

Families and Homes Directorate
“Children Who Go Missing From Home, Care or Education”

Procedures and Practice Guidance

CONTENT

- | | |
|----|--|
| 1 | Introduction |
| 2 | Principles |
| 3 | Definitions |
| 4 | Related Procedures |
| 5 | Roles and Responsibilities of Agencies |
| | 5.1 Metropolitan Police |
| | 5.1 Legal Powers: Local Authorities and the Metropolitan Police |
| | 5.1 Local Authorities |
| | 5.1 Healthcare Professionals |
| 6 | Specific vulnerable groups |
| | a. Homeless 16/17 year olds |
| | b. Trafficking |
| | c. Grooming |
| | d. Care Leavers |
| | e. Out of Area Placements |
| 7 | Roles and responsibilities within MASH |
| 8 | Initial processes and actions when a child is reported missing |
| | a. Receipt of missing children notifications from the Police by MASH |
| | b. Missing Notifications via EDT (Emergency Duty Team) |
| | c. Initial screening and referral in MASH |
| | d. Daily Risk Management Meetings (DRMM) in MASH |
| 9 | Children Missing from Care |
| 10 | Children Missing from Home |
| 11 | Persistent or Lengthy Missing Episodes |
| 12 | Children Missing Education |
| 13 | Additional Practice Considerations |
| 14 | Administrative Mosaic and Reporting |
| 15 | Strategic Issues |
| 16 | Links with other Child Protection issues |

1 Introduction

This practice guidance is intended to support staff in Waltham Forest to implement the WFSCB Children Missing from Home, Education and Care Strategy.

Within Waltham Forest, services to children who go missing from home or care are provided by various agencies such as Children's Social Care, the Metropolitan Police, Early Help, Independent Return Interview Service, Education, Health, etc.

However, when a child goes missing there needs to be an effective, collaborative safeguarding response from all agencies involved. (Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2015).

Services for children missing education (CME) or children missing from education (CMfE) are undertaken by a range of professionals across Early Help and Education Services.

“Missing” needs to be considered as one aspect of the concept of **“Contextual safeguarding”**: this concept promotes the idea that young people's behaviours, levels of vulnerability and levels of resilience are all informed by the social/public, as well as private, contexts in which young people spend their time, therefore recognizing the complexity of the presenting issues.

Young people's engagement in extra- familial contexts can inform, and be informed by, what is happening in their homes. Therefore, when young people are exposed to violence or exploitation in their school, community or peer group this may fracture their family relationships and undermine the capacity of their parents/carers to keep them safe. Likewise, if young people are exposed to harm within their families such as domestic or physical abuse this can impact their behaviour in extra-familial settings. They may learn/adopt harmful social norms which inform their peer relationships. Or young people in these situations may perpetrate violence towards their parents or siblings, avoid their home altogether and spend time in street or community settings where they may experience criminality, violence and exploitation.

Additionally, the increasingly complex and sophisticated criminal networks in extra-familial settings may present a challenge to family members to engage in any support offered to them by professionals due to the fear of threats, intimidation or repercussions by the criminal networks or peers. This in turn may impact on the family dynamics and functioning, potentially causing further safeguarding concerns for other family members.

Given this contextual nature of safety and vulnerability during adolescence, systems and services designed to keep young people safe need to engage with the dynamics at play in extra-familial, as well as familial, settings and interventions need to be creative and aimed at breaking the cycles.

2 Principles

The following safeguarding principles need to be adopted 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 and reducing risk of going missing again is the main objective
- Child protection procedures will be initiated whenever there are concerns that a child, who is missing, may have suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm

Missing Children is a safeguarding issue and is likely to overlap with other child protection issues such as child sexual exploitation, trafficking, harmful practices, county lines, extremism or radicalisation, etc.

Professional judgement should be used in applying the threshold criteria and considering the right help for the child and their family based on the presenting needs/issues.

All notifications of children missing from home and care should be notified via the MASH Team and processed according to threshold criteria. Children Missing from Education will have input from the MASH team if safeguarding concerns are raised.

Where there is not an allocated worker in either CSC, the Disability Enablement Service (DES) or Early Help, an assessment will be considered as a response to children missing from home or education and a return interview offered/ completed for children who are found following a period of missing. A lead professional will also be identified to ensure that the child/the family have the appropriate services in place to respond to their needs and to monitor the risks.

3 Definitions

The Police have been using the following definitions of “missing” and “absent” in relation to children reported missing to the police; these are based on ongoing risk assessment (ACPO, Association of Chief Police Officers, 2010)

- **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
- **Away from placement without authorization:** the child’s whereabouts are known, therefore the child is not treated as missing or absent by the police.

4 Related Procedures

The London Child Protection Procedures Part A and Guidance in Part B (available online, <http://www.londoncp.co.uk/>) provide information to support professionals to

recognise, respond to and manage circumstances in which children, who have run away, or are missing, may be suffering, or likely to suffer significant harm.

Additional Practice Guidance is provided in Part B for

- Asylum Seeking Children
- Safeguarding Trafficked and Exploited Children
- Safeguarding Children Abused through Sexual Exploitation

Nationally, the following information relates to this issue

- The Missing Children and Adults Strategy (2011)
- Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation: Supplementary Guidance (2009)
- The Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Plan (2011)
- Statutory Guidance: Children who run away or go missing from home/ care (2014)
- Children Missing Education, Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities(2016)

5 Roles and Responsibilities of Agencies

5.1 Metropolitan Police

The Police Classification of a person as “missing” or absent” (see Section 4 for definitions) will be based on an ongoing risk assessment.

It is important to note that professionals or others reporting a child missing to the police, should not make the judgment themselves as to whether a child is missing or absent – this decision will be made by the police on the basis of the information provided.

The Police will carry out a debrief which is also known as a “Safe and Well Check” with a missing child who returns and will update the relevant MERLIN report.

Risk Assessment: The police will prioritise all incidents of missing children as medium or high risk. Where a child has been recorded as absent, the details will be recorded by the police who will also agree review times and any ongoing actions with the person reporting

- A *child assessed to be at high risk* requires the immediate deployment of police resources and should lead to the appointment of an Investigating Officer/ Senior Investigating Officer/ Police Search Advisor. There should be a media strategy and/ or close contact with outside agencies; family support should be put in place; the UK Missing Persons Bureau should be notified immediately, CEOP (Child Exploitation Online Protection Service) and local authority children’s services should also be notified.
- A *child assessed to be at medium risk* requires an active and measured response by police and other agencies involving proactive investigation and search in accordance with the circumstances to locate the missing child as soon as possible

5.2 Legal Powers: Local Authorities and the Metropolitan Police

- Section 46(1) Children Act 1989 to remove a child into police protection if they are at risk of significant harm (for up to 72 hours)

- Section 17 Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 to enter and search a premises in certain circumstances, notably, with regard to this guidance, for the purposes of saving life and limb or to arrest without warrant a person who has committed an indictable offence or certain other listed offences under the section.
- Section 24 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 provides police the power of summary arrest for any offence subject to certain provisions notably, for the purposes of this guidance, under S.24(5)(d) to protect a child or other vulnerable person from the person in question.

Local Authority

- Should it be necessary to take the child into police protection, the child must be moved as soon as possible into appropriate local authority accommodation. It is important that young people are not placed in accommodation that leaves them vulnerable to exploitation or trafficking.
- Section 50 of the Children Act 1989 The Local Authority may apply to the Court for a Recovery Order (only possible when the child is subject to an Interim or Full Care Order and it is clear that the child is in no immediate danger of significant harm)
- Section 44 of the Children Act 1989 to apply for an Emergency Protection Order, when a child was taken into Police Protection (before its expiry) or when threshold is met otherwise.

5.3 Local Authorities

Local authorities should name a senior children's service manager as responsible for monitoring policies and performance relating to children who go missing from home or care. The responsible manager should look beyond this guidance to understand the risks and issues facing children missing from home or care and to review best practice in dealing with the issue. In Waltham Forest, this role is assigned to Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting.

Local authorities must ensure that all incidents where children go missing are appropriately risk assessed, and should record all incidents of looked after children who are missing or away from placement without authorisation. (see Section 9 for further information).

Children, who are looked after should have information about and easy access to help lines and support services including emergency accommodation. Support should also be made available to families to help them understand why the child has run away and how they can support them on their return.

The local authority should consult with the police regarding what action should be taken to share information about a missing child who is looked after, subject to a child protection plan or a child in need. (see Section for further information). This should include an assessment of whether to release information to the media. The local authority should also notify other local authorities according to degree of concern. Consideration should also be given to whether the child or their family has links to other areas in the United Kingdom.

On receipt of a notification from another local authority, a flag should be added to the electronic record system for children's social care and consideration should be given to notifying health and other relevant partners.

Local authorities should collect data on children reported missing from home, care and education including repeat episodes of missing, unauthorised absences from care placements, and other relevant data and should regularly analyse this in order to map problems and patterns. This should include identifying patterns of sexual and other exploitation. (See Section 7 for further information).

5.4 Healthcare Professionals

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

Missing children access a number of services provided by a range of health providers, for example: Urgent Care Units; A&E Departments, Genito-Urinary Medicine Clinics (GaUM); Community Sexual Health Services; and Pharmacy Services.

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

All health providers should provide a comprehensive service for Looked after Children.

6 Specific vulnerable groups

Homeless 16/17 year olds

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.

Trafficking

Trafficked children are at high risk of going missing, with most going missing within one week of becoming looked after and many within 48 hours. Unaccompanied migrant or asylum seeking children, who go missing immediately after becoming looked after, should be treated as children who may be victims of trafficking. (See *LCPP Practice Guidance Part B, Chapter 10: Safeguarding Trafficked and Exploited Children*)

Children, who have been trafficked, may be exploited for sexual purposes and the link to sexual exploitation should be addressed in conjunction with *LCPP Practice Guidance Part B, Chapter 7: Safeguarding Children from Sexual Exploitation*.

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

- Relevant details about the child's background before they came to the UK;
- An understanding of the reasons why the child came to the UK; 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 *UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC)* 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.

'*Safeguarding Children Who May Have Been Trafficked: Practice Guidance (2011)*' contains practical guidance for agencies which are likely to encounter, or have referred to them, children and young people who may have been trafficked. Where it is suspected that a child has been trafficked, they should be referred by the local authority into the *UK's victim identification framework, the National Referral Mechanism (NRM)*

The *NSPCC Child Trafficking Advice Centre (CTAC)* provides specialist advice and information to professionals who have concerns that a child or young person may have been trafficked. CTAC can be contacted at free phone number: 0808 800 5000, Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm or email help@nspcc.org.uk.

Grooming

Grooming is when someone builds an emotional connection with a child to gain their trust for the purposes of sexual abuse or exploitation. Children and young people can be groomed online or in the real world, by a stranger or by someone they know - for example a family member, friend or professional. Groomers may be male or female. They could be any age. Many children and young people don't understand that they have been groomed, or that what has happened is abuse.

Children can be groomed for different purposes

- Child Sexual Exploitation; with *LCPP Practice Guidance Part B, Chapter 7: Safeguarding Children from Sexual Exploitation*
- Radicalisation; *LCPP Practice Guidance Part B, Chapter 6: Safeguarding Children Exposed to Extremist Ideology*
- Offending Behaviour; *LCPP Practice Guidance Part B, Chapter 12: Safeguarding Children affected by Gang Activity / Serious Youth Violence*

Care Leavers

Local authorities continue to have a range of responsibilities towards children leaving care until the young person's 21st and in some instances their 25th birthday. It is good practice to follow the guidance set out below whilst a young person remains 'leaving care'. (See The Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010).

Out of Area Placements

Waltham Forest Children placed out of borough

- When a child who is looked after by Waltham Forest is placed out of borough, the Social Worker must make sure that the child has access to the services they need
- Notification of the placement must be made to the host authority and other specified services.
- All children subject to a London pre incident risk assessment (i.e. history of missing previously) should be notified to the local police services.
- When a Waltham Forest Child placed out of borough runs away, the host local authority's Missing from Home and Care Protocol must be followed in addition to complying with other processes that are specified in the WF Practice Guidance and close communication with the police force in both areas will be necessary.

Looked After children from another area placed in Waltham Forest

- Children who are looked after by another Local Authority but are placed in Waltham Forest go missing, a police report should be sent to WF MASH; this will be recorded on the system via the Notification of Missing episode.
- These children will be recorded on Framework I and the episode and the Police Notification be sent to the relevant Local Authority for action via their Missing Policy
- This enables the Missing Hub to monitor and track any trends with Care Providers in the Local Authority and can help focus training at establishments where children going Missing seems to be prevalent.
- Information about frequently missing children, or those where there are apparent risks associated with being missing, is considered by the High Risk Missing Operational Board monthly. (see 15.) This is a multi-agency meeting with partners including Early Help, Police Missing Persons unit Education and schools. Where risks and concerns emerge a letter of concern will be sent to the responsible authority from the Board

7 Roles and Responsibilities within MASH

Process Map for Children who are reported Missing or Absent

For more information see Appendix 1 "Waltham Forest Missing Flow Chart".

MASH missing Co-ordinator, Early Help Co-ordinator (Children Missing) and Children Missing From Education Co-ordinator

The above roles make up the Children Missing Hub in the MASH, and act as a central point of contact for all missing children notifications and are responsible for disseminating the referrals in the following ways:

- Request for a return interview;
- Referral to social care/ early help
- Support to other areas of the service to ensure an appropriate response to Missing Children
- Checks for Children missing Education.
- Informing other Local Authorities regarding children missing from their area

The MASH Missing Co-ordinator will record, monitor and follow up on all missing children episodes on the system. They will be responsible for co-ordinating the

response for Missing children and identifying any areas that require closer monitoring or further research. This may include the **collection and analysis of the following data** together with a multi professional group demographics of all children who are missing, absent or away without authorization

- associates of the above
- the legal status of the children
- episodes, and length of episode by child
- numbers and themes from safe and well checks
- numbers and themes from return interviews
- cross match data with gangs matrix, CSE lists, home education and missing from education list, including information about children who go missing from part of the school day
- consideration should be given to analysing where the child is found as this information could help identify links between missing children and criminal enterprises like the current expansion of London gangs' drug sale operations outside of London (the "county line" issue)
- Analyse date by establishment and geographical area

The Early Help Co-ordinator will be responsible for providing training to schools to ensure they are aware of the responsibilities in terms of offering a return interview if required to children who have returned from a missing episode. If the child refuses a return interview by a professional known to them (but not involved in their day to day care) the Missing coordinator can arrange the offer of the return home interview. All efforts and attempts will be made to ensure a return interview is offered to the child and is conducted in a timely manner.

The Children Missing Education Co-ordinator (CMEC) will ensure that they are aware that all children missing education come to their attention for follow up. All children missing education, either CME or CMfE, will be recorded on Mosaic and monitored by the Education representative; if a safeguarding issue is raised then the MASH team will complete further checks and decide if threshold has been met. See Section 4.

Children's Social Care (CSC), Early Help and Education

Where a young person is open to a statutory team within CSC, or where they are not, but the threshold for CSC involvement is met, then CSC social workers will undertake the functions outlined in this document. (See Section 9 and 10 for further information)

Where the threshold for CSC is not met, the family will be offered support through Early Help services.

Children identified as missing education (CME or CMfE) need to BACME for checks to be completed. If these are cases without an allocated worker then consideration will be given to understanding that the children's needs are identified and understood through the Early Help Assessment, Plan and Review process. (See Section 12 for further information).

8 Initial processes and actions when a child is reported missing

8.1 Receipt of missing children notifications from the Police by MASH

The MASH missing coordinator receives daily (Monday-Friday) all reported missing children notifications from the police through a secure account which is checked at regular intervals during the day or via the single Request for Help and Support or Protection. The police also send found notifications which are married up to the missing notification on the individual child. Notifications following weekends and bank holidays will be picked up on the next working day. For any urgent or child protection issues arising from a missing episode the police would access the MASH or emergency duty team if out of hours.

8.2 Missing Notification via EDT

If a child is reported Missing outside of office hours to the Emergency Duty Social work Team then they will add a case note on Mosaic and alert this to the allocated Social Worker and Team Manager.

8.3 Initial Screening and Referral in MASH (see appendix 1 for flowchart)

The Practice Guidance is applied in respect of whether or not a return interview, multi-agency meeting, or a strategy discussion is required.

In the first instance, the MASH Business Support checks all notifications against Mosaic and the Education system via the CMEC to ascertain whether the young person is an open case to CSC, the DES, Early Help or Education services. Where they are, a missing step is created on Mosaic and the task and notification will be forwarded to the relevant Manager with the request for further work or multi-agency meeting, if appropriate.

Where a young person is not open to a service but there are concerns of a safeguarding nature, a Missing step is created on Mosaic and the MASH Team will decide whether or not the threshold for CSC intervention is met, including the consideration for the need of a Strategy Discussion. This will also determine which service will undertake the return interview, i.e. CSC, Early Help, Missing Coordinator/ MASH or other appropriate professional once the child has returned.

For other first time missing children, who are considered vulnerable by the MASH social worker, consideration will be given to the completion of an Early Help Assessment. For those children that do not meet the threshold, advice and guidance will be provided when the offer of a return home interview is made.

For all missing steps, including where the young person is not open to a service, a missing step is created on Mosaic. The Early Help Coordinator (Missing Children), in conjunction with involved professionals (i.e. Education) will ensure that a return interview is offered and consideration given to an Early Help Assessment unless there are concerns of a Safeguarding nature; in which case the above process within CSC would apply.

For Children actively being worked by Early Help 0-18 cases, the allocated worker will be informed of the Missing steps via a case note notification and will be contacted by the MASH team to help inform the assessment of risk.

For CSC allocated cases the request will go directly to the Team manager via the Mosaic step task system following the creation of a missing step. The team manager and allocated worker are then responsible for completing the step.

If the case is not open to any services, a missing step is created and processed in the usual way for all new cases coming through the single front door (MASH)

8.4 Daily Risk Management Meeting (DRMM) in MASH

The DRM meeting has been developed to enhance and promote good practice, improve joint working between the Police, Social Care and partner agencies and to ensure a robust multi - agency response where it is believed a child, young person or adult may be at risk of significant harm, particularly those who are at risk of CSE, Missing, Gangs, High risk DV and radicalisation. The DRMM will consider these young people and adults and a strategy meeting will be held where appropriate

The DRM meeting provides the framework to allow regular information sharing and action planning to safeguard high risk cases being received into Waltham Forest's front door.

The DRM meeting serves as a channel to ensure that action regarding high risk cases and overnight critical incidents is taking place and is co-ordinated.

The DRM meeting is not intended to replace or supersede the guidance set out in Waltham Forest LSCB, LSAB, Pan London child protection procedures and legislation in place to safeguard people or any other referral and assessment process currently in place in relation to safeguarding. No agency should delay action whilst waiting for a discussion at the next DRM meeting.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and as such any professional can use their professional judgement to make a referral into the DRMM.

See Appendix 2 for Terms of References DRMM; See Appendix 3 for Referral form to (DRMM.)

9 Children Missing from Care

It is important that for missing children who are looked after by the local authority, LAC guidance and processes are followed both in the prevention of children going missing (i.e. through good care planning and risk assessment) but also in response to any missing step. This also applies to children in care who are away from placement without authorization.

Prevention and Planning

Local Authorities have a duty 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 following considerations should be followed:

- The Care Plan – should include strategies to avoid unauthorised absences and/ or a child going missing. It should also include strategies to reduce the duration and risks associated if the child does have unauthorised absences/ goes missing

- The Placement Plan – should include strategies for preventing the child from taking unauthorised absences/ going missing
- A pre-incident risk assessment should be completed for all children for whom there is a concern that they may run away; 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 view 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

Where a child already has an established pattern of running away, the care plan should include a strategy to keep the child safe and minimising the likelihood of the child running away in the future. This should be discussed and agreed as far as possible with the child and with the child’s carers and should include detailed information about the responsibilities of all services, the child’s parents and other adults involved in the family network.

Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) should be informed about missing/ absent episodes and they should address these in statutory reviews; in section 4 of the “Notification of Missing Child or Young Person” (Notification Details) there is now a prompt to remind workers to inform the IRO via a step outcome.

On the ‘Outcomes’ page there is now a new outcome named ‘Notify IRO of Missing Child/YP’. This outcome will then send a simple notification into the IRO’s ‘Incoming Work’ folder which just requires the recipient to click on the ‘Acknowledge’ link. Once the outcome has been acknowledged the item will be removed from the folder (it will still show up under ‘Completed Work’). This means that the IRO will need to ensure that they take any appropriate actions after acknowledging receipt of the outcome

Actions when the whereabouts of a looked after child is not known

Whenever the whereabouts of a looked after child is not known, the foster care or manager on duty in the children’s home is responsible for carrying out preliminary checks to see if the child can be located which a good parent would do, too, i.e. contacting the child/ young person, school, friends, etc. if these initial checks do not succeed in locating the child or there are still concerns that, despite contact being made with the child they are at risk, the individuals and agencies listed below should be informed

It is clearly important that a deadline is set at the outset of these initial checks so that they don’t continue beyond a reasonable timeframe; what timeframe is reasonable should be based on an assessment of the risk relating to the individual child.

The individuals and agencies who should be contacted when a child is missing or they are away from placement without authorisation are:

- The local police
- The authority responsible for the child’s placement – if they have not already been notified prior to the police being informed

- The parents and any other person with parental responsibility, unless it is not reasonably practicable, or to do so would be inconsistent with the child's welfare
- The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)

The **Looked after Children Information Sharing Form** (Appendix 4) should be used when reporting the child missing to the police; as a minimum requirement, all reports should include the following information:

- Child's name, Date of birth, status, responsible authority
- Where and when they went missing
- Who, if anyone, they went missing with
- What was the child wearing plus any belongings such as bags, phone, etc.
- Description and recent photo
- Medical history, if relevant
- Time and location last seen
- Circumstances or events around going missing
- Details of family, friends, associates
- Updated risk assessment

A referral to the Daily Risk Management Meeting (DRMM) in MASH may be considered at this point (See 8.4 for further details).

Following initial discussions between the allocated children's Social Worker/ Team Manager and the police, they should agree an immediate strategy for locating the child and an action plan including details of all attempts necessary by all professionals involved to locate and ensure the safe return of the child.

Within 3 days, a **Missing from Care Meeting/ telephone discussion** (Appendix 5: Agenda for Missing from Care Meetings) between relevant parties should take place and should include at least the police, the child's social worker, the Social Worker's Manager and the foster carer/ care home provider. Additionally, any professionals involved with the young person need to be invited as well.

The **action plan and risk assessment** (Appendix 6: Risk Assessment Record and Management Plan) should be reviewed and updated jointly by the professionals present considering all available information.

Any publicity will be led by the police, the use of harbouring notices, etc. will be agreed at the missing from care meeting; recovery orders may be used where the child is looked after

During the investigation to find the missing/ run away child, regular liaison and communication should take place between the police, the allocated social work team, the host authority (if the child is placed outside of Waltham Forest area) and any other agency involved.

Actions when a child has been located: Safe and Well checks and Independent Return Interview

Police Debrief) Safe and Well Checks

- When the child has been located, care staff/ foster carers should promptly inform the child's social worker and Independent Reviewing Officer (where relevant) that the child has been located/ has returned and the police needs to be notified.
- Safe and Well Checks are carried out by police as soon as possible after the child has returned. Their purpose is to check for any indications that the child has suffered harm, where and with whom they have been, and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them.
- The Safe and Well Checks provides an opportunity for the police to develop and share information/ intelligence to prevent any risky behaviour and disrupt potential offenders.
- This information gathered by the police during the safe and well check should be shared with the Social Worker and MASH via the electronic notification to report that the child has been found.
- Where a child goes missing frequently, it may not be practicable for the police to see them every time they return. In these cases a reasonable decision should be taken in agreement between the police and the child's parent or carer with regard to the frequency of such checks bearing in mind the established link between frequent missing episodes and serious harm, such as gang involvement, forced marriage, maltreatment/ abuse at home, Sexual or other forms of exploitation, etc.

Return Interview (RI)

Return interviews will be offered to all children who have returned home from a missing step.

The Return Interview is an in-depth interview (Appendix 7: Template for Return Interview) and should be carried out by an independent professional, i.e. Social Worker, teacher, health professional or police officer, who is not involved in the day to day care of the child and who is trained to carry out these interviews and is able). The child should be seen on their own unless they specifically request to have someone with them. The child should be offered the option of speaking to an independent representative or advocate. The IRO, where relevant, should be informed.

The Return Interview should be carried out within 72 hours of the child's or young person's return. The timeliness of the return interview is a key factor in responding to missing children. If the child/ young person/ family refuses an interview then this will be fed back to the referrer (usually Social care) to determine if another agency can be supported to complete the interview.

In the first instance the child/ young person should be offered the return interview by a professional known to them but independent to their daily care, such as their Social Worker, teacher, health professional, etc.). The return interview can be offered through the MASH Missing Coordinator (contact the MASH Missing Coordinator for details).

Mosaic Process:

- Once a child has been identified as returned, the MASH missing Co-coordinator or allocated worker will log this on the system and the missing step will be closed. A new step for A Return Interview will be tasked to the professional the child/ young person wishes to have the Return Home Interview with; if this professional sits

outside CSC, the step will be tasked to the allocated Social Worker who will then ask the professional conducting the Return Home Interview for the report. .

- Once the professional of the young person's choice has completed their interview and this has been recorded on the system the step will be closed by the professional completing the interview and any issues of a safeguarding manner will need to be sent to the referring social worker or MASH team for review.

Repeat Running away/ frequent missing

Repeatedly going missing should not be viewed as a normal pattern of behaviour. If a child continuously runs away, actions following earlier incidents need reviewing and alternative strategies should be considered by the professional network through a joined approach. (See 11: Persistent or Lengthy Episodes)

10 Children Missing from Home

Actions when a child is missing

Every practitioner from any agency who becomes aware that a child is missing or has been missing from home/ care/ education should encourage the person with Parental Responsibility or carer to contact the police to report the child as missing and check that this has been done. The Practitioner should contact the police and report the child missing if the parent/ carer is unwilling to do so. The practitioner should then contact MASH and complete a Request for Help and Support or Protection Form or encourage the Practitioner to contact the police and a police MERLIN report will be sent to CSC.

Child Protection Procedures must be initiated in collaboration with Children's Service whenever there are concerns that a child who is missing may be suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm

Consideration for a referral to the Daily Risk Management Meeting (DRMM) in MASH should be given at this early stage (See 8.4 for further details).

Strategy Discussion/ Meeting

The threshold for convening a **missing strategy meeting** will be triggered by any of the following

- A child who is reported missing or absent on three occasions within a month
- A child who is considered to be at risk of significant harm
- A child has not been traced/ recovered within 5 days (case passed for assessment on day 3)
- A child who is considered vulnerable because of their young age (12 and under) or their history
- A child where there is additional vulnerability identified for the child, i.e. risk indicators that they are at risk of CSE, self-harm, in need of Early Help or CIN services, etc.

When the threshold (as outlined above) for a Strategy Meeting is met, the meeting should be arranged as soon as practicable and in any event within 48 hours and preferably within 24 hours of the initial referral or identification of concern, although the actual timing will depend upon the degree of perceived risk

The purpose of this discussion/ meeting is to establish the ongoing level of risk and coordinate efforts to locate the child or young person. It is imperative to consider all aspects of need and risk presented for the child including CSE and gang involvement and that all relevant involved professionals attend.

If the child is not considered to be at risk of significant harm but has additional needs, a **multi-agency meeting** should be held. This meeting should be held within 5 working days of the missing step that triggered the need for the meeting.

If the **child/ young person is subject to a Child Protection Plan** and is missing for over 48 hours, a Review Child Protection Conference should be convened and held within 15 working days.

Attendance at Missing Strategy Meeting/ Multy Agency Meetings: if the child is an open case to CSC, the meeting will be chaired by the relevant Team Manager responsible for the case, or in circumstances where the risk is high, or there is media interest, by the relevant Deputy Head of Service. If the case is not open to social care, the meeting will be chaired by the Team Manager of the Assessment Team on duty. The meeting will be attended by:

- Allocated Social Worker if an open case
- Early Help Worker, if relevant
- Police Missing Persons Officer
- Relevant workers/ agencies working with the child and family, including school, education and voluntary sector professionals
- Relevant Health Practitioners from a range of health providers, including school nurses, Community Sexual Health Clinics and CAMHS should be considered
- Police CSE Lead attached to MASH if CSE has been identified as a risk and it is determined appropriate for them to attend
- Parents/ carers where appropriate

Issues to consider at a Missing Strategy Meeting/ Multi Agency Meeting are (see Appendix 5: Agenda for missing from care meetings that equally apply to missing from home)

- Share information about the child and their family, what is known about missing incidents and any concerns and risks
- Identify what action has been taken by agencies so far
- Determine, what assessments, if any, have been commenced/ completed and if further assessment is required
- Level of harm and risk to be assessed
- Any risk of sexual exploitation
- Extend and number of episodes of the young person going missing/ running away
- Is the young person involved in any crime
- Is the young person victim of any crime
- Are there health issues to address (sexual health, physical, emotional)
- Is the child or young person being bullied, including cyber bullying
- Is the child experiencing domestic abuse at home or in a relationship
- Is the child associating with a person who is a **Person Posing a Risk to Children**
- Is the child at risk from trafficking, honour based violence, forced marriage, FGM
- Is the child at risk of radicalisation

- Are there any specific equalities issues to be considered for the child/ young person
- Does there need to be a plan to enable the child/ young person to reengage with education
- What are the push/ pull factors that need to be addressed
- How will any issues around disclosure of abuse be managed
- What can be put in place to avoid further episodes of the child/ young person going missing/ running away
- Determine if the child should be referred to Early Help or Children Social Care for an assessment (if not yet open to CSC)
- Determine if there are any specific services the child/ family should be signposted to
- In case of a Strategy Meeting, determine if a S47 Enquiry should be initiated

Risk Assessment and Risk Management Plan: The professionals attending the Missing Strategy Meeting should together assess the risk and agree on a clear support plan for the child with SMART actions. **Review arrangements** also need to be agreed at this meeting (See Appendix 6: Risk Assessment Record and Management Plan); these should be at least monthly if a child continues to be missing or has continuous missing episodes/ goes missing repeatedly.

Notification to Senior Management

Where the child/young person is either subject to a Child Protection Plan or looked after by the Local Authority, the Head of Service should be notified of the child/young person's absence at the latest by the time they have been missing for 24 hours with a subsequent update at 72 hours or earlier as determined by professional judgment. They will notify the Lead Member and Corporate Parenting Board within 7 days of the child going missing

The relevant Head of Service for CSC should also be made aware of any Child in Need (CIN) young person who remains missing after five days at the latest or earlier as determined by professional judgment.

For those children and young people, who are open to Early Help or other targeted services and are still missing after five days, the Group Managers in Early Help should be informed by the relevant team manager and risk reviewed to determine if the case requires escalation to CSC.

Where a child/young person has been missing for 28 days the Divisional Public Protection DCI (or representative) will meet with senior managers from relevant agencies, including the divisional director for children's social care.

Actions when a child is found: Safe and Well Checks and Independent Return

Interviews: please see Section 9 "Children Missing from Care" for further details; this will also apply to children previously missing from home who return from a missing episode

11 Persistent or Lengthy Missing Episode

Where a case is open to a particular service within CSC, or Early Help and the young person continues to go missing then there should be regular reviews of current plan of intervention. (See Section 9 and 10 of this guidance) The frequency will need to be in accordance with level of risk and should be at least monthly. The name of the frequently missing child should be included in the list of those considered at High Risk Missing Operational Board. (See Section 15)

12 Children Missing Education

Definitions:

- **Missing Education:** A child whose whereabouts are known but does not have a school place_or is receiving suitable education otherwise than at school
- **Missing From Education:** A child who does have or has been allocated a school placement or is not receiving suitable education otherwise than school and their whereabouts are unknown

Recognition and Response

Enquiries into the circumstances surrounding a child who is missing from school can be effectively supported by schools adopting an admissions procedure which requires a parent/carer to provide documentary evidence of their own and the child's identity and status in the UK, and the address that they are residing at. These checks should not become delaying factors in the admissions process.

If a member of school/educational establishment/college staff becomes aware that a child may have run away or gone missing, they should try to establish with the parents/ carers, what has happened. If this is not possible, or the child is missing, the designated safeguarding teacher/advisor should, together with the class teacher, assess the child's vulnerability.

From the first day that a child does not attend school and there is no explanation or authorisation of the absence, the following steps should be taken:

- A trained staff member will make contact with the parents/carers (person with parental responsibility for the child) to seek reassurance that the child is safe at home;
- The outcome of the contact should be assessed and if there are any concerns a consultation with the school/establishment/colleges designated safeguarding adviser should take place to consider the child's vulnerability.
- Appendix 8: Safeguarding Children Missing Education Process for Schools should be used to assess risk and vulnerability and inform about the necessary immediate actions

Notifications and Actions

If at the point of the assessment of risk to a child missing from school (day 1) there are concerns about the child's safety then a referral should be made to the police and Children's Social Care immediately.

Step one:

- Contact the local police station (24 hour response);
- Any suspicion/evidence of crime must be clearly stated;
- The circumstances and all available information regarding the child and family will be required.

Step two:

- The missing person report will be risk assessed and the local police response team will carry out immediate actions;
- The investigation will be progressed by the police response team, in conjunction with either the local Missing Persons Unit and/or the CID.

Step three:

- The missing person report will generate a notification to the police;
- The police will work with, and refer information to, LA children's social care;
- LA children's social care, who must be contacted as soon as possible in these circumstances, will also liaise with the Child Abuse Investigation Team (CAIT) in order to identify, and act upon, any suspicion of child abuse or child related crime.

Step four:

The school / educational establishment / college should work in collaboration with Children's social care and the police and a safeguarding education representative should participate in any strategy discussions, s47 enquiries and Child Protection Conferences which may arise. (See Appendix 9: Information Sharing between Schools & LA Children's Social Care).

Reasonable enquiry:

If the judgement reached on day one is that there is no reason to believe that the child is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm, then the school may delay making a referral. The process of 'reasonable enquiry' has not been identified in regulations, however this includes school staff checking with all members of staff whom the child may have had contact with, and with the pupil's friends and their parents, siblings and known relatives at this school and others.

School staff should also make telephone calls to any numbers held on record or identified, sending a letter to the last known address, home visits by some school based staff and consultation with local authority staff.

Days two to twenty-eight

If the above response was unsuccessful, the school should contact their local authority CME Officer. The local authority should make enquiries by visiting the child's home and asking for information from the family's neighbours and their local community – as appropriate.

The LA CME team should also check databases within the local authority, use agreed protocols to check local databases, e.g. LA housing, health and the police; check with agencies known to be involved with the family, with the local authority the child moved from originally, and with any local authority to which the child may have moved.

The child's circumstances and vulnerability should be reviewed and reassessed regularly jointly by the school's nominated safeguarding advisor and the CME Officer in consultation with children's social care and the police as appropriate.

Child missing from school for more than four weeks

A child may not be removed from the school roll before the end of four weeks. After 4 weeks the child's Common Transfer file should be uploaded to the Department for Education secure site for the transfer of pupil information when a pupil moves between schools. The CME Officer in the Local Authority must also be informed.

MASH and Mosaic process

Relevant staff in the Education Welfare Service (the Children Missing Education Behaviour and Attendance Team, CMEBA Team) need to be informed of all children Missing education via the appropriate form (See Appendix 10)

When a CME/ CMfE case comes to the team attention, the CMEBA team will complete a search on Mosaic to see if the child is already known to Children's Social Care (if not, they will create a record for the child), and then create a Notification of Missing Child step

BACME team will pick up the notification and complete safeguarding checks. If there are safeguarding concerns, notification to the MASH team who will decide if this needs to be progressed via the Safeguarding Service and progressed to a child and family assessment, and the CMEBA will be informed of the action taken.

The CMEBA team hold the step open in Mosaic until one of the three agreed exit points occurs (child is located, a school place secured, or is put onto the national database), at which point they will enter the child's return date (where appropriate), and complete the step.

Step relating to Electively Home Educated (EHE) children will be closed and the relevant worker assigned as the allocated worker to the case so a list can be obtained of all EHE children and enable for relevant reviews to take place

Where there is an allocated worker within either CSC or Early Help, the Children Missing Education Coordinator (CMEC) will contact the allocated worker and the relevant senior education officer to ensure that the work is co-ordinated around the needs of the child and family.

Where there is no allocated worker, the CMEC will seek a discussion with the relevant Senior Education Officer to ensure that the work is allocated within the appropriate team and an Early Help Assessment is initiated.

13 Additional Practice Considerations

Information sharing

The young person should be made aware by the relevant worker that information will be shared with other professionals as appropriate. This should also have been made clear by police officers dealing with the missing person's report.

Sharing of Intelligence

It is important that any relevant information or intelligence gained from the return interview is shared with the police to enable any disruption tactics to be utilised or other safeguarding measures. This is the responsibility of the worker for the child where a return interview has taken place.

The police will be notified of any further involvement beyond the completion of the Return Interview by allocated workers and the police will enter this information onto their system. The worker will advise the police when they close the case.

It is also important that any relevant information or intelligence gained from the police safe and well check is shared with the allocated worker and team by the worker undertaking the return interview.

All intelligence and information relating to children going missing will be fed into the High risk missing children operational group in order to target strategic action and/or resources. (See 15)

Interview Refused

When a young person or parent has refused to participate in a Return Interview then as much information as possible should be gathered during the refusal discussion and recorded appropriately. This may involve sharing intelligence with the police. If the young person initially refused but the discussion evolved into a meaningful dialogue, allowing the return interview to be completed, then this should be done in the usual manner and explained to the young person. For cases where the MASH Missing Coordinator has arranged the Independent Return Interview a follow up letter and leaflet on Missing Children should be sent to the young person and their parent(s).

Where there is a refusal by a young person to engage with the Return Interview and there remain concern (from available intelligence or information about the degree of vulnerability of the young person) then the relevant professional may need to make a professional judgement about the need to refer to CSC.

14 Administrative Mosaic and Reporting

Mosaic Recording

Police notifications will be uploaded onto the missing episode step on Mosaic by the MASH Business Support Team. Where no record exists then a client record will be created.

For each notification a Mosaic step will be created by MASH and the Business Support Officer will task the step to the relevant Team Manager as appropriate to complete.

Mosaic Case note “Missing Child Update”

A case note on Mosaic case notes is available for use “Missing Child Update”. Social workers or their managers need to use this case note to record a summary of the latest position for the missing child and the actions taken to locate them. This will enable an up to date summary to be collated and enable the “Wednesday Missing list” to be accurate and show a clear progress of action taken so far. The “Wednesday List” is a list of all children who are currently missing is sent to the Divisional Director on Wednesdays.

Missing Dashboard

A Missing Dashboard is produced on a Monthly basis; this collates the number of Missing children and enables the Missing Hub to track cases and trends that are identified in the Dashboard.

15 Strategic Issues

Accountability and Governance

The strategic lead for Missing Children remains with the Divisional Director, Children and Families who co-chairs the WFSCB Children Missing and CSE Strategic Group with the Police Superintendent.

The “missing high risk operational group” (Appendix 11) reports into the Strategic Group and is co-chaired by the Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting and the Detective Sergeant from the Metropolitan Police Missing Person’s Unit. This meeting takes place monthly and will have a clear role in providing scrutiny, challenge and reassurance of a “grip” on responses to children missing. It will also be the forum to analyse the performance data from across the partnership to ensure there is co-ordination of interventions and identifying patterns and trends. See appendix 12 for terms of reference.

16 Links with other CP issues

Research and enquiries demonstrate that the reasons for children going missing are often complex and can be linked to a number of child protection issues. It is therefore important that missing episodes are considered within the context of child protection and where appropriate immediate action should be taken if a child is considered at risk of significant harm.

Additionally, the concept of “contextual safeguarding”, as mentioned at the beginning of this guidance, also needs to be considered by to keep young people safe. They need to engage with the dynamics at play in extra-familial, as well as familial, settings and interventions need to be creative and aimed at breaking the cycles.