

JOINT PROTOCOL

between Northumbria Police
and Local Authority regarding
children and young people who
go missing from home and care

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VERA BAIRD^{QC}
POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER



**NORTHUMBRIA
POLICE**

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1.0 Introduction

This protocol refers to situations where children or young people run away or go missing from home or when children or young people who are looked after by the local authority go missing from residential or foster care. It defines the roles and responsibilities of police, Children's Social Care, other agencies and staff concerned with safeguarding children and young people.¹

This document should be read with reference to statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care (Department for Education, 2014). The guidance cannot anticipate every situation. However, the most effective risk assessment and means of safeguarding children and young people comes from joint working, information sharing, planning and action between agencies in partnership with parents and carers.

Police, Children's Social Care staff and foster carers should use their professional judgment to take any action they feel necessary to protect the safety of a child or young person based on their understanding of the needs, risk assessment and risk management plan for each individual.

All parties involved in the protocol should be clear about the definition of a 'missing' person, and discourage the casual reporting of 'unauthorised absences' as 'missing' persons.

Children or young people who go missing may place themselves and others at risk. As well as short term risks there are also long term implications, as adults with serious problems have often run away as children.

The reasons for a child or young person's absences are often varied and complex, and cannot be viewed in isolation from their home circumstances and their experiences of care.

Every 'missing' episode should attract appropriate attention from the professionals involved with the missing child or young person, and they must collaborate to ensure a consistent and coherent response is given to the individual on his/her return.

2.0 Definitions

- **Child:** anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people' throughout this guidance.
- **Looked after child:** a child who is looked after by a local authority by reason of a care order, or being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.
- **Responsible local authority:** the local authority that is responsible for a looked after child's care and care planning.
- **Host local authority:** the local authority in which a looked after child is placed when placed out of the responsible local authority's area. ▪
- **Young runaway:** a child who has run away from their home or care placement, or feels they have been forced or lured to leave.

¹ The specific responsibilities of partner organisations are set out in the statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing (Department of Education, 2014)

- **Absent and absence:** refers to a looked after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (e.g. school).
- **Unauthorised absent and unauthorised absence:** refers to a looked after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (e.g., school) and the criteria at 2.1 applies.
- **Missing:** a young runaway whose whereabouts is unknown and is reported as missing to the police by their family or carers and the criteria at 2.2 applies.
- **Children missing from education:** children of compulsory school age who are not on a school role, not placed in alternative provision by a local authority, and who are not receiving a suitable education at home.

2.1 Unauthorised Absence

- **Unauthorised absent and unauthorised absence:** refers to a looked after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (e.g., school) and:
 - they have deliberately or carelessly absented themselves and
 - their location is known and/or they have made contact and
 - they are likely to return of their own accord or they are staying with others known to them and
 - they are likely to be easily located and
 - there are no apparent risks to their immediate safety and they are unlikely to suffer or cause significant harm whilst absent without authorisation.

Clearly some children absent themselves for a short period and then return and during their absence their whereabouts is known. Sometimes children stay out longer than agreed, either on purpose or accidentally, and may be testing boundaries. This kind of boundary testing is within the range of normal teenage behaviour and not necessarily considered a risk.

Whether the absence is careless or deliberate, if there is no apparent risk for their immediate safety it may fall within the 'unauthorised absence' category. 'Unauthorised absences' must be carefully monitored however as the child may subsequently go missing.

For example, in some circumstances young people staying with a friend without prior agreement may not be 'at risk' and it would be inappropriate to flag this event as a missing from care incident or report it to the police.

In situations where a child is absent the first response will be that providers of their care along with any relevant staff from their responsible authority, which could include the child's social worker (or school if relevant), should act like a responsible parent and take all practical steps to establish the child's location and wellbeing and to ensure that they return to their placement/school without delay.

If a decision is made that the circumstances of the absence fits the criteria for classification as 'unauthorised absence' then the episode must be kept under continuous review and if he/she has not returned within a reasonable period of time, (generally after 8 hours) serious consideration must be given to reporting them as 'missing'.

The responsibility for managing this type of absence lies with the staff of the care home or the foster carer.

An episode of 'unauthorised absence' should not routinely be reported to the Police.

2.2 'Missing'

Revised government guidance states that a child should only be reported to the police when they are actually 'missing', and not 'absent without authorisation'. If a child's whereabouts are known then they cannot be 'missing'.

- **Missing:** a young runaway whose whereabouts is unknown and is reported as missing to the police by their family or carers and any of the criteria below applies:
 - the reason for their absence is unknown and/or
 - there is cause for concern for the child because of their vulnerability and/or
 - there is a potential to danger to the public and/or
 - there are suspicious circumstances and/or
 - the absence is out of character or unusual behaviour and/or
 - there are indications that the child has already come to harm and/or
 - there are indications that the episode is not a deliberate or careless act and/or
 - there are indications that the child or young person:
 - is not expected to return within reasonable time limits and/or
 - is not staying at homes of others known to them and/or
 - will not be easily located

A child or young person who fits the above criteria must be reported to the police as missing. Carers (including Local Authority Staff) must take all reasonable and practicable steps as set out in **5.1** before consideration of reporting to Police.

If as a result of the Corporate Parenting actions at **5.1** the child or young person is located but will not return, refer to **2.1** 'unauthorised absence' guidance.

It is the responsibility of the local authority to arrange a looked after child's return if the whereabouts become known or suspected. However, there will be some circumstances when the police will agree to requests from the care setting to assist in the interests of a safe and speedy return; **however the police should not be used as a 'taxi service'**.

2.3 Children Missing from Education

Local authorities must have robust measures in place to identify quickly when a child is not receiving a suitable education. When a child is missing from education it is possible that this is due to other behaviour, associations or activity that puts them at risk of harm. The local authority should investigate all cases of children missing from education.

A child or young person in this category should be reported to the Police or Children's Social Care where appropriate.

2.4 Absconder

An absconder is a child who is absent without the permission of the responsible person and who is either, a Ward of Court, on a Care Order or Emergency Protection Order or on remand, (to Local Authority accommodation)

A child or young person in this category must be reported to the police as soon as possible and treated as a wanted person.

3.0 Risk Assessment

In assessing the significance of any child's absent or missing episode a risk assessment must be conducted.

Where a child is absent or missing, relevant staff from the local authority and police must consider the above definitions, and take into consideration guidance already agreed and incorporated into the child's care plan as well as the factors listed below when assessing risk:

- The legal status of the person in care i.e. subject of an Emergency Protection Order; a remand or curfew conditions etc.
- Previous behaviour patterns e.g. a history of absence and quick return.
- The child's state of mind/perceived risk i.e. is the child likely to self-harm or commit suicide and does the child see risks in a balanced way?
- Group behaviour at the time of the absence.
- Whether the young person is perceived as running to someone or running from a situation.
- Any physical or learning disabilities the child may have which increase the risk to them.
- Is the child vulnerable due to age or infirmity or any other factor?
- Is the child suspected to be the victim of a significant crime in progress, e.g. abduction?
- Are there family/relationship problems or recent history of family conflict, including domestic abuse?
- Does the missing person have any physical illness, disability or mental health problems?
- Are they in the company of a person who may cause them harm?
- Do they require essential medication, which is not likely to be available?
- Is there any evidence of ongoing bullying or harassment e.g. racial, sexual, homophobic or local community concerns and/or cultural issues?
- Do they pose a threat of harm to others?
- Is there drug or alcohol dependency?
- Any other particular circumstances at the time of the incident influencing the risk assessment

As a minimum requirement the risk assessment should be reviewed every eight hours and the level of prevailing risk agreed by carers and other professionals responsible for that young person's health safety and well-being.

3.1 Categories of Risk

High Risk

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

Medium Risk

In this case the risk posed is likely to place the child in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others.

Low risk

A Child or Young Person under 18 years of age would never be classed as Low Risk

IMPORTANT

In all categories of risk the assessment of risk is considered a dynamic process and should be managed, challenged and re-assessed at every point during a child's absence.

4.0 Police Responsibilities and Powers

Police will investigate all cases falling within the 'missing' definition and will respond in accordance with the Northumbria Police Missing Person Policy and Procedure, keeping a record on the appropriate missing person report / computer system. All incidents of 'missing children' will be prioritised as 'medium' or 'high' risk.

The table below sets out the definition of each category and what each category means in terms of operational response:

DEFINITION OF RISK

HIGH RISK

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

or

The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the missing person presents a danger to the public

MEDIUM RISK

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

LOW RISK

There is no apparent threat of danger to the missing person or the public.

OPERATIONAL RESPONSE

This category will attract silver command, the Duty Supt or CIM, (Critical Incident Manager), and requires the immediate deployment of police resources. The Duty Superintendent must be involved in the examination of initial enquiry lines and approval of appropriate staffing levels and allocation of ownership. Such cases will always have an allocated named investigating officer. There should be a press/media strategy and/or close contact with outside agencies.

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

In addition to recording the information on the PNC, the police will advise the person reporting the disappearance that following basic enquiries and unless circumstances change, further active enquiries will not be carried out by the police. Low risk missing persons, however must be kept under review as risk can increase with the passage of time.

Children's Social Care will work collaboratively with police during any enquiry to locate a missing child. When police locate a child reported as missing, they should return the child to the parent/carer/placement. In some instances it may be inappropriate to return a child to their home or placement and in all such cases the police should contact the Children's Social Care Emergency Duty Team (EDT) for an evaluation of their safety.

Even after reporting a child missing, parents and carers should recognise that they are responsible for children in their care at all times and this responsibility remains when they have reported a child missing to the police.

In all cases, police will inform Children's Social Care of all children who are reported missing within one working day initially via the submission of an email from the Police Central Referral Unit to the Social Worker for Missing Children/Single Point of Contact, followed by a Child Concern Notification (CCN).

If the child is missing from local authority care a CCN will not be submitted as the local authority will be aware already.

Any immediate safeguarding issues will be addressed by Police and Children's Social Care. All children who meet the threshold for intervention following a missing episode will be eligible of an Initial Assessment (IA) as a child in need under Section 17 of the Children Act.

The IA process should be used to intervene and offer support to children and families to avoid further instances of running away. Where a child is considered to have suffered, or is considered likely to suffer significant harm as outlined within the Children Act 1989 a Section 47 inquiry will be undertaken. Children's Social Care will be responsible for informing police of all intervention outcomes where a CCN has been submitted.

4.1 Police Powers

Police powers are limited and difficulties can arise when missing children are found but do not want to return to their home or placement. In some instances it may be inappropriate to return a child to their home or placement. In all such cases police will contact their local Children's Social Care office during office hours, and the EDT outside of those hours.

Under the Children Act 1989, where there is reasonable cause to believe that a child could suffer significant harm the police can take that child into Police Protection, and remove them to suitable accommodation which could include the home from which the child originally went missing.

The police are not given the power to use force to take a child into Police Protection but reasonable force may be used to prevent a child suffering significant harm. Where Police Protection is used, the police will inform the Local Authority via the local police area office and/or Central Referral Unit during office hours, or contact EDT out of hours.

Any child who is unlawfully at large from a secure unit or penal establishment may be arrested and returned by police.

If the child is on remand without conditions, the police will return the child or young person to the designated placement. If the child is on remand with conditions (e.g. curfew) they will be detained and brought before a court if any conditions are breached.

If a child has been remanded to local authority accommodation they may be arrested under Section 32, Children and Young Person Act 1969.

An individual's behaviour and location may justify arrest under Section 136, Mental Health Act 1983, or Breach of the Peace under Common Law.

5.0 Responsibilities of the Local Authority when Children in Care are Reported Missing

5.1 Initial action to be taken by carers, when a child is missing

Carers (including Local Authority staff) must take all reasonable and practical steps to:

- establish the whereabouts and well-being of the child (corporate parenting tasks)
- determine the level of risk of harm to the child
- determine the nature and reasons for absenteeism
- ascertain the likely intentions of the child before contacting the police

Actions should include:

- search their own premises and immediate locality
- make enquiries with other children/associates in the home/school/workplace
- make enquiries with other professionals
- make enquiries with relatives unless it is considered not in the child or young person's best interests
- consider recent events
- telephone / text the child and young person to establish their safety and well-being

All issues/decisions/actions should be fully documented.

5.2 Informing the Police

If a child is reported as 'missing' (fitting the criteria at 2.2) from a children's home or foster home, the carer or the manager on duty (responsible person) in the children's home must ensure that the following individuals and agencies are informed within the timescales set out in local protocols:

- the parents or those who have parental responsibility
- the Social Worker or Team Manager
- the Emergency Duty Team, if out of hours
- the police.

If the episode is considered to fall within the definition of 'unauthorised absence' the carer should seek the views of other professionals responsible for that young person's health, safety and well-being and continually review the status of the child's absence.

It remains entirely a matter of professional judgement; taking into account all known factors and the views of other professionals, as to when an 'unauthorised absence', (which will not have been reported to police) has gone on too long and the child should be reported to the police as a 'missing'.

Any case of an absent child, which causes significant concern, or the circumstances give rise to a suspicion that the child or young person is at risk of significant harm, should be brought to the attention of the relevant manager and the police as soon as possible.

5.3 Reporting Procedure

Once a decision has been made to report a child as 'missing' the carer should contact police using the non-emergency telephone number 101.

The carer, in consultation with other professionals responsible for the young person's health, safety and well-being, must be explicit when reporting an episode to the police so that the level of perceived risk to the child is clear from the outset. This will determine the level of police response.

The carer will be given a unique reference number, which should be retained and used in any future contact with the police.

5.4 Information to be Made Available

When reporting a child as 'missing' to the police the following minimum information is required:

1. Description of the child or young person including their clothing
2. Details of where the child or young person was last seen and with whom
3. Recent photograph
4. Relevant addresses
5. Known associates and addresses frequented
6. Personal details of the child or young person
7. Previous history of absenteeism and circumstances of where found
8. Circumstances under which the child or young person is absent
9. Any factors which increase the risk to the child or young person
10. Name of the staff member completing the risk assessment and / or the search of the home and locality.

5.5 Monthly Meeting between the Local Authority SPOC for Missing Children and the Police

The Local Authority SPOC (Single Point of Contact) for children reported missing and the PVP Designated Missing Person's Officer will meet monthly to review all children reported missing from home and care during the previous month.

The role of Local Authority SPOC is to review data regarding missing children on a monthly basis with the PVP Designated Officer, and where necessary agree follow up safeguarding action, or a risk management strategy where this is not already taking place. This is in addition to, and does not replace, the day to day safeguarding practices of the Area Children and Family Teams. Any recommendations regarding the risk assessment and risk management of a child or young person will be referred to the relevant Area Team, who will then complete a vulnerable young person risk assessment using the Vulnerability Check List.

Where there is concern a child may be at risk of sexual exploitation the Child Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework should be used to determine risk level, and any appropriate safeguarding actions. Assessment should give consideration to the possibility of a concealed pregnancy, and/or where a pregnancy is disclosed the welfare/needs of the young person as well as the unborn should be assessed. Where a child is assessed as medium, high or very high they will be referred to the Young Person's Multi Agency Risk Management meeting, where the risk management plan will be reviewed and consideration given to placing the child's name on the risk management log.

A flow chart regarding the SPOC Missing Person's Meeting Process is attached as Appendix B.

5.6 Missing During External Activity

If a child becomes absent outside of their area, the carer in charge of the external activity will:

- Arrange a search in the area where the child became absent
- Notify the local police for that area
- Notify the child's parent or guardian
- Notify the child's social worker or Team Manager
- Notify a senior manager of the home
- Notify the Youth Offending Team if the child is on remand
- Notify the Emergency Duty Team, if out of hours
- Ongoing communication regarding the missing young person will be maintained between Children's Social Care and the police local to where the absence occurred

5.7 Longer Absences

Whenever a child is missing the absence will be reviewed after 48hrs by CAVA PVP Detective Inspector. For a longer period of time and in any case where the child has been missing for 72 hours a senior manager (including the Assistant Director) in the relevant Children's Social Care will be informed. A responsible person in the Children's Social Care will make the decision to convene a meeting for the purpose of developing a strategy to locate and return that child to safety.

This decision will be based on the ongoing risk assessment and depend upon the child's individual circumstances.

The meeting will involve:

- The Local Authority SPOC for missing children
- The Team Manager from the Authority responsible for the child's welfare
- The Detective Inspector of the PVP (or their nominee)
- Other relevant staff representatives from the Authority where the child is living
- The registered manager of the children's home or fostering service
- Parents or carers

These senior officers will review the actions taken up to this point and satisfy themselves that all possible steps are being taken to locate and return the child or young person.

If after 7 days the child or young person is still missing the CAVA D/C/I will review the case.

If the child or young person has been missing for **28 days**, a senior police manager and the appropriate Children's Social Care manager for the area should jointly review the case and take any actions they consider necessary to locate and return the child.

5.8 Recording

Throughout the period that the child is classed as 'missing' carers and allocated social workers must keep a full record of all actions taken and messages received or given. Police will keep a record on the appropriate missing person report/computer system.

The records should clearly include details of where the child was found, any reasons given for going missing and any actions taken in light of those reasons. This information is important for any future missing from care episodes.

5.9 Planning for Return Following Longer Term Absence (over 7 days)

If a child's absence is categorised as 'missing', the appropriate Children's Social Care Manager in consultation with social workers, carers and police (as appropriate), should prepare a contingency plan for when the child is found. Considerations should include:

- Arranging for an independent person to talk to the child about the reasons that they went missing
- Arrangements to escort the child and support them on their return
- Collaboration should take place between the police and Children's Social Care to identify appropriate arrangements to return the child when they are recovered outside the Authority/Force area
- Whether the police wish to interview the child before he/she is returned to placement

5.10 Planning Before the Event

When a child becomes looked after, parents or carers should consider whether he/she has ever runaway, or staying in unknown and/or possibly unsafe places, as part of the core assessment of their needs.

A prevention or early intervention service working with those identified as being at risk of going missing or who have already gone missing should be in place to prevent the continuation and escalation of behaviour.

Prevention and early intervention services should be reviewed, and effectiveness evaluated every year, gaps identified and plans made to fill any gaps.

Where children do run away from their care placement, their needs should be reassessed and their care plan updated to incorporate a risk management strategy to minimise missing from care incidents.

The assessment should consider:

- Risk factors
- Likelihood of the child going missing
- Previous episodes
- Trigger incidents
- Risk of harm / vulnerability of the child
- Risk of harm posed by the child to others
- The child's view of placement
- The child's view of going missing and the associated risks
- Views of parents / relatives / carers of the child's needs
- External influences
- Risks associated with addresses / locations frequented by the child
- The likelihood of the child being harboured
- Recent photograph
- Description of the child

6.0 The Return

When a child is located, police, parents, social workers and any other person informed of the child or young person's absence should be notified without delay.

In relation to 'looked after children', the general principle is that the Children's Social Care for the area from where the child is missing will be responsible for recovering the child and returning that

individual to their home or placement, unless the child is located by police. However please see page 10, Planning for the return and appendix A.

In some instances it may be inappropriate to return a child to their home or placement and in all such cases police will contact their local Children's Social Care office during office hours and EDT outside those hours for an evaluation of their safety.

If there are specific and identified issues of safety or public order associated with returning that child then a coordinated approach to recover the child should be agreed with the police.

6.1 When a Child is Found or Returns - 'Safe and Well Check'

The police will interview all children as soon as practicable when they return from a 'missing' episode and share relevant information with Children's Social Care. The purpose of the interview is to check for any indication the child has been harmed, identify where they have been and with whom, and to offer an opportunity for them to disclose any offending by or against them. The 'Safe and Well Check' will also offer an opportunity to gather intelligence about the missing episode and it serves to confirm the identity of the child and that they have returned.

If the child makes an allegation of crime that occurred whilst they were missing or that contributed to him/her running away, the police will record this allegation and take appropriate action. In all cases an assessment of whether a child or young person might run away again should be based on information about:

- Their individual circumstances
- Their motivation for running away
- Their potential destinations and associates
- Their recent pattern of absences
- The circumstances in which they were found or returned
- Their individual characteristics and risk factors such as whether they have a learning difficulty, mental health issues, and/or other vulnerabilities

6.2 When a Child or Young Person is Found or Returns – Independent Return Interview

Statutory guidance (Department for Education, 2014) describes a Return Interview as an in-depth interview best carried out by an independent person who is trained to undertake the task, and in a position to follow up on any actions that emerge. Where a child is found a Return Interview will be requested by the SPOC/Social Worker for Missing Children and undertaken by a member of an independent third partner agency e.g. SCARPA, Barnardos.

Local Authorities should have a cross boundary agreement to ensure Independent Return Interviews for children placed outside of their Local Authority area are completed in a timely manner.

The Return Interview will offer the child an opportunity to talk about the reasons they went missing, and the person undertaking the interview will act as an independent representative or advocate.

Actions to follow from the Return Interview should include:

- Seeking to identify and respond to any harm the child has suffered, either whilst or prior to the 'missing' episode; which may not have been disclosed to police during the 'Safe and Well Check'
- Seeking to identify the 'push and pull' factors, and address the reasons why a child went missing

- Seek to help the child feel 'safe' and understand options available to help prevent repeat missing incidences
- Seek to provide information to assist in 'staying safe' if a child indicates they will go missing again and/or remain at risk
- For both those in and not in care, where appropriate, a recommendation for the provision of alternative accommodation should be considered

Where a Return Interview is required contact with a child should be made within 72 hours of being located, and should occur preferably on a 1-2-1 basis, in a neutral place where the child feels safe. It is especially important a Return Interview takes place where a child has:

- Been missing for over 24 hours
- Been missing on two or more occasion
- Is frequently absent without authorisation
- Engaged(or believed to have engaged) in criminal activities during their absence
- Been hurt or harmed whilst they have been missing (or this is believed to be the case)
- Known mental health issues
- Known risk of sexual exploitation or contact with persons posing risk to children

Information gathered as part of the Return Interview should be shared with Children's Social Care, police and other professionals working with the child.

Where any allegation of physical or sexual abuse is made or becomes evident, local child protection procedures must be implemented.

If there is evidence that a child has been a victim or perpetrator of crime, consideration must be given to securing evidence by police, including forensic examination (with appropriate consent). It is essential to recognise that the welfare of the child is paramount and careful consideration should be given to the potential effects of the procedures on the child.

Where children are in local authority care the social worker and Line Manager should decide in consultation with residential staff and the child, whether they should convene a statutory review of the child's care plan.

Where a child refuses to engage in a Return Interview, parents or carers should be offered an opportunity to provide any relevant information, and encouraged to contact police if future missing episodes occur. Through missing periods parents should be supported and kept informed of any developments by Children's Social Care, and/or police.

7.0 Children who Repeatedly Run Away and Go Missing

Repeat episodes of a child going missing may indicate a risk of sexual exploitation, and/or an unsettled living arrangement. Therefore a child who repeatedly goes missing should not be considered to be demonstrating a consistent/normal pattern of behavior.

If a child repeatedly goes missing or causes specific concerns due to risk factors when missing, a **multi-agency meeting** should be held to develop a strategy to prevent future missing events and reduce the risk of harm to the child should they go missing again.

The strategy meeting should be informed by an assessment of risk using the Child Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework. Where a child runs away to a different area and/or a pattern is identified involving a child running to another local authority the SPOC for the adjoining local authority should be alerted, and information sharing and arrangements to support the safeguarding strategy for the host local authority should be agreed.

The purpose of the strategy meeting is to:

- Agree and record a pre-risk assessment
- Agree a reporting strategy
- Recommend the minimum enquiries to be undertaken by carers, Children's Social Care and the police
- Agree an appropriate return strategy
- Consider appropriate interventions to allow a child opportunity to talk about their reasons for running away, and link them to services to address the issues affecting them

An action plan to ensure the long-term safety of children and to help bring about behavior change should be put in place, and regularly reviewed for its effectiveness.

Research has shown there is no developing pattern in which the risks to a child escalate the more often that they run away. Short absences may present the same risk as longer ones and should be viewed with equal seriousness and urgency. The assessment of the risk that a child might run way again should be based on information about their:

- Individual circumstances, including family circumstances
- Motivation for running
- Possible destination
- Recent pattern of absences (if any)

It is not the number of previous absences but the particular information about what happened when the child was away from home that indicates the level of risk that they might face should they go missing again.

Consideration should be given to carrying out a new assessment every time a child runs away. Repeat runaways should be viewed with as much concern as children who run away for the first time. The persistence of this behaviour would suggest at least that the action following from earlier assessments should be reviewed and alternative options considered.

8.0 Harboring

Vulnerable children who abscond or go missing risk placing themselves at additional risk of harm, and in accordance with the Missing Children Protocols, the police are usually called upon to assist with retrieving the child, which involves their service and a great deal of time and resources, often with no positive outcome for the child.

Certain individuals allow children to stay at their homes without informing the parent or carer of the child. They either directly or indirectly encourage them to go missing and to stay away from their parents or carers. This can lead to an increase in the number of individuals who are reported as missing or unauthorised absence.

It is frequently the case that parents, foster carers or social workers know where the child is staying but feel powerless to prevent the person in question from harbouring the child, because there is no proof of a crime being committed.

If the harbourer has no malicious intent, officers should seek the co-operation of the harbourer wherever possible. Officers should use their discretion to decide whether advice or a formal warning will be more effective in changing the behaviour of the harbourer.

Consideration should be given where appropriate, to identify, warn and where necessary prosecute these individuals for harbouring or abduction in order to disrupt this activity and to ensure the wellbeing of the child.

9.0 Safeguarding and Child Protection

On each occasion that a child is reported missing from home or Local Authority care:

- Police will submit a child concern notification to Children's Social Care in accordance with Northumbria Police procedure if the missing person is under 18 years old and is not in care. If the child is in care a CCN should also be submitted if there are additional safeguarding concerns.
- A full child in need assessment should be considered by Children's Social Care so that their broader needs can be identified and addressed.
- Children's Social Care will provide early intervention and support where necessary to understand and address reasons for running away.
- Where there is any child protection concern, the police PVP Unit should be involved and local procedures followed.
- At the point of **return** a police representative will visit the child. Where possible the child should be seen alone. The officer will provide contact details to the child to allow future contact if the child wishes.
- Police information will be supplemented by information from other statutory partners and where appropriate the voluntary sector. Information from return interviews will be shared with Police and Children's Service

10.0 Information Sharing and Data Collection

Information will be shared on a regular basis between the police and Children's Social Care to enable them to identify patterns where a child has:

- Gone missing on 2 or more occasions
- Missing for more than 24 hours
- Has been involved as a victim or perpetrator in criminal behaviour whilst missing
- Known mental health issues
- Known risk of sexual exploitation
- Known risk of contact with persons posing risk to children
- Incidents that have generated assessments of needs via Common Assessment Framework, S47 (Child Protection enquiry), or S17 (Child in Need enquiry) of the Children Act 1989

Aggregate data about the profile of running away in the area will be collated between Police, Children's Social Care and other partner agencies and shared on a frequency to be negotiated locally. This will allow the LSCB to identify:

- Incidences of running away
- Individuals who have run away
- Individuals who have run away on more than 2 occasions, and for more than 24 hours
- Incidents that have generated a case conference or professionals meeting
- Children's homes that have particularly high levels of missing report in relation to other homes in the area
- Areas where missing young people are frequently located
- The proportion of young people who are hurt or harmed whilst they are away
- The proportion of young people who have committed an offence whilst they are away

Information will be broken down by:

- Child's age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Missing from home
- Missing from care
- Missing from education
- Whether the child is an out of area placement
- Child's legal status

The data will be regularly reviewed and analysed by the LSCB and will inform a proactive response to running and patterns of running in the local area.

11.0 Finding Young People Who Are Not Reported Missing To Police

When children are located in circumstances where identified risk factors are evident, but have not been reported missing to the police by their families or carers, further investigation may be warranted. It may be necessary to consider police protection and enquire into whether there are any continuing child protection concerns, or whether the child and their family or carers should be offered family support services. Information will be shared via a child concern notification to Children's Social Care in such circumstances.

11.1 Children Found Whose Origins Cannot Be Established

Where a child is found who has not been reported missing, and whose origins cannot be established, there is a need to be alert to the possibility they may have been trafficked. Children are trafficked across national borders for a range of reasons including sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, as drug mules, for benefit fraud and other criminal activity, for illegal inter-country adoptions and child labour etc.

There is also increased evidence that children, both of UK origin and foreign citizenship, are being trafficked internally across regional boundaries within the UK. It is important to understand that trafficked children may not necessarily show obvious signs of distress or abuse. Subsequently, identifying trafficked children remains difficult. Therefore, where professionals suspect a child has been trafficked they need to be alert to a range of indicators including:

- Possession of money/goods not accounted, and/or possession of a mobile phone but without money
- Receipt of unexplained/unidentified phone calls whilst placed in care/temporary accommodation
- A degree of self-assurance, confidence and maturity not usually seen in a child of such age
- Malnutrition, signs of physical and sexual abuse including bruising and bleeding, and/or a sexually transmitted infection and/or an unwanted/unexplained pregnancy
- Identified as not enrolled in school, registered with a GP or known to other professionals
- Having a prepared story, an excessive fear of deportation and/or verbal references to being cared for by adults who are not their parents, and/or little known to them

Additional indicators that a child may have been internally trafficked within the UK include:

- Persistent missing episodes, and returning to place of residence late without explanation, looking unkempt, or well cared for despite having no known base
- Accounts of social activity without known source of funding, and possession of money and gifts such as clothes, mobile phones
- Truancy, or disengagement from education

- Association with adults, adults being identified as loitering outside a child's usual place of residency, and the entering or leaving of vehicles driven by unknown adults
- Missing and being found in areas where the child or young person has no known links
- Inappropriate use of the internet and the forming of on-line relationships with adults
- Low self-esteem, self-harming behaviour, drug and alcohol use, overdose and eating disorder and other mental health issues
- Promiscuity and reports from reliable sources suggesting the likelihood of involvement in sexual exploitation

It is also important to be aware a child may not be aware they have been trafficked. Meanwhile, others may actively seek to participate in hiding the fact they have been trafficked.

Where agencies or individuals are concerned a child may have been trafficked police and Children's Social Care should be notified immediately. On being made aware there are concerns a child or young person may have been trafficked, Children's Social Care must notify the UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC), and work with immigration staff in conducting an assessment. The assessment of need and care plan is critical and should be undertaken at the earliest opportunity and establish:

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

Where a child is identified as an unaccompanied asylum seeker, it is important to recognise they may have been trafficked, and remain at high risk of going missing from care if they become looked after.

12.0 Informing the Media

The police have responsibility for advising the media regarding children who are missing in order to assist in locating that person or warning the public if the child poses a significant threat.

Decisions to publicise will always be made in consultation with the Children's Social Care who in turn will consult with parents and/or carers prior to any media coverage.

13.0 Supporting Agencies

Missing children cannot be managed effectively by the police service alone. There are a number of statutory and voluntary organisations that play a role in the prevention and management of all missing children:

- National Crime Agency Missing Persons Bureau (NCAMPB)
- Notification to NCAMPB must be made in the following circumstances:
 - all missing persons outstanding after 14 days
 - all foreign nationals missing in the UK or British nationals missing abroad
 - all unidentified bodies or body parts to be notified to NPIA within 48 hours

13.1 Missing People (formerly National Missing Persons Helpline)

Missing people (formerly the National Missing Persons Helpline) is a charity dedicated to helping missing people, their families and those who care for them. Missing People receive information from Police and other public, private and voluntary organisations, and from individuals. National

Missing Person Helpline (NMPH) and Police will share information in accordance with the ACPO/NMPH National Data Exchange Protocol of April 2007.

Police and families can contact the 24 hour free phone confidential helpline on 0500 700700.

The **views** of the carers must be sought before sharing information in high and medium risk cases. The **consent** of the carer must be obtained before sharing information in low risk cases

13.2 UK Missing Kids Website

The UK Missing Kids Website, <http://uk.missingkids.com> helps the police to find missing and abducted children. The website enables the police to transmit photographs and information about a missing child to other forces around the UK and abroad.

To improve the likelihood of locating a missing child, police officers may submit cases for entry onto the website, where all of the following criteria are met:

- The child was under 18 years when he or she went missing.
- There are descriptive details and photographs of the child, sufficient to enable identification by a visitor of the website.
- The SIO believes there will be no risk to the child through placement on the website or associated media campaigns
- The parent or guardian or the child agrees to the child being featured, **OR** the SIO believes that it is in the child's best interests to be featured on the site against the parent or guardian's wishes.
- **EITHER** the child has just been reported missing and is at extremely high risk **OR** the child has been missing for over 48 hours and may be at a lower risk.

13.3 Child Rescue Alert

Child Rescue Alert is a system designed to alert the public, as quickly as possible, to abduction or other high risk child disappearance. The scheme relies on coordinated action with the media who will broadcast the alert via radio and T.V. The criteria for issuing an alert have to be strict or there is a risk that the public and media will become de-sensitised to them.

The scheme is intended to be activated by police when particular criteria are met:

The child is believed to be under 18 years old;

There is a perception that the child is in imminent danger of serious harm or death;

There is sufficient information available to enable the public to assist police in locating the child.

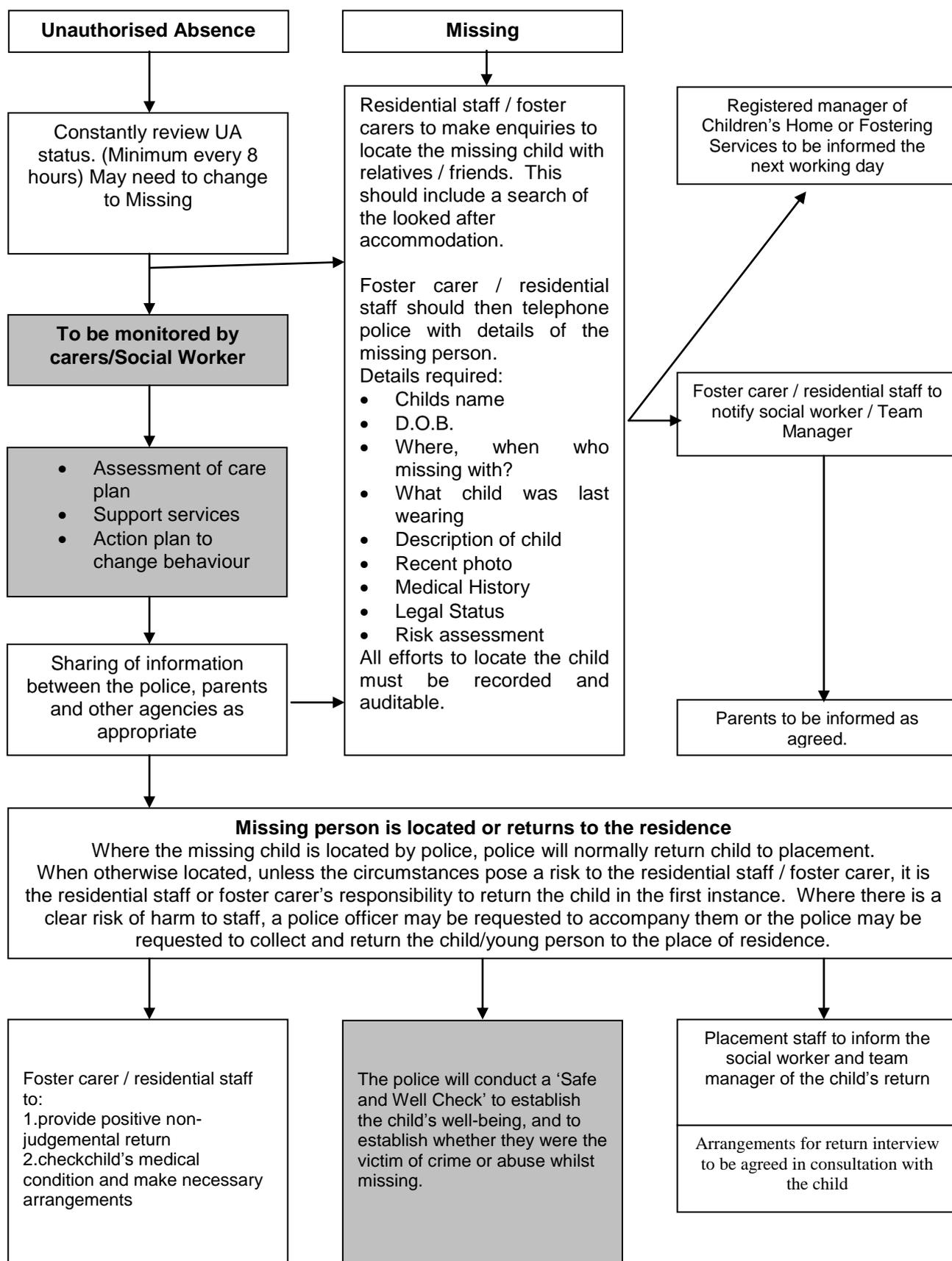
It should only be used in **HIGH** risk cases and with the authority of the on call SIO (Detective Superintendent).

The alert will normally be enforced for a maximum of **four hours** but this could be extended by **up to two hours** if authorised by the on call SIO. Alerts should be cancelled at the conclusion of their use.

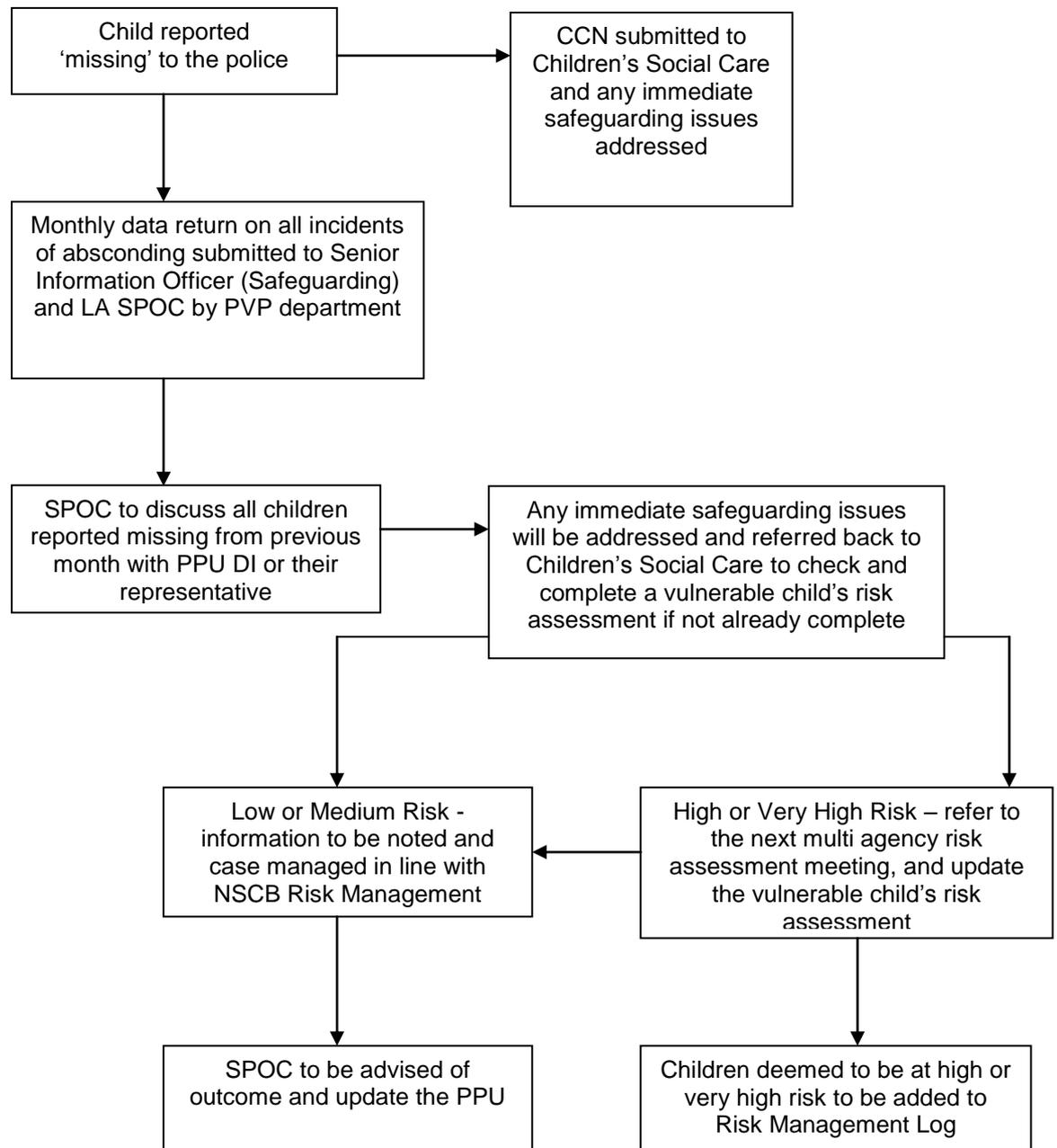
13 Reviews

The protocol will be initially reviewed via a bi-annual meeting of the lead officers from the Children's Social Care Directorate, the Safeguarding Children Board and Northumbria Police, who should seek wider feedback from operational colleagues.

Children and Young People Missing from Care



Local Authority Single Point of Contact Children Missing from Home and Care



Local Authority Definitions of Risk:

- **Low Risk:** No current indication of risk but the child's history indicates possible risk from identified behaviour
- **Medium Risk:** History and current behaviour indicates the presence of risk but action has already been identified to moderate risk
- **High Risk:** Circumstances indicate that the behaviour may result in a risk of serious harm without intervention from one agency or more
- **Very High Risk:** The child will commit the behaviour as soon as they are able and the risk of significant harm is considered imminent

Approval and Implementation

Document

Title	Missing Children and Young People Protocol		
Version number	2	Previous	2009
Date	12.01.15	Approved	15.01.15

Implementation plan

NSCB member organisations, through their Policy and Procedure Committee

Representative or safeguarding lead are responsible for ensuring that all relevant staff are made aware of the revised procedure and how and where to access it.

Approval

Approving body and date	NSCB Policy and Procedures Committee
Implementation date	12.01.15
Review date	December 2017
Circulation, email & website	30.01.15
Date signed off and by whom	Chair, NSCB Policy and Procedures Committee 12.01.15