in terms of referring the child on for services. A safe and well check will be carried out for all children returning home. However, for children who frequently go missing from care placements the police may decide on a case by case basis whether to conduct the check or whether this may be carried out by the allocated social worker.

High Risk cases will continue to demand a face-to-face **prevention interview**, and this will be conducted within 1 hour of them being located by police or police being notified of their return.

The Wandsworth South West Missing Person Unit (SW-MPU) will automatically notify the MASH of all young people who have received a police safe and well-check. The Wandsworth MISPER Unit may not always be informed of a young person's return in the cases where LAC young people are placed far out of borough.

## RETURN HOME INTERVIEW (RHIs)

Independent Return Interviews should take place with all children who have been reported missing and returned home or back to their placement and should, **take place within 72 hours of their return and be held in a neutral place where the child feels safe and be independent of the child's family, placement or care. See Appendix 6: Return Home Interview (RHI) Template/Guidance.**

The purpose of the interview is to give the child an opportunity to speak to someone about why they ran away, 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 and issues experienced by the child, gather information which can help assess the risk the child is at, can 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 care but also that the child has a good relationship with and feels comfortable talking to about their experiences. Information from the return home interview can be used to inform case planning.

For children missing from home, the social worker or other identified person can carry out a Return Home Interview (RHI) with the child. Depending on the circumstances of the Missing Episode the MET Hub may decide to commission an RHI. It is good practice to ask the child who they wish to speak to. The RHI should be shared with another trusted professional to be completed and returned to the social worker.

Where a young person refuses to engage in a return home interview, the social worker should obtain relevant information from the parents or carers.

For children missing from care, the return home interview service will be notified by the MET Hub in MASH, of when a child who has been referred returns.

The RHI workers will contact the child, offer an interview and arrange to meet. If this is refused, then the RHI worker must liaise with the social worker.

Where a child refuses, it should be explored if the child would prefer to talk to another trusted professional in the professional network. If the child still refused, or if the child were to specifically request to speak to the social worker, then the social worker should still carry out the interview as far as possible, and certainly will need to continue to discuss concerns for the child going missing and support to reduce missing episodes with the young person.

## RETURN HOME INTERVIEW – REVIEW AND INFORMATION SHARING

It is very important that RHI's are read carefully by social workers. In many cases they will contain useful information, that should be shared with their parents or carers to help prevent them going missing again or reduce the risks to them when they are missing. The information should also be used to update their **missing risk assessment and information sharing forms** and should inform longer term planning to safeguard and support the child.

Key relevant information from the RHIs that has immediate bearing on risk should also be shared quickly with police, and any other appropriate professionals, such as school and YOS worker. Otherwise the information should be shared as part of updating risk assessments and information sharing forms, and in informing children's plans.

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

If a child refuses an RHI 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.

**See Appendix 6: Return Home Interview (RHI) Template/Guidance.**

## SUPPORT BEYOND RETURN HOME INTERVIEW

Any information obtained during an RHI that may affect any future risk assessment or may assist in finding the child should they go missing again should be exchanged between the Police, the Local Authority and other relevant agencies involved with the child. This will help build up a comprehensive picture of why the child was absent and what support they and their carers may require to reduce future missing episodes and risk to the child.

Evolve are also commissioned to offer a period of support beyond RHI for those as high risk of repeat episodes. Support packages are evidence based, time limited and goal oriented and may include onward referral to other sources of support such as parenting courses or support groups such as girls and gang's worker, exploitation etc. Packages may include:

- Development of strategies aimed to reduce risk or harm, such as reducing association with risky peers / adults, prevention of substance misuse, sexual health strategies.
- Practical and emotional support (including mediation and support to succeed in education) with young people and their families.
- Support to families/parents to enable them to understand why the child has run away, identification of CSE risks and prevention strategies.
- Promoting and linking young people with positive activities within local community.
- Involvement of LAC health team for advice and co-ordination of care; e.g. re-scheduling statutory health assessments.

## NON-ENGAGEMENT IN RHI PROCESS

Engagement in the RHI process is voluntary, however, young people who persistently go missing, whether missing from home or care, and do not engage in RHIs may also be at high risk. A strategy meeting should always be considered for young people persistently not attending RHIs. This may be organized by the social worker or by the agency tasked to conduct RHIs where the young person is not involved in social care.

**Non engagement in RHIs should be reported to the MET Hub in the MASH.**

## CHILDREN MISSING IN SPECIFIC CIRCUMSTANCES

### 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 [16], they will usually become looked after.

The accommodation provided must be suitable, risk assessed and meet the full range of the young person's needs. The sustainability of the placement must be considered. Young people who have run away and are at risk of homelessness may be placed in supported accommodation, with the provision of specialist support. For example, a specialist service might be provided for those who have been sexually exploited, or at risk of sexual exploitation.

Local authorities should have regard to statutory guidance in April 2010[17] issued to children's services authorities and local housing authorities about their duties under Part 3 of the Children Act 1989 and Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996[18] to secure or provide accommodation for homeless 16- and 17-year olds.

## Trafficking/Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

There are complex issues facing Asylum Seeking children. Information about some children's whereabouts is not always maintained due to the transient nature of their accommodation arrangements. Agencies must, however, be alert to the fact that some children are trafficked into, within and out of the UK for custom related reasons, to be abused and exploited for commercial gain, including through sex, for domestic servitude etc.

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

Unaccompanied migrant or asylum-seeking child who goes missing immediately after becoming looked after should be treated as children who could be victims of trafficking.

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

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

In conducting this assessment it will be necessary for the local authority to work in close co-operation with the Modern Slavery Human Trafficking Unit (MSHTU) and immigration staff who will be familiar with patterns of trafficking into the UK. Immigration staff should be able to advise on whether information about the individual child suggests that they fit the profile of a potentially trafficked child.

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

Many children, who have been trafficked, will be exploited for sexual purposes and the link to sexual exploitation should be addressed in line with Wandsworth Children's Social Care Child Sexual Exploitation Protocol.

**The Local Authority, Police and other agency response to an Asylum-Seeking child going missing should be exactly the same as for all other children, whether they are looked after or living in the community.**

For further guidance of trafficked children see London Safeguarding Board's Guidance, 'Safeguarding Trafficked and Exploiting Children'.

Information and guidance can also be sought from the UK Human Trafficking Centre at Modern slavery and human trafficking (NCA).

EXPATS.ORG.UK has useful research/resources.



## Harbouring

In order to safeguard children who repeatedly go missing and are found to be with the same person, the police may issue a Child Abduction Warning Notice to any persons considered to be harbouring a young person who has run away. The Police may ask the named Social Worker for the young person to provide a Witness Statement to assist in the production of the Child Abduction Warning Notice. Repeated incidents may lead to their arrest and prosecution under Section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984.

## Abduction

If it is suspected that a child has been or may be abducted by a parent and removed from the UK, normally due to disputes over residency or custody, parents should be advised to call the police and contact the Child Abduction Unit in the Official Solicitor's Office for details on what action can be taken. See Official Solicitor and Public Trustee (GOV.UK).

Any concerns for abduction by a stranger, or unsafe known adult, would constitute a Section 47 investigation and responded to accordingly.

Any concerns for abduction of a child from Local Authority Care would also constitute a Section 47 investigation and responded to accordingly. Legal services should be immediately informed, as well as the Assistant Director.

## Forced Marriage

Forced marriage involves the obtaining of consent to marry by duress, threats and violence. If there are concerns that a young person has gone missing because of a forced marriage, social workers and professionals should refer to the government guidance GOV.UK: Forced Marriage (2017) on what actions to take. For Looked After Children, Legal Services should also be consulted, and orders sought to protect the child.

If it is feared that the child may be removed from the UK for the purposes of forced marriage, professionals should contact the Forced Marriage Unit based in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Victims of forced marriage.

## Female Genital Mutilation

If there are concerns that a young girl may be removed from the UK for the purposes of female genital mutilation (FGM) professionals should follow the guidance set out in Multi-agency statutory guidance on female genital mutilation (2016, GOV.UK).

Concerns for FGM must be reported to the police, and, they have a specialist team working on FGM: Project Azure Partnership Team.

The FGM Unit, based at the Home Office, co-ordinates work on FGM across government and offers outreach support to local areas. Please note the unit does not handle individual cases.

**The NSPCC have an FGM helpline: 0800 028 3550**

## Radicalisation

The harm children and young people can experience from radicalisation ranges from a child adopting or complying with extreme views which limits their social interaction and full engagement with their

education, to young children being taken to war zones and older children being groomed for involvement in violence.

If there are concerns that a child who is missing has been radicalised, or a child is likely to go missing where there are concerns of radicalisation, then the London Child Protection Procedures need to be followed, see London Child Protection Procedures, Safeguarding Children Exposed to Extremist Ideology.

A referral should also be made to Wandsworth's MARVE (Multi-Agency Risk Vulnerability Exploitation Panel) for oversight of the safeguarding and risk for the young person.

## Child Exploitation (CE)

As mentioned, going missing is a risk indicator of CE, and where there are linked concerns to a child going missing and being at risk of CE it is very important that all possible actions are taken to safeguard and support the child, and that the risks are fully considered in all aspects of planning and support. In these cases Strategy Meetings and Professionals Meetings are particularly crucial to ensure that all relevant information is shared and acted upon and that actions to investigate crime, disrupt activity, and support the young person are being progressed. Please see Wandsworth Children's Social Care Child Exploitation Protocol and the associated Child Sexual, HSB and Criminal Exploitation protocols for more information.

Information will also be shared between the Missing Coordinator and CE Coordinator. 'Mapping' of young people's family, friends, wider associates and the locations that they visit is also crucial to protecting young people. This should be completed and updated regularly. Completed ecomaps should also be shared with the CE Coordinator.

Where a young person who is identified as medium or high risk of CE (or low risk and not engaging with services) continues to go missing, then the case should be referred for further information sharing and advice to MARVE.

## COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS

Unless there are concerns that this would increase the risk, it is good practice and can in some cases be crucial for information sharing to invite the parent/carer of the child to the Missing Strategy Meeting. Where this is not appropriate, parents must be kept updated.

If a child is on a child protection plan or subject to Section 47 enquiries, then the CP Chair, Quality Assurance Team and CP Designated Nurse needs to be notified. The child's school should always be informed and invited to strategy meetings as they may hold valuable information.

For Looked After Children, the IRO should be notified as soon as possible. If there are ongoing Care Proceedings, the Children's Guardian should also be informed, and they may wish to attend meetings. The child's school should always be informed and invited to strategy meetings as they may hold valuable information. The virtual school should be notified.

For a full list of persons to invite see **Appendix 3: Strategy Meeting Guidance**.

It is important to remember to communicate with all professionals that a child has returned home and provide updated information where known about why they were missing, where they were located, and any change to the safeguarding or support plan as a result.

## STRATEGIC OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNANCE

Weekly and Monthly interagency meetings monitor the immediate exchange of information regarding missing young people and have oversight of the arrangements in place and the activity of the operational panel in safeguarding children missing from home and care.

The MARVE contains a core membership (e.g. Police, Young Offending Service, Health, Education, Health, CSC, Probation, Housing etc) able to commit resources and make decisions. The panel will consider cases where vulnerable young people who are at risk as a result of contextual safeguarding factors and/or who pose a risk to others where this risk is deemed to be high or very high and a multi-agency plan is required to reduce/manage that risk.

The Head of Service for MASH is the Named Person with responsibility for Missing Children and will ensure regular reports on children who go missing are presented to senior management and are governed by the Vulnerable Adolescent Group of the WSCP.

The Panel will scrutinise regular reports received from the local authority and partners analysing data on children missing from home and from care within the local authority area, and on the effectiveness of their measures to prevent missing episodes.

## DATA COLLECTION AND MONITORING

It is very important that all missing episodes are added to the Mosaic appropriately and closed once returned. All information regarding the missing episode and risk of the child needs to be filled in correctly by social work teams on the Mosaic work step. This information can then be used to inform any data analysis.

The MASH Manager will monitor the actions, plans and outcomes for children considered to be high risk missing by Children's Social Care (CSC). Relevant data collated by Wandsworth Children's Services jointly with the Police and partner agencies includes missing episodes for children from home or care (duration and frequency), police safe and well checks, information from return home interviews and identification of specific trends and risks such as child sexual exploitation.

Where cases are deemed to be high risk due to factors such as Child Sexual Exploitation, gang affiliation, trafficking, etc, they can be referred to the Multi Agency Risk Vulnerability Exploitation Panel (MARVE) if it is felt it would be beneficial for the case to be discussed and monitored at a strategic multi agency level. Any intelligence and actions obtained from the panel should form part of the child's risk assessment and appropriate professional judgement applied by the social worker when determining how best to share information with parents/carers as required for safety planning.

## INFORMATION SHARING WITH OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Where it is known that a Wandsworth child has run away to another local authority area, the police will contact the police in that area;

Where families go missing, Wandsworth CSC will send out notifications to all other local authorities giving details of the family, via the CPC team in Quality Assurance;

If a child from another area is found in Wandsworth, the police will notify the home local authority; as will Wandsworth MASH via the MET Hub.

If a child is placed out of borough and has a Missing Risk Assessment, then this is to be shared with local authority by the child/young person's allocated social worker. If the child/young/person does not have an allocated social worker then the Missing Risk Assessment is to be provided to the Police by the MASH.

## MASH WEEKLY MISSING MEETING

A weekly meeting is hosted by the MASH to consider the children and young people that have been reported in the previous 7 days and ongoing plans for high risk cases who have returned. This meeting will ensure that cases are being dealt with in a timely manner and in line with joint protocols. The main aims of the weekly missing meeting are to:

- Review the latest missing case load to share intelligence and information relating to individual missing children/young people.
- Establish responsibility for conducting RHIs where there are ambiguities (such as several multi-agency professionals involved).
- Identify and discuss high priority cases and/or young people with a high number of missing episodes especially those who frequently do not engage in RHIs.
- Generate intelligence for investigations and identify any trends or problem locations and ensure they are dealt with.
- To provide advice and guidance to professionals in relation to cases where children/young people are reported as missing or absent.
- To identify any training needs of professionals and inform the Monthly missing meeting.
- Identify the multiple vulnerabilities of young people if these have been missed to ensure effective risk planning (e.g. CE/CCE, trafficking, gangs, youth violence etc)

The weekly missing meeting is intended to act as a safety network to ensure all missing young people are being worked with appropriately.

You should not wait for the weekly missing meeting to either report a child as missing or to arrange a strategy meeting. Further information regarding this meeting is contained within the weekly missing meeting terms of reference. **See Appendix: 4 at the end of this document.**

## THE MONTHLY MISSING MEETING

The monthly missing meeting takes place every month and will take place after the weekly missing meeting. Both weekly and monthly missing meetings are coordinated by the MASH. The main aims of the monthly meetings are to:

- Receive and review intelligence regarding missing episodes, trends and uptake of RHIs from the analyst within the MET Hub.
- Share intelligence and information relating to high priority missing children/young people. This is to generate intelligence for investigations and identify any trends or problem locations and ensure they are dealt with.
- Look at cross border issues and ensure there is a co-ordinated approach with other boroughs.
- To provide advice and guidance to professionals in relation to cases where children/young people are reported as missing or absent.

- To identify and include an overview of those Looked after Children placed out of borough who have had missing episodes, including patterns, trends and known associations. This information should be gathered by BCU and CSC.
- To identify any training needs of professionals and inform the Wandsworth Learning and Development team.

The monthly meeting will also monitor the cohort of young people reported missing in the previous months and agree actions on any exceptional cases requiring further discussion (such as those involved in serious criminal activity, vulnerable to sexual exploitation, or vulnerabilities in relation to age) and/or review repetitive cases of concern.

A report on children missing from home and care will be presented to the Vulnerable Adolescent Group (VAG) on a 6-monthly basis. This report will monitor outcomes and analyse patterns including those children placed in the area by other local authorities.

The Chair of the monthly missing meeting will report to VAG Strategic Subgroup of the WSCP.

## APPENDIX 1: PREVENTION AND PUSH/PULL FACTORS

### Preventing Running Away Behaviour, and Understanding why Children go Missing

It is important that children who are thinking of running away are able to 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 / Looked After Child 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;

**Grooming for potential child exploitation or child trafficking** – young people may run away or go missing following grooming by adults or peers who seek to exploit them;

**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 EDT/OOH. 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

**Places frequented:** 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 DISCUSSION AGENDA GUIDANCE

1. Brief information on child and family and presenting risks, including history of missing episodes and background of child;

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.

2. 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 interviews, 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 other 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 the date of the meeting and date of any further meeting.

## APPENDIX 4: STRATEGY DISCUSSION AGENDA GUIDANCE

### Wandsworth Missing Children's Panel Terms of Reference

#### Introduction

In response to identified national and local trends concerning the multi-faceted nature of adolescent risk including child exploitation, Wandsworth in partnership with the Met Police have replaced the VAMP with a new panel called MARVE and is similar to developments across other London Boroughs. The MARVE stream lines processes around vulnerable adolescents and considers all forms of child exploitation including CSE, CCE, County Lines, Serious Youth Violence, Trafficking, and Gangs. The MARVE will also include adolescent risk in relation to missing and the information and intelligence from the weekly missing panel will support the MARVE decision making processes and management of adolescent risk across child exploitation categories. On **13 January 2020** the WSCP Vulnerable Adolescent Group (sub-group of WSCP) approved the terms of reference and time line for the implementation of the MARVE and changes to the Missing Panel.

#### Terms of Reference

The Missing panel will now be held every week to discuss Wandsworth children including those that are reported missing from care and children missing from home. It will review data of children who have been missing over the last week period. There will also be a monthly missing meeting held to consider wider intelligence, patterns and risk factors to be considered for the MARVE.

The data used will be that received via the MASH and collated by the Senior Information Analyst from Evolve.

The Missing panel will have multi-agency representation including Health, Education, Police, YOS, Evolve, and Children's Services.

The panel will be chaired by either the **MASH Service Manager or MASH Team Manager at Wandsworth**.

#### The meeting will consider for each case;

- Whether the missing protocol has been followed to ensure a robust response to the case being presented.
- The nature and degree of risk to each child or young person and;
- Review actions that have been taken in order to reduce the risk.
- The Missing panel will identify any high-risk children or young people and escalate to the MARVE panel for their risk management oversight.
- Ensure intelligence is captured and escalated to the MARVE panel to aid in effective disruption

#### Operational Process

The Missing panel will sit on Wednesdays, every week from 9:00-11:00 am.

The Senior Information Analyst will send to the Missing Business Support via the MASH inbox the data on the Monday before the Wednesday meeting. Missing Business Support will notify attendees, via email, by the Monday lunch time prior to the meeting that the data is ready to view. External agencies will be sent the data via secure email. If identified representatives are unable to attend it is expected that a representative will attend in their stead or send the required research on cases for the meeting to ensure effective decision making by the panel. **It is critical that appropriate representation is in attendance to ensure quoracy for effective decision making.**

The representative from Children’s Service responsible for reporting on the case will come to the meeting with an update on responses and actions taken in relation to the missing child or young person. Managers should review all RHIs and any decisions made regarding the missing episode recorded within 24 hours. If there is no involvement from Children’s Services, the MASH Manager or Return Interview Worker will lead on reporting in relation to the child or young person.

The Panel Chair will quality assure the minutes by the Friday following the meeting and the agreed minutes will then be sent out to the panel members no later than Monday alongside the Missing List.

Children who meet criteria for MARVE Panel will be noted as such in the minutes and actions. The responsible allocated Social Worker and Team Manager will ensure a referral to the MASH inbox and the Child Exploitation manager will ensure that these cases are taken to MARVE and the MARVE Business Support will also add the cases to the MARVE agenda.

The attending representative from Children’s Service and responsible manager will have responsibility to ensure that action points from the meeting are undertaken and updates provided to Business Support Missing inbox within 1 week of the Missing panel.

For cases open to Children’s Services, Social Care, the key discussions and actions will be entered onto the child or young person’s case note under heading of Missing meeting by the Missing Business Support.

**ATTENDEES**

<b>Education</b>	<b>Police</b>	<b>Health</b>
Children Missing Education <b>Education Welfare? Or Virtual School?</b>	South West BCU MISPER Representative	Named Nurse Safeguarding 0-19, LAC Health Representative, <b>CAHMS-possibly virtual?</b>
<b>Wandsworth CSC</b>	<b>Voluntary</b>	
Edge of Care, Children with Disabilities, Child in Need Team, Children Looked After, CE and Missing Specialist Worker, Early Help (Thrive), Youth Offending Service, Evolve Team, MASH/RAS, Future First, Quality Assurance Team.	<b>Do we need anyone here?</b>	

**BUSINESS SUPPORT** All communications about Missing will come from, and need to go to, the MASH inbox: [mash@wandsworth.gov.uk](mailto:mash@wandsworth.gov.uk)

## APPENDIX 6-RETURN HOME INTERVIEW TEMPLATE



Whilst missing	Comments
<p><b>Where did you go?</b></p> <p>Help me understand – how did we get here?</p> <p><b>Prompts:-</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How did you get there?</li> <li>- How did you pay for food/drink?</li> <li>- Where did you sleep?</li> <li>- How did you keep clean?</li> <li>- Did you have belongings with you?</li> <li>- Did you arrange to meet anyone?</li> <li>- Was it planned?</li> <li>- Who were you with?</li> <li>- Did you want to return?</li> </ul>	
Contact	Comments
<p><b>While you were missing, who did you keep in touch with?</b></p>	
<p><b>Who would you have liked to be in touch with whilst missing?</b></p>	

Safeguarding	Comments
<p><b>What did you do while you were missing?</b></p>	
<p><b>Did anything (scary) happen while you were missing?</b></p>	
<p>Prompts : -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did someone pressure you to leave / meet them?</li> <li>• Did you get contacted online / messaged about going?</li> <li>• Were you going to get alcohol and / or tobacco?</li> <li>• Were you going to collect drugs?</li> <li>• Were you seeking family contact?</li> <li>• Were you offered anything to go missing? A job, better lifestyle?</li> <li>• Did you need to clear your head?</li> <li>• Were you kept against your will?</li> <li>• Were you hurt, injured, drugged, abused (sexual, physical, verbal)?</li> <li>• Were you offered drink/drugs - how much, what was it, was it bought, given or stolen and where from?</li> </ul>	
Risk	Comments
<p><b>While you were missing did you come into contact with the police?</b></p>	

<b>Did you see any crime being committed?</b>	
<b>Did anything happen while you were missing that you think the police can help you or another person with?</b>	
E.g. Exploitation - Sexual, criminal, trafficking, county lines	
<b>Return from Missing</b>	
<b>How come you returned? And how?</b>	
<b>How has it been since you came back?</b>	
<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>How do you feel? Physically and emotionally?</b>	
<b>Do you think you would benefit from medical attention?...Is there anything you need?</b>	
E.g. Sexual health clinic if been sexually active, GP if emotional wellbeing suffered, A & E if injured	
<b>Prevention</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>How likely do you think it could be that you'll go missing again?</b>	
<b>If you did, what might make it happen?</b>	
<b>Is there anything anybody can do to help reduce it/that from happening?</b>	
<b>Support</b>	<b>Comments</b>

Is there anything that you'd like help with in your life?			
Do you have an adult in your life who you have a trusted positive relationship with?			
Do they know about you going missing?			
Will you talk to them about this?			
Other	Comments		
Additional questions/discussions that arose during interview:			
<b>Themes related to this missing episode</b>			
	Tick Box		Tick Box
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/carers		Didn't 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	

**Wandsworth Return Home Interview Feedback**

**Name:**

**D.O.B:**

**Date of RHI**

**Missing episode/s:**

**Location of RHI:**

**Contacts made prior to successful RHI:**

**Safeguarding concerns**

- 

**Recommendations**

- 

**Completed by:**

**Date:**

**Missing Children Worker (CSE and Missing Team)**

**7 Ram Street , Wandsworth, London, SW18 1TJ**

**Tel: 020 8871 8107**

