

## **East Midlands Protocol for Missing Children**

The purpose of this protocol is to set out how Local Authorities in the East Midland region will work together to ensure that children who go missing from care receive the support that they are entitled to and that information is shared appropriately between the authorities

Each authority has its own arrangements for responding to missing children, including the provision of return interviews. This protocol is focused solely on cross-border working arrangements where a child is placed by one authority (the placing authority) in another authority area (the host authority).

This protocol complements the East Midlands Looked After Children Notification protocol that was developed in 2015. To further strengthen the arrangements set out in that protocol it has been agreed that the Placing Authority will notify the Host Authority's Missing Children lead when they are placing a child who is at risk of going missing and/or child sexual exploitation. The Placing Authority will provide the Host Authority's Missing Lead with a copy of the relevant risk assessments and a recent photograph of the young person. This information will be shared prior to the young person being placed or within 24 hours of the placement being made.

When a child who has been placed in another authority goes missing, the Host authority's 'Missing from Care and Home' protocol should be followed by the carers and other professionals in that Host authority area. The only exception to this is where there is a discrepancy between the Host Authority and Placing Authority in terms of the trigger point for a return interview, lower threshold will always be applied, i.e. some authorities do not undertake return interviews with young people categorised as being absent/missing (no apparent risk) whilst others do. What this means in practice is that if a Placing Authority that would not ordinarily undertake a return interview for a young person categorised as absent/missing (no apparent risk) in an authority area that does, the placing authority will commit to undertaking return interviews for young people falling into this category. The reverse expectation would also be true, which will require the Host authority to share information with a placing authority about all children reported missing/absent.

A notification process for Absent and Missing from placement episodes should be in place between Placing and Host local authorities in each of the East Midland authority areas. This should include the fact that the foster carer or the manager of the children's home is responsible for informing the local Police, the child's social worker, The Missing Children Office in the placing authority and the person(s) holding parental responsibility (PR) - unless the latter is inconsistent with the child's welfare. They should also report to the local Police when the child has returned, and inform the child's social worker and Missing Children Officer in the Placing Authority

who should share this information with the child's Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).

Responsibility for the Return Interview rests with the Placing Authority who will work closely with the Host Authority. Where a child is identified as being at risk of significant harm the safeguarding children procedures in the Host Authority will be followed. The placing authority will share information, including a copy of the return interview, with the host authority. Where this does not happen this will be escalated as set out below.

Some Authorities in the region offer a return interview service to Placing Authorities, which is available either free or at a cost. Should a Placing authority wish to take advantage of this then they should liaise with the **Missing** Children Lead in the Host Authority.

### Escalation

Where the Missing Children Service in the Host Authority does not receive an update in relation to a return interview within 10 days of the child returning to placement they will liaise with their counter-part in the Placing Authority.

If the return interview, or an update regarding this, is still not received within 5 days this will be escalated to the manager of the Host Authority's Missing Children team, who will liaise with their counter-part in the placing authority.

Where the return interview or an update remains outstanding after a further 5 days then this will be further escalated to the Head of Service/equivalent in the Host Authority who will liaise with their counter-part in the Placing Authority. By this point there may be little purpose in conducting a return interview and the Head of Service will therefore agree with their counter-part whether a return interview will be undertaken or, if no longer appropriate, what further action will be taken to safeguard the child and ensure that any future missing episodes trigger a prompt return interview.

### Children who go missing frequently, or are identified as particularly vulnerable

Where a child placed in a host authority by another Local Authority has gone Missing 3 times in a 90 day period a multi-agency meeting should be convened by the Placing Authority. The Host Authority should be invited to this meeting. Attendance by the Host Authority may not always be necessary but the Missing Children Service in the Host Authority should always receive the minutes of such meetings. Where the minutes are not received this will be escalated as described above.

Where missing episodes continue to escalate in either frequency or seriousness the Head of Service in the Host Authority will liaise with their Counter- part in the Placing Authority to ensure that all appropriate measures are in place for

the future care and safety of that child. Formal written details will be required so that the child's record can be updated. If the concerns continue this will be escalated to Director level and the host Director will draft a letter and send this to the placing authority's Director of Childrens Services

### Analysis

Each Host Authority will collate information about the number of cases where no Return Interview was completed by each of the other East Midlands authorities. This information will be shared at the regional tier 3 Safeguarding leads meeting twice yearly in order to promote improved performance.