CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO RUN AWAY OR GO MISSING FROM HOME OR CARE

PAN CHESHIRE JOINT PROTOCOL

2016 - 2017
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This protocol is important for the safeguarding of children and families across Cheshire, or those using services in the area. It is intended that this protocol will assist in developing robust responses to running away, which mirror the good practice already established across Cheshire. It should be used to engage partner agencies in developing preventative services for children and young people who are at risk of running away.

1.2 This protocol has been developed to ensure a consistent approach across all agencies and in response to recent government guidance. It also introduces the new Police definitions of ‘missing’ and ‘absent’ which will apply across Cheshire with effect from 1st April 2015.

1.3 This protocol relates to all children and young people in Cheshire who run away and go missing or absent from home or care. This includes children and young people looked after by another Local Authority and placed in a home, care or residential school within Cheshire. Additionally, the protocol applies in parts to children and young people looked after by Cheshire and placed in home, care or residential school outside of Cheshire.

1.4 It has been written jointly by Halton Borough Council, Cheshire East Council, Cheshire West and Chester Council and Warrington Borough Council and Cheshire Constabulary. The relevant Local Safeguarding Children Board will be responsible for ensuring an annual review of the effectiveness of all aspects of the protocol.
1.5 The most effective assessment and support comes through good information sharing, joint assessments of need, joint planning, and professional trust within the interagency network and joint action in partnership with families. **Halton, Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester and Warrington Safeguarding Children Boards** expects all agencies working with children or young people who are missing from home or care to implement this protocol and ensure that all relevant staff are aware of it and how to use it. It should be used in all new contacts with children and young people.

1.6 If you believe that a child is at immediate risk, this should be reported without delay to the Police service; for emergencies use 999 as well as making contact with Children’s Services:

- Halton 0151 907 8305 Out of hours Emergency Duty Team 0345 050 0148
- Cheshire East 0300 1235010
- Cheshire West and Chester 0300 1238123
- Warrington 01925 443400

1.7 **Background**

1.7.1 Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is a key duty on local authorities. Over 3,000 missing person reports are made every year in Cheshire. Approximately over 75% of investigations undertaken annually in Cheshire involve people under the age of 18 years.

1.7.2 Over 300 children in Cheshire go missing on at least three occasions a year. Many of these children are children in care; these include children’s care homes operated by Local Authorities as well as by private care providers. It is also important to note that the majority of looked after children do not experience missing episodes. Moreover, most children in residential care do not go missing.

1.8 **Why children go missing**

1.8.1 The Children’s Society through its research has identified the following risk factors that can precede a missing incident:

- Arguments and conflicts
- Conflict within a placement
- Poor family relationships
• Physical and emotional abuse
• Boundaries and control
• Step parent issues

1.8.2 The immediate risks associated with going missing include:
• No means of support or legitimate income – leading to high risk activities
• Involvement in criminal activities
• Victim of abuse
• Victim of crime, for example through sexual assault and exploitation
• Alcohol/substance misuse
• Deterioration of physical and mental health
• Missing out on schooling and education
• Increased vulnerability

1.8.3 Longer-term risks include:
• Long-term drug dependency / alcohol dependency
• Crime
• Homelessness.
• Disengagement from education
• Child sexual exploitation
• Poor physical and/or mental health

1.8.4 Academic research together with local analysis from partners within the Cheshire area show that children who run away are often very vulnerable in the ways described above.

1.8.5 Over a third (36%) of young people who have run away have first done so before the age of 13. Around one in nine (11%) of young people who have run away said that they had been hurt or harmed while away from home or care. (Still Running 3, The Children’s Society 2011)

1.8.6 It is vital that the missing episode itself is not seen as a discrete incident but as a symptom of other ongoing issues. It is important to deal with the missing episode, locate the missing person and ensure they are returned safe
and well. However it should not stop there; as ongoing work to

- identify the causes of missing incidents and preventing them reoccurring
  is as vital. Together with flagging up via a multi-agency approach, the
  dangers these individuals may be facing and the preventative / early
  help work that may keep the individual safe should they run away
  or go missing / absent again.

1.8.7 Children with mental or emotional health needs, learning and physical
disabilities are particularly vulnerable when missing or absent. They may
have communication difficulties and fewer opportunities to disclose reasons
for running away. They are also far more at risk of sexual or other exploitation.
All agencies should be alert to the particular needs of disabled children,
making sure they know how to raise concerns and receive whatever assistance
and support they require. If any child or young person within this category
goes missing or absent they should immediately and automatically be
considered as being at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). For further
information on CSE see the Pan Cheshire CSE Strategy and Protocol via the
LSCB websites.

1.8.8 It is essential that everyone is working together for children and young people
and ensure that:

- All appropriate agencies and individuals are notified if children and
  young people are missing or absent and / or return;

- A clear plan of effective inter-agency action is taken to trace or return
  children and young people who run away or go missing;
• Appropriate and effective actions are taken when children and young people return or are located. This includes provision of a return interview and on-going support when required;

• The Police are appropriately notified of children and young people who go missing or absent;

• Information is gathered to support the reporting requirements of the statutory guidance which includes the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), Council Members and the DoE, and also to inform local practice;

• Children and young people are positively encouraged to influence the outcome of any professional intervention;

• All partners regularly update their knowledge of the LSCB safeguarding procedures;

• Raising awareness of children who are missing or absent with all professionals and others who work with children, young people, families and the general public;

• Protect and prevent vulnerable children from going missing or absent and contribute to reducing the number of people going missing or absent;

• Provide effective and early intervention and prevention strategies to help reduce the potential of repeat cases;

• Be aware of the name of the lead LSCB person in their own organisations;

• Ensure that all new employees receive safeguarding training that explains the potential vulnerability of all categories of missing or absent children, and the procedures to follow.
2. DEFINITIONS

2.1 The following definitions apply to this protocol and relate to children who run away or go missing from home or care. These definitions come from the Department of Education (January 2014) statutory guidance on children who run away who run away or go missing from home or care.

- **Child**: A child or young person under the age of eighteen. Care leavers cover young people aged 16 – 24 years.

- **Care leaver**: an eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989.

- **Young runaway**: A child or young person under the age of 18 who has run away from their home or placement, or feels they have been forced or lured to leave.

- **Missing child/Young person**: A young runaway reported as missing to the police by his family or carers.

- **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 authority that is responsible for the young person’s care and care planning.

- **Host local authority**: The authority in which the young person is placed when placed out of the responsible authority’s area.

- **Missing from care**: a looked after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (e.g. school) and their whereabouts is not known. This should be reported to the police as missing and a record of this should be made.

- **Absconder**: An absconder is a child or young person who is unlawfully at large: In a small number of cases, young people become looked after children because they are remanded to local authority accommodation by a Youth Court, having been charged with a criminal offence. This is known as a Remanded to Local Authority Accommodation (RLAA). The child may be placed in secure accommodation, but may also be placed in a non-secure children’s home or foster placement. A child who goes missing when RLAA is unlawfully at large, and in legal terms has escaped custody.

- **Accommodated**: A child is accommodated if the Local Authority looks after her/him with the voluntary agreement of his/her parents or with the child if s/he is over 16 years old.
2.2 Missing and Absent Categories

2.2.1 In line with the National Police guidance, with effect from 1st April 2015, Cheshire Police have adopted a risk based approach to managing incidents where children or young people go missing. In order that resources are targeted at locating the most vulnerable, the police will categorise incidents in the following way, under set definitions:

- **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’.

2.2.2 The child or young person will be categorised as ‘absent’ if they are not at a place where they are supposed to be and there is no apparent risk. Absent cases should still be reported and will not be ignored by the Police. They will not be actively looking for the child or young person, but they will continue to monitor and review the case and, if there is a change to the circumstances that increases the level of risk then they may be escalated to ‘missing’. These definitions apply to all children and young people, whether missing or absent from home or looked after children missing from their placement / foster home or missing from residential placements.

2.3 Looked after children away from their placement without authorisation

2.3.1 The previous term for this was ‘unauthorised absence’. This is when young people are absent for a short period of time i.e. less than overnight, and after a careful and thorough risk assessment, the absence does not raise concern for their immediate safety or that of the public.

2.3.2 The police classification of a person as ‘missing’ or ‘absent’ will be based on an on-going risk assessment. Note that ‘absent’ within this definition would NOT include those defined as ‘away from placement without authorisation’ a young person whose whereabouts are known would not be treated as either ‘missing’ or ‘absent’ under the police definitions or by this protocol.
3. LEGISLATION

3.1 The legal parameters within which missing person enquiries are conducted can be found in common law, international law and the provisions of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR). Some of the provisions of the ECHR have been given legal effect within the United Kingdom by virtue of the Human Rights Act 1998.

3.2 Data Protection legislation places certain conditions on the ‘processing’ of information classed as personal data. Data held for policing purposes should only be disclosed for such purposes. Adherence to this agreement will therefore ensure compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Data Protection legislation does not prevent the Police and Local Authority working together to ensure the safe return of a missing child. Both organisations are registered for the purpose of protecting people and therefore for disclosing information for that purpose.

3.3 This protocol is based on and should be read in conjunction with

- The National Minimum Standards in Residential and Fostering Agencies (2011)
- Local Authority Missing From Education procedures
- Statutory guidance on children who runaway and go missing from home or care (2014).
- The Missing Children and Adults strategy (2011)
- Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation (2009)
- The Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan (2011); and
- The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations volumes on care planning and review
- OFSTED report ‘Missing Children’ (2013)
- Real Voices Child Sexual Exploitation in Greater Manchester (Anne Coffey MP 2014)
4. SCOPE

4.1 The protocol is designed for:

- All children living in the boundaries of the Local Authority.
- Children looked after by the Local Authority placed within children’s homes or foster homes (either Local Authority or independent) within the Local Authority boundaries.
- Children looked after by the Local Authority who are living with parents or relatives and who are subject to a care order.
- Looked after Children that are placed out of Local Authority boundary. It is the social workers responsibility to ensure return interviews are completed.

4.2 When a child is placed out of their local authority area, the responsible authority must make sure that the child has access to the services they need. This should include full registration with a GP near to where they live. Notification of the placement must be made to the host authority and other specified services. Any information around trigger or safety plans should be shared across local authorities and with the police so that all areas can act appropriately.

4.3 Other Local Authorities placing children within ‘the host Local Authority’ boundary will be required to comply with this protocol. It is possible that the child will return to the area of the responsible authority so it is essential that liaison between the police and professionals in both authorities is well managed and co-ordinated.

4.4 Within this context, “Children Looked After” refers to children accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, children subject to Care Orders including Interim Care Orders, Section 31 and 38 Children Act 1989, and children who are otherwise provided with accommodation by Section 21 Children Act 1989. These include children on remand and children subject to a supervision order with a residence requirement.
5. **PRINCIPLES**

5.1 This protocol should be read as guidance only and cannot anticipate every situation. Anyone working with children in a professional capacity should use their judgment to take whatever action is deemed necessary to protect and safeguard the child, based on an assessment of risk for each individual.

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

5.3 When a child does go missing our joint aim is to prevent that child suffering harm and to recover the child to safety as soon as possible. We do this by partnership working, information sharing, and problem solving and performance management.

5.4 Interventions are important in attempting to address repeat missing and absent episodes. Interventions for looked after children must be informed by and reflected in the placement information record and in the care plan. Interventions must also be informed by effective return interviews. Children’s views and concerns will be taken seriously and each local authority area has independent advocacy services that can be accessed by young people where required.

5.5 Interventions may be focused on the individual child, the child’s home, or by targeting ‘pull’ factors in the community.

5.6 Even with strong systems and services that minimise the likelihood of young people running away, some young people will still feel that they have to run. If there is concern that the child may be at risk if returned home, the child should be referred to children’s services’ social care to assess their needs and make appropriate arrangements for their accommodation.

5.7 Across Cheshire there is a helpline supported by the Missing People Charity and is open 24 hours a day 365 days per year 0808 168 9698. It is staffed by experienced Missing from Home Case Workers and fully trained volunteers. This helpline is open to young people, parents and carers there is also a variety of support for families across universal and specialist services.

5.8 The Local Authority, Residential and Foster Carers will record all incidents
of missing, absent or away from placement without authorisation, they will also report a child missing or absent to the police according to this protocol. Cheshire Constabulary will receive and record incidents of children missing or absent from their home or care. Local authorities must ensure that incidents are appropriately risk assessed, and record all incidents for looked after children. See appendix 1 for further details on these procedures.

5.9 The police will prioritise all incidents of missing children as medium or high risk. A risk assessment is undertaken for each missing person on every separate occasion they are reported as missing. Due consideration will be given to their age, vulnerability, capacity or learning difficulties of the young person and risks of sexual exploitation. Where a child is recorded as being absent, the details will be recorded by the police, who will also agree review times and any on-going actions with person reporting.
6. PROCEDURES FOR A CHILD MISSING FROM HOME

6.1 Responsibility of parents / carers

6.1.1 Children who go missing from their home often place themselves at risk. The reasons for their absence are often varied and complex. Every ‘missing’ episode should be responded to effectively with professionals from all agencies and organisations involved with the child working together to ensure the child’s safe return.

6.1.2 All children who have gone ‘missing’ must be reported to the police.

6.1.3 Parents and those with parental responsibility are normally expected to undertake the following basic measures to try to locate the child, if considered safe to do so, prior to reporting the child as ‘missing’.

- Search bedroom/ accommodation/ outbuildings/ vehicles
- Contact known friends and relatives where child may be
- Visit locations that the child is known to frequent, if possible.

6.1.4 However, if there is any cause to believe that the child may have been harmed or is at risk of being harmed then the police must be informed immediately.

6.1.5 Any person who has care of a child but does not have parental responsibility
should take all reasonable steps to locate the child and ascertain their safety. In these circumstances it is expected that the Police will be informed without delay when a child goes missing.

6.1.6 Children under the age of 16 years old are not legally considered as being able to live independently. For children over the age of 16 years old, consideration should be given to their legal status, physical and emotional needs and vulnerability when making a judgment as to whether they can live independently.

6.1.7 Anyone who has care of a child without parental knowledge or agreement should also do what is reasonable to safeguard and promote the child’s welfare. In these circumstances, they should inform the Police, Children’s Services and the parents of the child’s whereabouts and safety.

6.2 All agencies

6.2.1 If it comes to the attention of any agency that a child is missing, they must advise the parent/carer of their need to report this matter to the Police.

6.2.2 They also need to advise the parent of the agency's duty to ensure that the matter is reported to the Police and if necessary follow this up by contacting the Police to verify that the child has been reported missing.

6.2.3 All staff should be aware of the need to identify children missing from education and how to notify the Local Authority where they know or suspect that a child is missing from education. Contact information and notification forms for Children Missing from Education can be found on each LSCB website.

6.2.4 The government has placed a duty on Local Authorities to make arrangements to establish (so far as it is possible to do so) the identities of children in their area who are of compulsory school age and not receiving a suitable education. These children are referred to as Children Missing Education.

6.2.5 Children are identified as Missing from Education where they are of compulsory school age and are:

- Not on a school roll
- Identified as having been out of any educational provision for a substantial period of time

6.2.6 Schools should work with parents and carers to ensure any concerns around missing are reported to the police, as highlighted above in 6.2.2.
6.3 Role of the Police

6.3.1 Upon receiving a report of a child being missing from home, the Police will carry out enquiries aimed at locating the child as soon as possible.

6.3.2 It is important that in undertaking their investigative role the police has the full support of other agencies and other organisations and adopts an effective multi-agency approach in their efforts to trace the missing child.

6.3.3 The police will carry out a risk assessment for each individual on every separate occasion they are reported missing. This risk assessment will form the basis for the subsequent investigation into the child’s disappearance.

6.3.4 Children who have gone missing may come to the attention of the Police in a variety of circumstances. Where the Police locate a child who they believe may be missing, although not officially reported as missing, then, based on the child’s account of the circumstances, an assessment will be made and any necessary further enquiries undertaken. These will normally include enquiries at the child’s home address.

6.3.5 In the event that a ‘missing’ child has not been reported by parents/carers and enquiries identify risk factors at the home address then relevant safeguarding procedures will be implemented.

6.3.6 The Police will notify the relevant Local Authority’s Children’s Services department of all missing children. This should normally be done as soon as possible but in any case within 24 hours of the report. This will be done by the Vulnerable Person Assessment (VPA) route.

6.4 Review of continued missing episode

6.4.1 Throughout the missing episode, the Police are responsible for on-going enquiries, risk assessment and proportionate actions.

6.4.2 In the event of a continuing missing episode good communication and close cooperation is essential to ensure that any significant concerns are identified and appropriate safeguarding action is taken.

6.4.3 When a child has been missing for a period of 48 hours the Police will update the Local Authority of any significant developments. Contact will be made with the Local Authority at least every five days thereafter or earlier, if deemed appropriate. In some cases it may be appropriate to undertake a case review meeting, which should be arranged and led by the police with representatives of the relevant agencies / organisations who have been involved with the missing child.
6.5 Return of the child

6.5.1 Where a missing child is found then they should be returned to their parents / carer or other person with parental responsibility.

6.5.2 Where a child is returned or has returned ‘home’ of their own accord it is the responsibility of the parent or carer to contact the Police and confirm that the missing child has returned.

6.5.3 It is the responsibility of the parents or carers to arrange any necessary transportation for the child to return to their home. In exceptional circumstances, in the interests of the safe and speedy return of the child, the Police may agree to requests from parents or carers to assist.

6.5.4 In all cases, once the child has been located, the Police will need to ensure that the child is ‘safe and well’ and to check for any indications that the child has suffered harm; where and with whom they have been; and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by, or against, them. This is NOT a ‘return interview’ (see paragraph 9.1 below) and the ‘check’ must not be conducted over the telephone.

6.5.5 Additionally, in matters of sexual exploitation, or any other situation which indicates that the child may have been subject to, or at risk of, significant harm, a referral must be made to the Local Authority in accordance with local safeguarding procedures.
7. PROCEDURES FOR A MISSING LOOKED AFTER CHILD

7.1 Procedures

7.1.1 Prior to any placement, a written Placement Information Record (PIR) should be completed, outlining expectations about how it will meet the child’s needs, how positive routines will be maintained, and how they will be supported to achieve their potential. Every looked after child must have a care plan, subject to regular review, that sits alongside the PIR. This process must include an evaluation of whether a child is likely to run away. Where this is likely, strategies should be put in place to minimise risk.

7.1.2 Each looked after child has a care plan based on a full assessment of the child’s current and future needs, including potential risk to self or others. The care plan will therefore take account of any risk that the child may go missing in future and any factors which may increase the risk to the child should they go missing. Children’s residential and fostering service staff should contribute to this assessment. All information should be included in the placement plan and in the child’s care plan. Within these plans due regard should be given to young people that will go missing and to ensure that the plans reference that the Cheshire protocol will be followed. As part of this assessment it may be appropriate for the Local Authority to consult with the Police to share information that may be of relevance. Appendix 2 contains a Missing from Care risk assessment this is required to be completed with the relevant staff and young person and reviewed on a monthly basis or as incidents occur.
7.1.3 This assessment should include information on the following:

- The likelihood of the child going missing;
- The child’s view;
- Consideration of the measures that can be taken to prevent the child going missing;
- The level of supervision / support that care staff propose to provide for the child;
- The views of parents/carers on their child needs and the action that needs to be taken if the child is absent;
- The risk of harm to the child and his/her vulnerability if he/she is absent;
- Consideration of any external influences which may result in a child’s removal without consent;
- The likelihood of the child being harboured;
- Note the prevalence, from current statistical information, of 14-16 year olds going missing;

7.1.4 A trigger plan (action plan), applicable to that child, should be formulated to cover the event of the child going missing. This trigger plan should be agreed by all relevant parties including the local authority, police and placement provider. An example of a trigger plan is in Appendix 3.

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

7.1.6 The residential unit manager/foster carer should consider the most appropriate ways to meet the above requirements and whether it is necessary and appropriate to discuss ‘running away’ and the requirements of this protocol with the child.
7.2 When the looked after child goes absent

7.2.1 Categories of absence have been agreed between the Police and the Local Authority.

- absent,
- away from placement without authorisation
- missing, or
- Absconded / Unlawfully at Large

7.2.2 In deciding the category of absence, all staff must consider the circumstances of the child and their absence. This will include detailed consideration of:

- The circumstances of the absence.
- The child’s care plan.
- The age of the child.
- The maturity of the child.
- Any physical or cognitive disability of the child.
- Any continuing or urgent need for the child to have medication or other medical treatment.
- The legal status of the child.
- Previous behaviour and history of the child.
- Is the current behaviour out of character?
- Danger posed by the child to themselves or others.
- General vulnerability of the child.
- The child’s tendency to drug/substance abuse.
- Whether the child is perceived as running to, or running from, someone or something.
- Any circumstances within the placement, say with carers or other residents that may be relevant to the absence.
- The risk of offending.
- The influence of peer groups, families or friends.
• Predatory influences on the child. These may relate to others wanting to use the child for crime, sex or drugs.

• Any known risk of abduction.

• Environmental factors including weather, time of year, community events or tensions.

7.2.3 Children who are absent from their placement can be a matter of considerable concern to their carers and there is a need to locate them and ensure they are safe. The children can be thought of as being at risk on a continuum, with their being little cause for concern at one end, and with significant cause for concern at the other. Children who are a few minutes late home from school would not normally give rise to concerns; they may have missed the bus, or they may be exhibiting normal adolescent testing out, to establish the boundaries of acceptable behaviour, or to show their disagreement with aspects of their placement. It is not helpful to consider every momentary absence as warranting a formal missing person report.

7.2.4 However, at some point, depending upon the child and the circumstances, the child’s absence will give rise to justifiable concern and require a formal missing person report to the Police. Whilst there can be no substitute for a considered judgement, based on a sound assessment of the child and the circumstances, it is the purpose of this framework to assist carers to structure their thinking with regard to the categories of absence. This decision should not be taken in isolation, residential staff should consult with the senior member of staff on duty and foster carers should liaise with the child’s Social Worker, IRO or EDT staff. The situation should be kept under constant review and changes in circumstances taken into account. If the child is receiving support from CAMHS professionals, Educational Psychologists and so on, it may be advisable to discuss the case with them. However, if they are not readily available a decision must be made on the basis of the best available information. In cases of doubt it may also be appropriate to discuss the case with a local Police supervisor.

7.2.5 Each case must be decided on merit and a formal missing person report to the Police may be actioned earlier in some circumstances than in others. Indeed for a small number of young people it may be appropriate to immediately report them as a missing person. Normally this will have been previously agreed as part of the Care Plan because of the child’s vulnerability.

7.2.6 The fact that the child may have gone missing on a number of previous occasions does not reduce the risk. In fact, children who repeatedly go missing are often being enticed away from their placement by activities that
they see as exciting or by predatory influences. Furthermore, short absences may be as risky as lengthy ones. The categories and consequent actions are outlined below.

7.3 Away from placement without authorisation

7.3.1 Clearly some children are absent for a short period and then return, with their whereabouts known to the carer. Sometimes children stay out longer than agreed, either on purpose to test boundaries, or accidentally. Examples of situations are: running away after a dispute, failing to return on time, staying at a known location with a friend and this could be classed as away from placement without authorisation.

7.3.2 If the carer assesses that the child is at risk due to any factor/s known to the carer, then the child should be reported as missing without delay and the believed risk communicated to the Police (see paragraph 7.4 below). If the assessment of the carer is that there is no apparent risk for their immediate safety but the child is away from their placement without authorisation it is still important that staff/ carers record these incidences as away from placement without authorisation in the child’s record. This does not need to go to the police. In addition to this staff/ carers should always start a dated/timed record of their contacts, risk assessment and decisions throughout the episode from the point that they are aware of the child’s absence, in case the level of risk changes and decisions are auditable. All episodes of away from placement should be recorded by the carer and reported to the relevant social worker at the local authority and the social worker should inform the IRO.

7.3.3 If the child’s whereabouts are known or suspected, the staff will decide whether to allow the child to remain at that location, albeit temporarily, or to arrange for their return. If the decision is to arrange their return and there is reason to believe that there may be public order difficulties, Police assistance will be sought. Police assistance in these circumstances does not mean that the child is categorised as absent or missing. Each such occurrence needs to be evaluated based upon the factors mentioned in paragraph 7.2.2 and upon other information gleaned from the child, friends, family and associates.

7.3.4 The responsibility for managing this type of absence remains with the staff of the residential home or carer. It is not the responsibility of the Police to influence or determine the decision regarding whether a person is missing or away from placement without authorisation.

7.3.5 It is expected that the first response by providers of their care along with any relevant staff from their responsible authority, which could include the
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child’s Social Worker in circumstances where a child is late home will be to take all steps a responsible parent would take, to try to locate the child and to make a careful assessment in accordance with paragraph 7.2.2

7.4 Absent

7.4.1 Instances of absences should be reported to the Police. Cheshire Constabulary will make a record of the absence and will agree with the person reporting the episode a future course of action e.g. the police to be informed should the child or young person not return in a specified time period. All episodes of absent should be recorded by the carer and reported to the relevant social worker at the local authority.

7.4.2 A clear assessment needs to be made by the carer in each individual case as to the length of time that elapses before a child who is absent becomes categorised as missing. An absence must be kept under regular review by the appropriate carer.

7.4.3 The carer should consider whether the period of absence is out of character for the child, whether the circumstances of the disappearance would now render the child at risk of harm, for example: whether the child requires medication at a set time or where the weather conditions have severely deteriorated. In these circumstances the child should then be reported to the police as missing.

7.5 Missing

7.5.1 If the decision is that of the child being ‘missing’ then staff / foster carers will complete a Cheshire Constabulary Form 200036, ‘Report of Missing Person’ (Form 36). Appendix 4 shows the F36 form.

7.5.2 Staff / foster carers will telephone Cheshire Constabulary (101) and inform them that a child is missing from their establishment / home, giving details of the location where the child was last seen, the circumstances in which the child is missing, any immediate concerns that there may be for the child’s safety and the reasons why they are being reported as ‘missing’.

7.5.3 Cheshire Constabulary must get details of the placing responsible Local Authority from the staff or carer in case this is outside of the Cheshire boundaries. All correspondences will then take place with the responsible Local Authority but the relevant host Local Authority will also notified for information purposes only.

7.5.4 The carer will provide information to the police about any risk factors associated
with the child on the missing person form.

7.5.5 Staff / foster carers will request that the Police ‘incident number’ is given to them. The Police ‘incident number’ must be recorded on the Form 36.

7.5.6 Staff / foster carers will then forward the Form 36 to the Police Force Control Centre by email via force.control.room@cheshire.pnn.police.uk (or fax via 0845 359 5909). If staff / foster carers do not have access to the internet or to a fax then an officer must call and collect the form.

7.5.7 The Local Authority will ensure that sufficient knowledge and information about the child is recorded to enable carers to complete the missing person form should the child go missing in future.

7.5.8 Where available, an electronic version of the missing from home form should be completed. It may be that in cases of ‘persistent’ episodes, sections of the form can be completed in advance to enable speedy and accurate reporting if and when required.

7.5.9 When receiving a missing person report the Police will tailor their response to the circumstances. If information is available to suggest a possible location of the missing child, and this gives rise to concerns about the safety of the child, the Police response will be to immediately address those concerns, perhaps postponing the administrative recording duties for a short time in favour of safeguarding.

7.5.10 In circumstances where a child is reported missing from a residential home, the senior care manager responsible for the unit will ensure that the following basic actions are undertaken;

• Conduct a thorough search of the premises (For a child missing from a foster placement (not a residential children’s home), a premises search will be undertaken by Police officers).

• Speak to any known friends and relatives where child may be

• Speak to other residents or other persons who may be able to assist with the investigation

• Speak to other (previously on duty) colleagues and care staff who may have had some form of earlier contact with the missing child

7.5.11 Carers must also inform without delay:

• The parents/those who have parental responsibility (unless indicated otherwise on the care plan)
• The Social Worker or the accountable team manager
• The emergency duty team if out of hours and the Social Worker and accountable team manager the next working day

7.5.12 Where there is a Child in Care that is placed within the Cheshire Local Authority (host) boundaries but comes from another local authority the residential staff or foster carer will inform the police and the placing responsible authority but also pass this information on to the relevant host Local Authority.

7.6 Absconder / Unlawfully at Large

7.6.1 A child is to be considered as having ‘absconded’ or being ‘unlawfully at large’ when he / she is absent from their placement without permission and is subject to an order or requirement resulting from the criminal justice process (e.g. where the child has appeared before a youth court and has been remanded into Local Authority accommodation). A child in this category must be reported to the Police without delay.

7.6.2 If the child is under the age of 16 years the Police will treat the matter as BOTH a missing child case AND an unlawfully at large case. This means that it will be necessary to provide detailed information to the Police on the Form 36. When the child is traced however, it is likely that they will also be arrested or dealt with by the Police in relation to any offence or breach. It is essential however, that they are also viewed as a child in need of protection and safeguarding, and any risks exposed to during their absence must be reviewed fully.

7.6.3 However, if the child is aged 16 or over, the Police will treat the child solely as a person unlawfully at large and not as a missing child, unless there are grounds to suspect that factors other than the child’s desire to evade justice are involved in their disappearance.

7.7 Roles and responsibilities

7.7.1 The local authority has a range of corporate parenting duties in relation to children in care and should always apply the “reasonable parent” test when planning and making decisions in relation to the children in its care. This means having the same interest as any reasonable parent would have for their own children in relation to safeguarding and promoting welfare. Both the relevant Safeguarding Children’s Board and the Corporate Parenting Boards have a key role in monitoring the incidents of children and young people who go missing from care.
7.7.2 After reporting a child missing, Children’s Services remain responsible for the child in their care. This responsibility is not absolved when the child has been reported missing to the Police.

7.7.3 Carers and the child’s Social Worker will be responsible for liaising with the Police, taking an active interest in the investigation and passing on all information, which may help to inform the investigation and assist in protecting the child while absent or missing.

7.7.4 Carers and the child’s Social Worker should continue to make appropriate enquiries with other residents or by telephone with all persons who may be able to assist with the investigation unless they are requested not to do so by the Police. All information gleaned from these enquires should be passed to the Police.

7.7.5 Once a child is reported missing to the Police, the Police will have primacy in respect of the investigation to trace the child.

7.7.6 The Police will normally conduct all physical enquiries away from the premises from which the child is absent.

7.7.7 In certain circumstances the Police may need to revisit the duties initially performed by care staff. When necessary they will do so in liaison with appropriate children’s services staff and will do so sensitively, causing as little disruption as possible to the establishment and residents.

7.7.8 Throughout the process in this protocol, residential carers and social workers must keep a full record of all actions taken and messages received and given.

7.7.9 Social Workers are responsible for informing Independent Reviewing Officers Managers (IRO/M’s) about all episodes of away from placement without authorisation, absent or missing where relevant so that these can be addressed via review meetings.

7.8 Review of continued missing episode

7.8.1 When a child has been missing for a period of 24 hours the social worker should inform the relevant senior manager as per the Local Authority protocols via the usual line management route.

7.8.2 Throughout the missing episode, carers and the Police will continually review the case. After the child has been missing for five days, or earlier, if deemed appropriate, an urgent case review meeting will be held. It will involve Police officers, carers, the child’s Social Worker, and any other professional involved
in the care of the child. The meeting will review:

- What action has been taken so far by the Police and professionals
- What action needs to be taken by the Police and professionals
- Decide whether the child should return to that placement when located
- Consider any other relevant information
- Whether further such review meetings will take place and the time scales for such review meetings (it is suggested that a period of at least every five days thereafter or earlier, if deemed appropriate).

7.9 Return of the child

7.9.1 Where a missing child is found then they should normally be returned to their placement.

7.9.2 It is the responsibility of the Local Authority to arrange for transportation for the child to return to their placement.

7.9.3 There may be circumstances when, in the interests of the safe and speedy return of the child, the Police are requested to assist the Local Authority in returning the child. The Police should not unreasonably withhold assistance in cases involving local recovery and transport missions for vulnerable children. However, the Police will not agree to requests to provide escorts for missing children, which would unreasonably involve officers leaving their normal areas of patrol.

7.9.4 Where a child is returned or has returned of their own accord it is the responsibility of the carer to contact the Police and confirm that the missing child has returned.

7.9.5 In circumstances where a missing child has returned to their residential home but has not been seen by a police officer, the Police will normally accept confirmation from care professionals that the child is ‘safe and well’ without the need for an officer to attend the home and visit the returnee.

7.9.6 If it is apparent, upon the return of a child, that they have been the victim of a crime whilst absent, or that they may be in danger or at risk from any person arising out of circumstances that have occurred whilst they were absent then the Police must be called and asked to attend without delay.

7.9.7 Additionally, in matters of sexual exploitation, or any other situation which indicates that the child may have been subject to, or at risk of, significant
harm, the allocated social worker and the Independent Reviewing Officer must be informed.

7.9.8 Where the child is in foster placement, the Police will verify the child’s safe return in person.

7.10 **Looked After Children Who May Have Been Trafficked From Abroad**

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

7.10.2 ‘Safeguarding Children Who May Have Been Trafficked’ 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 Trafficked Children Toolkit, developed by the London Safeguarding Children Board, has been made available to all local authorities to help professionals assess the needs of these children and to refer them to the NRM. [http://www.londonscb.gov.uk/trafficking/](http://www.londonscb.gov.uk/trafficking/)
8. SAFE AND WELL CHECKS

8.1 Cheshire Police will carry out a Safe and Well Check on all children and young people who have been categorised as missing, as soon as practicable after they are found and should be completed within 24 hours of the person being located. The details will be recorded on VPA and passed on to the relevant Local Authority Children’s Social Care.

8.2 When a child or young person has been located following an episode deemed ‘Missing’, statutory guidance requires that ‘The police will undertake a safe and well check to establish whether there are 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’.

8.3 The objective of the Safe and Well Check requires a Police Officer to physically see and speak to the missing child or young person as soon as possible after they are found. Where viable the Police Officer should speak to the young person independent of the parent or carer. The Police should also speak to the child or young person’s parents or carers to satisfy themselves that the child or young person is safe.
Key aims will be to:

- Determine the reasons why the child or young person went missing and in particular, if they have been subject to violence, exploitation, abuse or bullying;
- To establish if they have been the victim of or committed any crime whilst missing;
- To obtain information which may lead to their early location should they disappear again;
- To put in place any support and preventative measures to avoid such a recurrence;
- To inform the child or young person and their parents and carers, if appropriate, that:
  a) the relevant Local Authority Children’s Social Care has been notified of the missing episode; and
  b) that they will be contacted by an Officer of the Local Authority and offered an Independent Return Interview.

8.4 Where a child or young person goes missing or absent frequently, it may not be practicable for the Police to conduct a Safe and Well Check and a different approach may be more appropriate. In these cases, discussion should take place between the Police and the child’s parent or carer or, if Looked After, their allocated Social Worker, to agree the frequency of such checks. Given the established link between frequent missing or absent episodes and serious harm, which could include gang involvement, forced marriage, bullying or sexual exploitation, agreements not to conduct a Safe and Well Check should be recorded by both Police and Social Care. The Police Sergeant on duty must sign off with a rationale where there was no Safe and Well Check conducted.
9. **RETURN INTERVIEWS**

9.1 A return interview is the term applied to the safety, needs and risk assessment carried out in the form of a formal discussion with the child.

9.2 The interview provides an opportunity to hear from a child or young person about why they went missing and to understand the risks and issues faced by them whilst missing. Children and young people sometimes need to build up trust with a person before they will discuss in depth the reasons why they ran away.

9.3 It should be conducted by a person who is independent of the child’s home / placement and who is trained to carry out these interviews and is able to follow up any actions that emerge. The responsible local authority should ensure the return interview takes place, working with the host authority where appropriate. Within Cheshire there is a commissioned service that will undertake return interviews; however social workers where appropriate can undertake return interviews following a discussion with the commissioned service.

9.4 Account should also be taken of any preference the child has for the conducting of the return interview if the intervention plan identifies the need for a particular key worker then they should conduct the interview.

9.5 When it is not practicable for a return interview to be conducted by the most suitable person, or an independent person, it is better that an interview is conducted by a nominated care professional than no interview being conducted at all. The following table highlights the return interview arrangements within Cheshire.
## Pan Cheshire Local Authority Return Interview Arrangements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circumstances of the Child or young Person</th>
<th>Return Interviewer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For a child or young person living within Cheshire Local Authorities not an open case to Children’s Social Care</td>
<td>The notification of the missing incident will come via the police. The <strong>Cheshire Commissioned Service</strong> is responsible for undertaking the return interview. This interview will inform whether the child or young person is in need of services or at risk of harm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cases with an allocated Worker (Children In Need and subject to a Child Protection Plan)</td>
<td>The notification of the missing incident will come via the police. The <strong>Cheshire Commissioned Service</strong> or relevant <strong>Social Worker</strong> (unless there is a suitable professional that the child would prefer) is responsible for undertaking the return interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For a child or young person ‘looked after’ by the Cheshire Local Authorities placed up to approximately 20 miles within Cheshire boundary</td>
<td>It is the <strong>social workers</strong> responsibility to inform the <strong>Cheshire Commissioned Service</strong> of the missing incident. The Cheshire Commissioned Service or relevant <strong>Social Worker</strong> (unless there is a suitable professional that the child would prefer) is responsible for undertaking the return interview. If the commissioned service is not available then it’s the responsibility of the <strong>social worker</strong> to undertake the return interview. A record of the interview will be provided to the IRO/M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For a child or young person ‘looked after’ by Cheshire Local Authorities placed further than 20 miles away from the Cheshire boundary</td>
<td>At point of placement the <strong>social worker</strong> (were missing is identified from the risk assessment) is responsible for ensuring access to a local independent advocacy/missing service should a missing episode occur. <em>(This will be outside of the Cheshire Commissioned Service.)</em> Details should be available on the Placement Plan which is accessible and known to the carer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For a child or young person ‘looked after’ by another local authority placed within the Cheshire Local Authorities</td>
<td>The notification of the missing incident will come via the police. The <strong>Cheshire Commissioned Service</strong> or relevant <strong>Social Worker</strong> (unless there is a suitable professional that the child would prefer) is responsible for undertaking the return interview. A record of the interview will be provided to the responsible local authority.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9.6 The purpose of the interview is:

- To better understand the reasons why the child went missing
- To explore the circumstances which led to the missing episode(s)
- To inform future prevention strategies
- To inform any future missing person investigation should that person go missing again
- To learn of the activities, associates, risks and victimisation involved in the missing episode, and where possible to address those risks with appropriate and proactive strategies such as the use of the harbouring warning notices under the Child Abduction Act
- To identify and address any harm the child has suffered – including harm that may not have already been disclosed as part of the safe and well check.
- To provide information on how to stay safe if they choose to run again; including helpline numbers

9.7 The ‘return interview’ is different from the Police ‘safe and well’ check, it must not be viewed as a routine or administrative task.

9.8 Every child that goes missing from home or care will be offered a return interview. Return interviews will also be considered for young people that have been recorded as absent on two or more occasions. There could be some occasions where a return interview may not occur for every missing or absent episode for example repeat runners or those involved in direct work.
9.9 The return interview should be conducted in all instances within **72 hours of** the child’s return, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

9.10 Cheshire Constabulary and the relevant Local Authority Social Workers are required to send details of the missing Incident to the commissioned services case worker within 24 hours. The case worker has a further 48 Hours in which to see the child, and will aim to see them independent of an adult.

9.11 Appropriate safeguarding procedures should be followed where there are safeguarding concerns for example:

- Where the child has been hurt or harmed whilst they have been missing (or this is believed to have been the case)
- Where there is known or suspected risk of sexual exploitation or contact with persons posing risk to children

9.12 It is acknowledged that a returning child may well share different parts of their experience with different people. It is the responsibility of all agencies therefore, to attend to issues of immediate safety, future support and safeguarding needs, and information-sharing in a way which respects and safeguards children and young people. The acceptable minimum in the event of a single missing episode is that the missing episode is risk assessed following information gathered and cross referenced from the child, the carers and the Police.

9.13 In some circumstances the child may make extremely sensitive disclosures that need particularly careful management that should be recorded separately but referred to on the return interview form. In such circumstances it may be appropriate for the interviewer to discuss the information with relevant professionals.

9.14 Where a return interview leads to an identification of a safeguarding issue that needs specific action, for example, to safeguard the child or investigate a crime the matter should be referred to the Local Authority and/or the Police.

9.15 For looked after children it remains the responsibility of the relevant Social Worker to ensure completion of the return interview. There is an additional responsibility on the child’s placement to monitor that they are conducted within agreed timescales. In the event that the return interviews are not conducted within 72 hours, then the carer should alert the relevant Manager in Children’s Services.
10. MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS

10.1 In all missing child cases it is vital to the safe recovery of the child that a recent photograph of the child is made available. The photograph must be a good likeness of the child. Most commonly the photograph will be used by local Police officers to help them recognise the child when patrolling or when actively looking for the child at relevant locations.

10.2 The consent of a person with parental responsibility will be sought for a photograph to be used in any missing person investigation.

10.3 In respect of looked after children, a recent photograph bearing a good likeness to the child will be kept on record by the Local Authority. When a child is admitted to care the consent of a person with parental responsibility will be sought for a photograph to be used in any subsequent missing person investigation.

10.4 In some cases, particularly where a missing child is felt to be especially vulnerable or where they have been missing for a long period of time, it may be necessary to publicise the case via the media.

10.5 Such an approach is not routine but is usually a response to very serious concerns for the child’s safety, either carers or the Police may suggest such an approach. Normally, such decisions will be made in consultation with parents and Children’s Services. However, for operational reasons primacy over such decisions must lie with the Police.

10.6 The Police may also utilise the website facility of the Missing Persons Bureau (www.missingkids.co.uk) to publicise the absence of the child or young person.

10.7 If the case falls within the criteria for ‘Child Rescue Alert’ then any decision to publicise the case is likely to be urgent. It will be made in accordance with nationally agreed procedures by a Police officer of the rank of Detective Superintendent. In cases involving looked after children, where practicable, Halton Borough Council, Warrington Borough Council, Cheshire East Council, Cheshire West and Chester Council will be consulted in advance.
11. POLICE POWERS

11.1 The police have significant powers to safeguard vulnerable children. These include powers to enter premises, to recover children and to take a child into police protection. Local Authorities should give consideration of other civil sanctions for those not covered by police powers and child abduction notices.

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

11.3 Child Abduction Warning Notice is a useful tool aimed at tackling incidents where children or young people under 16 years old (or 18 under a full Care Order) go missing and are found with families or partners who are much older than them. It is anticipated that this procedure will be used in a limited number of cases per year and should reduce the opportunity for children and young people to go missing. It will be used to tackle people who target children and young people for sexual exploitation. Partner agencies should contact the police to discuss the potential use of this procedure. Relevant legislation:

- Sec 2 Child Abduction Act 1984 (child under 16).
- Sec 49 Children Act 1989 (child under 18 subject of Care Order). (This does not apply to children or young people who are voluntarily accommodated under Sec 20).

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

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

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

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

12.3 Prevention strategies across Cheshire take many forms these include targeted work through schools, training for residential providers and foster carers, regular briefings for social care staff, information around the risks of missing in the looked after young person’s guide and engagement with the Children in Care Council’s.

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

12.5 The Police and the relevant Local Authority will operate an escalating system of interventions to reduce the likelihood of a child repeatedly going missing. Strategically, the meeting cycle shown below operates across the Pan-Cheshire authorities, to maximise prevention opportunities and monitor trends
13. RESPONSE TO ESCALATING CONCERNS

13.1 If a child has run away two or more times, local authorities should ensure a discussion is held, either with the child, their family or both, to offer further support and guidance. Actions following earlier incidents should be reviewed and alternative strategies considered. Access to and timeliness of independent return interviews should also be reviewed.

13.2 Where there are concerns in relation to a child going missing multi-agency meetings under CAF, TAF, Child in Need, Care Planning under section 17 or 47 should be in place and followed in line with child protection procedures, as good practice, to address these issues and to ensure the right information is shared with agencies. There will also be links through local authorities CSE risk assessment and risk management.

13.3 Formal intervention meetings, in response to escalating concerns must take place in the event of repeat episodes of children going missing and following the first missing episode if there are concerns in relation to sexual exploitation. For these meetings to work, and thereby improve our collective responses, appropriate attendance and clarity of purpose are essential. The intervention meetings should be held within a week of any trigger episode, this could require a separate meeting outside of any care planning meeting already established.

13.4 The first stage intervention meeting will take place after five episodes within a 90-day rolling period. This level of intervention meeting is the crucial stage in avoiding serious escalation and must, therefore, be given high priority by all concerned.
13.5 The meeting should be chaired by a Senior Children’s Services Manager, attendees should include:

- Child*
- Social Worker or relevant lead professional
- Local Police Missing Person Co-ordinator
- Parent and or carer, residential worker or foster carer
- Fostering Social Worker
- Person who conducted return interview if different to above
- Other relevant professionals (For example Health, Education, Youth Offending Teams)

*Discussion should take place between the chair and the child’s Social Worker or relevant lead professional about whether it is appropriate for them to attend.

13.6 This meeting should try to identify any ‘push’ or ‘pull’ factor in the case and any other voluntary or statutory agency, which has an interest, or may take an interest, in the missing child’s welfare and circumstances. In the case of ‘pull’ factors it may be necessary to target those in the community who harbour the missing child or exploit them with regard to crime, sex or drugs. The meeting should be minuted and MUST produce a clear action plan, including timescales for action, named lead professionals, risk/ contingency planning and regular review dates. The notes of the meeting should be copied to all professionals invited. In addition, copies should be sent to the child’s allocated IRO, where the child is looked after, and the Children’s Services Lead Manager. These minutes need to be circulated within 5 working days after the meeting has taken place.

13.7 The second stage intervention meeting will take place after nine episodes within a 90-day rolling period. The meeting should be chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer or a Senior Children’s Services Manager, attendees should include:

- Child*
- Social Worker or relevant lead professional
- Local Police Missing Person Coordinator and champion (Chief Inspector)
- Parent and or carer, residential unit manager or fostering manager
- Person who conducted return interview if different to above
• Other relevant professionals (For example Health, Education, Youth Offending Teams)

*Discussion should take place between the chair and the child’s Social Worker or relevant lead professional about whether it is appropriate for them to attend.

13.8 Meetings at this level should be rare provided that this protocol has been followed with regard to the 1st stage intervention meeting and return interviews. The meeting should be minuted and MUST produce a clear action plan, including timescales for action, named lead professionals, risk/contingency planning and regular review dates. The notes of the meeting should be copied to all professionals invited. In addition, copies should be sent to the child’s allocated IRO, where the child is looked after, and the Children’s Services Manager. In addition to seeking to reduce future missing episodes and reduce any apparent risks to the child, this meeting should also quality assure compliance with the protocols and the efficacy of the 1st stage intervention meeting and return interviews. These minutes need to be circulated within 5 working days after the meeting has taken place.

13.9 At any point in the stage 2 process, if there is still a concern in respect of the child/ young person’s risk taking behaviour and there is no reduction in missing episodes, or there are greater risks identified, this will be escalated by the chair to Local Authority Director of Children’s Service and Cheshire Constabulary’s Detective Superintendent of the Public Protection Directorate, to ensure executive oversight within all other relevant agencies.

13.10 It should be noted, however, that the volume of missing episodes is not the only reason to launch an intervention or to escalate the level of intervention. The following are examples of other reasons to initiate or escalate interventions:

• Any case where the risks involved in even a single future-missing episode is very high

• Any case where sexual exploitation is a factor

• Cases where it has been identified that immediate action is necessary to ensure the well-being of the child

N.B. In cases of a child going missing from an out-of-authority placement the responsible authority calls a professionals’ meeting involving the relevant organisations from the host authority, to determine action, and to ensure change. When a child who has a history of going missing is moved to an out-of-authority placement, the host authority should be informed of the risk, and as part of the placement agreement, appropriate details should be shared to support the Local Authority to manage the risks to inform care planning for the
individual child.

13.11 It should be noted that if any one agency or professional has increased or serious concerns for a child’s well-being or safety then they may call a multi-agency strategy/ Section 47 Strategy meeting at any time, regardless of the number of missing episodes.

13.12 When it is believed that an adult is adversely involved with a child going missing the Local Authority will invoke safeguarding procedures and the Police may consider using enforcement tactics such as the Child Abduction Notice legislation. [Section 2 Child Abduction Act 1984 or Section 49 Children’s Act 1989]

13.13 Alternatively the Local Authority and/or parents, supported by the Police, may decide to institute civil proceedings to obtain an injunction preventing any particular adult having any contact with a named child.
14. GOVERNANCE

14.1 This protocol will form part of the Pan Cheshire Safeguarding Children Procedures. The relevant Local Safeguarding Children’s Board is responsible for co-ordinating the activities of member agencies in relation to the effective implementation of this protocol. Each local authority has a senior officer that is responsible for policies and performance for children who go missing from home or care; In Halton and Chester West and Chester this is the Senior Manager for Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, In Cheshire East this is the Safeguarding Manager Children, Families and Adults and for Warrington this is the Service Manager for Quality Assurance and Safeguarding.

14.2 Each Local Safeguarding Children’s Board has established an appropriate sub group that is responsible for Missing Children from Home and Care, Child Sexual Exploitation and Trafficked young people. Reports will be fed into the LCSB as appropriate. The subgroups will meet quarterly, the purpose of these meeting are;

• To review the local implementation of the protocol
• Analysis of missing from home incidents; patterns and outcomes
• To identify any patterns and trends in running / missing episodes and links to CSE and trafficking.
• To develop local strategies / plans to address concerns / patterns / trends.
• Safeguarding implications
• Practice and procedural issues

14.3 The meeting will be attended by:

• Senior manager from the local police
• Senior manager from the relevant Local Authority Children’s Service Department
• Senior manager from the relevant Local Authority Residential / Fostering Services
• Registered managers of local Care homes
• Other professionals may be co-opted on to the group depending upon local needs.

14.4 Quarterly Pan Cheshire meetings will also take place with strategic representatives from the Local Safeguarding Children’s Boards, the Local Authorities and the Police. The purpose of this meeting will be;

• To review the implementation of the protocol on a Pan Cheshire basis;
• To consider the provision of services for children missing from both local authority care and home;
• To identify any patterns and trends in running / missing episodes and any cross border issues
• To consider the provision of training for those responsible for management of, and services to, children missing from both local authority care and home;
• To monitor on a Pan Cheshire basis the provision of single and multi-agency data collation and information sharing processes.

14.5 The representatives from the relevant Local Safeguarding Children’s Boards are responsible for ensuring updating their respective Board with any Pan Cheshire issues or areas for concern.
15. COLLECTING AND SHARING DATA ON CHILDREN WHO GO MISSING OR ABSENT

15.1 Early and effective sharing of information between professionals and local agencies is essential for the identification of patterns of behaviour. This may be used to identify areas of concern for an individual child, or to identify ‘hotspots’ of activity in a local area.

15.2 Data about children and young people who go missing from home or care should be included in regular reports to Council members, especially to the Lead Member for Children’s Services and in reports by the local authority to the LSCB. Each local authority with regard to looked after children will record all away from placement without authorisation, absent and missing episodes through their relevant social care case management system such as carefirst.

15.3 Compliance visits will also be undertaken with residential providers and part of this will be to review data/ records of away from placement without authorisation, absence and missing young people.

15.4 Cheshire Constabulary will work in partnership with the Local Authorities to collect data on children reported missing and absence from care and home and other relevant data. This data will be regularly analysed in order to map problems and patterns. This will include identifying patterns of local “hotspots” sexual and other exploitation, as well as concerns about who children run with
and who they runaway to be with. The results will be reported into the relevant meeting structures and Lead Members were required. (Note for national data collection purposes only the authority responsible for a looked after child that is missing should include that child as missing in returns to the Department for Education.

15.5 Each month the strategic Public Protection Unit will send to each local authority a tracker that shows all missing and absent young people. The tracker will show the type of placement and the number of episodes over the last 6 months, the responsible local authority, CSE or other significant risks.

15.6 The commissioned service provides regular reports to each LSCB sub group around the activity of commission this includes further data on reasons for young people running, associates that they run with as well as highlighting positive outcomes for young people.

15.7 The sharing of data will help organisations across Cheshire to identify risks in their area, such as exploitation, gangs or crime related activity that might not be apparent. It will also help identify trends, for example, whether children are going missing from a particular children’s home or other patterns across the local authority. This will enable organisations to have a proactive approach to the needs of children and young people across Cheshire.
APPENDIX 1

Procedures for reporting a child that is Absent, Away from Placement without authorisation, Missing or Absconder (unlawfully at large)

1. If children placed out of their local authority run away the host local authority Missing Protocol should be followed. A notification process for missing/absent episodes should be in place between the responsible and host local authorities.
APPENDIX 2

LOCAL AUTHORITY MISSING FROM CARE RISK ASSESSMENT

Risk assessment: for children and young people who run away from care or are at risk of becoming missing from care.

(The risk indicators can also be used to inform assessments for children and young people who run away or are at risk of running away from home.)

Name of child or young person: ................................................................. ID: ......................
Date of Birth: ......................... Age: ........... Legal Status: .................................................................

It is important in completing this risk assessment that you consider the definitions of missing and absent being used are:

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

**Absent** – “A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be”.
The risk indicators should prompt the assessment and any relevant information, which should be included under the section “risk assessment information”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk indicators</th>
<th>Risk assessment information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the usual circumstances of the child/young person going missing i.e. is the young person running to someone or from a situation? When does the child/young person usually leave the home?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where do they usually go? Are they with family or friends or with people who are unknown or undesirable?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What level of maturity has the young person shown in being able to make decisions about themselves or others?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the agreed coming in times, if any?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do they have access to any money and how if necessary will they obtain this?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there any known issues/events happening in the child’s/young person’s family or close friends?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past method of return i.e. via family or on their own</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the risk of suicide/self-harm? What are the indicators of this?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likely use of drugs/alcohol/solvents? If so, type and amount?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past involvement of offending and in what form? Is the child/young person a risk to the community and in what way?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk indicators</td>
<td>Risk assessment information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there risk of sexual exploitation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have sexual exploitation protocols been activated (e.g. CSE strategy meetings)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any previous harm suffered while absent?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any concerns about new friends /boyfriends/ associates?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any concern of abduction or being prevented from returning?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a risk of forced marriage?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are they experiencing bullying/racial and/or homophobic abuse?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any signs or indicators that child is experiencing difficulties or abuse in the placement?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the child/young person on medication or suffering from medical condition?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical or learning disability/difficulties?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the child/young person’s legal status?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any further information and knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This risk assessment grid above should be used as a guide and involve discussion and pooling of information to agree an informed risk assessment. In cases of little knowledge or where there is disagreement, the child or young person should be considered as being at higher risk.
Concluding risk assessment

Action to be taken by whom and by when (in bullet points)

Young Person ............................................................... Date........................................

RCCW/Foster Carer......................................................... Date........................................

Home Manager/Family Placement Worker.................................................................

Date........................................
Categories of absence: for children and young people who run away from care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unauthorised absence</th>
<th>Usual action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Absent** – “A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be”. | 1. Carry out a MFH risk assessment or refer to MFH already in place  
2. Make enquiries to locate the child/young person and search premises  
3. Inform the police and agree any future course of action.  
4. Inform/contact family and those with parental responsibility.  
5. Where action not already agreed in MFH risk assessment is available Inform and discuss with on call manager and or social worker/Emergency Duty Team.  
6. Where child/young person has not returned undertake action as agreed with the police  
7. Once child/young person has been missing for longer than the agreed period follow-on action needs to be agreed. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Missing</th>
<th>Usual action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **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. “ | 1. Carry out a risk assessment  
2. Make enquiries to locate the child/young person and search premises.  
3. Inform on-call manager/senior.  
4. Report child/young person missing to the police providing full details  
5. Inform/contact family and those with parental responsibility  
6. Inform/discuss with social worker/Emergency Duty Team |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unlawfully at large</th>
<th>Usual action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| A child is considered unlawfully at large when they are absent from their placement without permission and are subject to an order or requirement resulting from the criminal justice system | 1. Carry out a risk assessment  
2. Make enquiries to locate the child/young person search premises.  
3. Inform on-call manager/senior.  
4. Report child/young person missing to the police providing full details.  
5. Inform/contact family and those with parental responsibility.  
6. Inform and discuss with social worker/ Emergency Duty Team  
7. Inform Youth Offending Service/probation/legal as appropriate. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Looked after children away from their placement without authorisation</th>
<th>Usual action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| This is when young People are absent for a short period of time i.e. less than overnight, and after a careful and thorough risk assessment, the absence does not raise concern for their immediate safety or that of the public | 1. Carry out a risk assessment  
2. Make enquiries to locate the child/young person search premises.  
3. Inform on-call manager/senior  
4. Inform and discuss with social worker/ Emergency Duty Team |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unauthorised absence/ Away from Placement without authorisation – lower risk</th>
<th>Missing /unlawfully at large– higher risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Signature of staff member  PRINT NAME

........................................................................................................................................

Date and time: ..............................................................................................................

Signature of line manager:

PRINT NAME ..........................................................
APPENDIX 3

'NOM/yyyyyyyyy Name / DoB /SRN

Address: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
Tel: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
#s mobile number is last shown as: xxxxxxxxxxx
#Area Social Worker: xxxxxxxxxxx Tel: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Concerns around 
• Examples............................
• Associating with other CSE victims, CSE offenders.
• Drug / alcohol use?
• Unsupportive family engaged in criminality.
• Allegations of # engaging in sex for cash.
• Last MFH June 14. 20 MFH in total.

Action to be taken when # is reported missing
• Search home address for evidence of her whereabouts, include mobile phones, SIM cards, notes, diaries.
• Check custody/PNC
• Check intelligence page on OPUS for recent intelligence
• Check local hospitals for recent admissions
• Circulate obs
• Visit the following nominal’s and search addresses
  • xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx historically found / frequents
  • xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx addresses to search based on intel / safe and well inf.
• Inform PROTECT team and review PIP
• If out of hours inform Social Care EDI 0151 277 1650
• Inform CIV, BTP, appropriate travel networks.  xxxxxxx specify xxxxx
• Ensure both INPT’s are aware of missing status
• Consider review of cctv at the location of the last sighting.
• Consider arrests on suspicion of abduction.

Action to be taken when # is found:
• Ensure the MFH intelligence has been reviewed for current intelligence and associations.
• Ensure all associations and telephone numbers when conducting enquiries are added to FIS i.e. numbers found in a bedroom or names mentioned by friends/family etc.
• Ensure you are aware of the child’s status, is he/she under the care of the local authority, if so which type of care order as this makes a difference to potential offences committed by perpetrators of CSE.
• When a child is located – consider them to be a potential crime scene unless proven otherwise, even if a child does not disclose offences (A child who is a victim of CSE and grooming is unlikely to disclose to a police officer where they have been or who with) - if you have a body camera record all actions
• Seize the child’s phone – We can do this with the consent of the parent/adult or social workers consent if they have parental responsibility. [These can have numbers/text that are relevant to i/d offenders and photos/videos which can be Geo located] Protect will submit to mobile phone submissions.
• If possible and the child has been away consider attempting to seize the child’s lower clothing – This is best done by a parent or care worker who can retrieve underwear/jeans/trousers/skirts from washing baskets etc. – Protect will continue with potential forensic submissions for semen etc.
• Ask the child if there is anything that has happened to them that they didn’t want to happen – give them the opportunity to make a disclosure. If they do is a TALON officer required.
• If suspects present when found – Even without a disclosure always consider arrest for Abduction If child under 16yrs – Take a child from care if on a full care order/interim care order and under 18yrs, Sexual offences – Sexual Activity with a child – This includes kissing!, Incite child to engage in Prostitution pornography – the child does not need to receive money for this offence so is committed just a suspicion they have engaged in a sexual act with an adult in return for drugs/alcohol etc. and in relation to pornography and indecent image of the child is recorded. Trafficking in the UK , have they been driven to a hotel/travel lodge by someone for the suspected purpose of engaging in any sexual offence 2003?. Grooming, have they been contacted via Facebook or BBM more than twice and asked to meet to engage in sexual activity? If suspects are present at an address consider the above and have the scene searched for evidence to support the above offences and seize, have the scene photographed, i.e. alcohol bottles, drug paraphernalia, underwear
• This is not an exhaustive list and a full review of the circumstances should be undertaken of each missing report.

ANY INTELLIGENCE RELATING TO THIS NOMINAL SHOULD BE ATTACHED TO.........
APPENDIX 4

FORM 36 REPORT OF MISSING / FOUND PERSON

HIGH RISK MISSING PERSON
MEDIUM RISK MISSING PERSON
LOW RISK MISSING PERSON
MISSING CHILD or YOUTH (Under 18 Years). LOOKED AFTER BY LOCAL AUTHORITY
MISSING CHILD or YOUTH (Under 18 Years)
FOUND ADULT
FOUND CHILD
FOUND BODY
ABSCONDER FROM LOCAL AUTHORITY CARE
ABSCONDER FROM HOSPITAL (Record here Mental Health Act, Section…………….. and Expiry date for Mental Health Act 1983 Order …………………………

Date of Initial Report
Incident No.
Reporting Officer
Force / Station Code
Case Reference No.

SECTION 1 IDENTITY / DESCRIPTION DETAILS (Use BLOCK capitals)
Surname……………………………………………………………………………………………………
Forename(s)………………………………………………………………………………………………
Date of Birth ……………………………………………………………………………………………
Sender …………………………………………………………………………………………………

School/Occupation……………………………………………………………………………………

SECTION 2 PERSONAL DETAILS

Place of Birth………………………………………………………………………………………………
Nationality………………………………………………………………………………………………
Other Name(s) Used……………………………………………………………………………………
Maiden Name…………………………………………………………………………………………
Section 3  PERSONAL DETAILS

Ethnic Appearance:
0. Unknown

Features:
Height: .........................
Marks / Scars / Tattoos / Body Piercings (visible when clothed).................................
Marks / Scars / Tattoos / Body Piercings (normally concealed beneath clothing)...........
Complexion.................................................................
Build..............................................................................
Sideburns.................................................................
Colour of Eyes...............................................................  
Eyesight Correction (where applicable)
Description of Spectacles
Contact Lenses Worn : YES / NO
Beard .............................................................................
Moustache......................................................................
Peculiarities (Limp, Stammer, Other Disabilities)

Hair:
Length .............................................................................
Colour(s) ...........................................................................
Hair Style (Description) .......................................................
SECTION 4  CLOTHING
Shirt / Sweater ..................................................................................................................
Trousers ............................................................................................................................... 
Outer Wear ............................................................................................................................
Underwear...............................................................................................................................
Head Wear ............................................................................................................................
Gloves .................................................................................................................................
Other Clothing......................................................................................................................
Footwear ............................................................................................................................... 

SECTION 5  JEWELLERY
Pierced Ears: YES / NO
Ear Rings (Description) .......................................................................................................
Other Body-piercing Jewellery (Description)........................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................
Watch (es) ............................................................................................................................
Bracelet(s) .............................................................................................................................
Rings ....................................................................................................................................... 
Necklace(s) ...........................................................................................................................
Other ....................................................................................................................................... 

SECTION 6  CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH MISSING
Last Seen: Time.....................................................................................................................
Date ....................................................................................................................................... 
Where? .................................................................................................................................
By? .........................................................................................................................................
Who talked with misper? .....................................................................................................
What was discussed? ...........................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................
Misper seen going which way? .............................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................
Reason for leaving? .............................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................
SECTION 7 OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION

Medical Information:
Doctor .................................................................
Address ..............................................................
Telephone No......................................................
Dentist ............................................................... 
Address ..............................................................
Telephone Number .............................................

Finance:
Money in possession of misper ..................................................
Bank 1 Telephone No ..............................................
Account Number ................................................
Bank 2 Telephone No ..............................................
Account Number ................................................

Credit Cards:
Company 1 ...........................................................
Account Number ................................................ Telephone Number ................................
Company 2 ...........................................................
Account Number ................................................ Telephone Number ................................

Vehicle Access by misper:
Make ........................................................... Model ........................................
VRM ............................................................
Colour ............................................................

Attitude (confident/confused, etc.) .................................................................
Misper complaining of anything? .................................................................
Other comments concerning misper ...........................................................
General Health ..................................................................................................
Factors for Concern (Medication, Drugs, Dressed, Suicidal, Violent, etc) ....
Consequences of missed medication ............................................................

Other distinguishing features .................................................................

Location Now .............................................................................................

SECTION 8 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
(HABITS / PLACES FREQUENTED, ETC)

.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................

SECTION 9

Surname ...........................................................................................................
Forename ..........................................................................................................
Telephone Nos: Home .....................................................................................
Work ..................................................
Mobile....................................................Other ......................................................
Relationship ..............................................................................................
Next of Kin .................................................................................................
Contact: Address / telephone ........................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
Relationship ..............................................................................................
Person to Notify when missing person found ................................................
.....................................................................................................................

Publicity: The informant should be informed of the possible use of the media in assisting in attempt to trace the missing person.

National Missing Persons Helpline Pamphlet issued: YES / NO
SECTION 10  
CONSENT TO ACCESS RECORDS

I consent to the Cheshire Constabulary, in investigating the disappearance of the person named in this report, to make any necessary enquiries with the named doctor / dentist / educational establishment / workplace / financial or other agency, or their representative, and examine, take, copy and retain any material considered relevant to the enquiry:  YES / NO

Date ..............................................................................................................................................

Name ...........................................................................................................................................

Signature ....................................................................................................................................... 

Relationship to misper ....................................................................................................................
