

Children Missing from Home and Care Policy and Protocol

This document updates the Policy and Protocol completed in 2020

Lead: Luwam Sebhatu	Date Created: 8 th December 2021	Date updated: 15 th April 2024	Review due Date: 15 th April 2026
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1. Introduction

This Policy and combined Mosaic Guidance is intended to support workers in Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion about:

- A child at risk of running away or going missing
- A child running away and going missing from home or care

For full detailed multiagency procedures, please see the London Child Protection Procedures, PART B3: Safeguarding Children Practice Guidance, Children Missing from Home, Care and Education:

https://www.londoncp.co.uk/B_contents.html

For a brief overview of the process outlined in the London Child Protection procedures click here to find [Appendix 1 – Flowchart](#)

2. Principles

The following principles should be adopted by all workers when responding to children who are at risk of running away or go missing:

- Children running away and going missing from care, home and education is a key safeguarding issue, regardless of the age of the child.
- Return home interviews are a valuable source of information about why children go missing and must inform risk assessments and safety planning to prevent further missing episodes
- Child Protection Procedures will be initiated whenever there are concerns that a child who is missing may be at risk of significant harm

3. Definitions

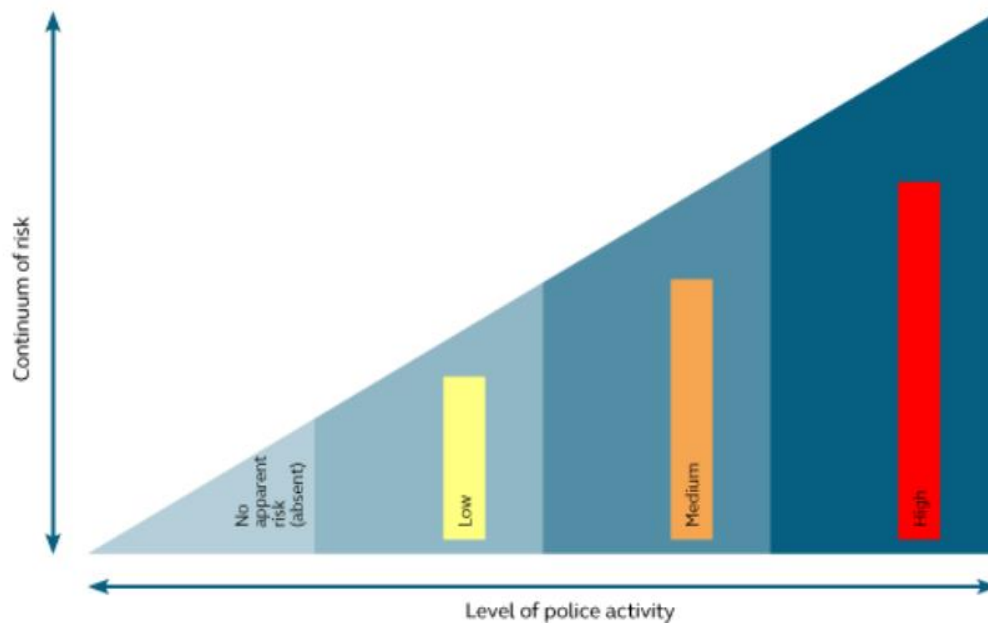
3.1 Missing definition

As of June 2020 the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) category of an 'Absent' person ended as an alternative to Missing.

Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until found, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed.

All reports of missing people sit within a continuum of risk from 'no apparent risk (absent)' through to high-risk cases that require immediate, intensive action.

Missing definition



3.2 High Risk

Merton's definition of High risk includes the following circumstances:

- Any child who is 12 years old or younger whose whereabouts are unknown.
- Any child deemed vulnerable due to a special educational need (such as learning and/or physical disabilities, mental, emotional or physical health problems).
- Any child/ young person who is a Child in Care
- Any child or young person who is subject to a Child Protection Plan or is considered as a Child in Need with a number of 'push or pull factors' (see [Appendix 2](#))
- Any child/young person where there are concerns relating to exploitation.
- Any child/ young person who is abducted from care and/or where there may be concerns in relation to possible radicalisation.

Asylum seeking children and young people

There are complex issues facing Asylum Seeking children. Agencies must be alert to the fact that some children are trafficked into, within and out of the UK. They are abused and/or exploited for commercial gain, including through sex, for domestic servitude and other reasons.

The London Child Protection Procedures provide further guidance relating to this group of children and young people: ***The response to an Asylum Seeking child going missing should be exactly the same as for all other children, whether they are looked after or living in the community***

4. Prevention and Planning for Children in Care

Research shows that children in care are over-represented in the cohort of children who go missing. Social workers, other professionals and carers should keep up to date with research on the reasons

why children are likely to go missing. This may help prevent missing incidents. See [Appendix 2](#) for a summary of “push” and “pull” factors.

As outlined in the London Child Protection procedures, local authorities have a duty to place a child in care in the most appropriate placement to safeguard the child and minimise the risk of the child running away. Remember:

- The Care Plan – should include strategies to avoid unauthorised absences and/or a child going missing. It should also include strategies to reduce the duration and risks associated if the child does have unauthorised absences/go missing;
- The Placement Plan – should include strategies for preventing the child from taking unauthorised absences/going missing;
- A pre-incident risk assessment ([Appendix 4](#)) should be completed for all children where there is concern that they may run away. Distance from home, family and friends should be considered as a risk factor;
- Provide the child with advice about an independent advocate and take the child's views in to account;
- Statutory reviews should consider any absences and revise strategies to prevent repeat absences and/or missing incidents, and the care plan should be revised as needed.

The likelihood of children going missing can be reduced by improving the quality of care they receive, in particular:

- Reducing the use of placements that do not meet the child's needs, or inappropriate use of Section 20 where family are known to be a danger to the child and known to interfere in the placement.
- Use of small children's homes, which have strong leadership, proper delegation of authority and responsibility and a strong, positive staff culture.
- Positive attention given to educational progress as non-attendance at school and going missing are mutually reinforcing.
- Children/ young people should have regular access to a trusted adult outside of the placement and access to a user-friendly complaints procedure.
- Access to Independent Advocacy Services and/or Independent Visiting Services for children who are in care. Jigsaw 4U provide this service. Contact details are in [Appendix 3](#)

4.1 Pre-incident Risk Assessment

Best practice would be to have a pre-incident risk assessment completed for all children in care, which can also assist in identifying the factors that increase vulnerability if they go missing. The template can be found in [Appendix 4](#).

The Pre-Incident Risk assessment should be completed within one week of the child becoming cared for where the child is aged 12 years or more and there is an identified risk of going missing. The factors that might increase the risk of going missing from home or care could be (also refer to the Contextual Harm Risk Matrix guidance):

- Previous missing episodes
- Coming home late (after agreed curfew) frequently
- Regularly truant from school
- Saying they want to move or want a different type of placement
- Arguments with the foster carers or staff in the placement
- Changes in behaviour (excessive texts, secretive, change in mood)

- Has stopped letting the foster carer / staff in the placement know where they are when they go out or returning late
- Doesn't answer calls or turns phone off when out late

The key elements of the assessment should consider:

- Previous patterns of going missing or risks associated with being missing (use information from previous return home interviews).
- Contact names, addresses and telephone numbers of the places where the child/young person may go or return to.
- The child's view on the current placement/ stability of their relationships.
- The level of supervision/support available to the child/young person.
- The views of those with parental responsibility on what action should be taken if the child/young person goes missing or regularly returns home late.
- Consideration for the child's age, maturity and learning needs.
- The level of risk presented if the child/young person goes missing
- Any medical needs that may be impacted if they go missing.
- Consideration of any external influences.

Appropriate permission should be obtained from the child or parent for photographs.

It is the responsibility of the child's Social Worker to ensure that the Pre-incident Risk Assessment is completed – with a case note to confirm it has been uploaded to the child's record. It should be reviewed for each placement and shared with the foster carer / residential manager. The child / young person should be involved in discussions and planning about what actions will be taken if they go missing. Best practice would be to involve the child / young person in clear safety planning about the 'push' and 'pull' factors identified and how these can be supported, addressed or met in a safer way.

For high risk young people with repeat missing episodes, Police will request a Trigger pack ([Appendix 5](#)). This has some similar demographic information to the pre-incident risk assessment and is used by Police to understand what has been the agreed actions for when a young person is reported missing and what should occur if the young person is found (this should be based on strategy discussion actions).

5. Responding to an Incident

Response Steps:

1. **Notify the Police if not yet reported. Send Police Trigger Pack if requested**
2. **Record the 'Notification of Missing Child or Young Person' in Mosaic**
3. **Record and complete the 'Missing Child - Senior Leadership Alert' in Mosaic if required**
4. **If the Child is missing from care, record and complete the 'Missing Child - Notification to IRO' in Mosaic**
5. **Arrange Strategy Meetings as appropriate**

5.1 Notifying the Police if not yet reported

In most cases a parent or carer will contact the police if they are concerned about a child who has not returned as expected or there are worries about where the child is and/or who they are with.

For a child allocated to Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion the allocated worker must make sure the report has been made and if required make it themselves.

Call 101 – or 999 in an emergency.

The person notifying police of a missing child or young person should try to provide the following minimum information:

- A description of the child (name, date of birth, physical appearance).
- When the child was last seen – where and with who.
- Description of the child including their clothing
- Circumstances of going missing – e.g. incidents that may have triggered them running away

If the pre-incident assessment is not available also provide:

- Family / Home addresses
- Known acquaintances – and contact details if available
- Previous history of absenteeism and circumstances of where found.
- Any factors that increase the risk to the child
 - age / maturity / learning needs
 - contextual harm risks
 - substance misuse / mental health needs
 - medical needs (any medication require)
- The name and address of the child's GP and Dentist, if possible

Please be aware that the Police will want to search the address at which the missing child was last seen, this should be negotiated so there is minimum disruption to the child's family home/residential unit/foster carer's home.

5.1.1 Who notifies in different circumstances

a) Who notifies and responds for Children missing from home?

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

Parents/carers are expected to undertake a number of actions to try and locate a child who is missing before reporting them to the Police as long as it is safe to do so. These actions include

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

It is expected that the parent/carer will inform the Police without delay. When referring to the Police any relevant information that might help to find or support the child should be shared.

b) Who notifies and responds for children on a Child in Need or Child Protection Plan?

The parent/s should notify the police immediately. The parents should then contact the child/young person's social worker or Out of Hours Service. If the parents have not contacted Police and/or Out of Hours Service then the social worker should consider their duty to phone the police and address the parent's lack of action as needed.

Where a child with a Protection Plan has gone missing with/without their family, Children's Social Cares must implement the London Notification of Missing Children/Persons Procedure sending out a national alert to all other local authorities.

c) Who notifies and responds if a child in care goes missing

Whoever discovers that a child is absent without permission from a residential unit or foster home, should immediately inform the Residential Unit Manager/Shift Leader/Supervising Social Worker on duty.

Foster carers or residential staff must (as far as is practicable and as staffing levels will allow), do all that a reasonable parent would do to locate and ensure the safe return of the child/ young person. They should telephone the child, their friends or relatives to ascertain the child/ young person's location collect the child/ young person or negotiate some alternative arrangements. Before making these arrangements, the carer may wish to discuss the situation with the young person's social worker/ Out of Hours Service.

If the carer believes the child/ young person is at risk, or the carer feels that they are unable to make an informed judgment in relation to this (for example if the child is new to the placement, or if the staff on duty do not know the child well enough) they must inform the child's social worker/ team leader/Out of Hours Service. The Pre-Incident risk assessment should be used to inform this process ([Appendix 4](#)).

During their absence circumstances may change and the Social Worker/Out of Hours Service and the Residential Unit Staff/Foster Carer need to be in a position to respond accordingly. The child's parents must be kept informed.

If it is decided the child is missing, then the foster carer / residential unit managers should notify the Police and Out of Hours Service.

The allocated social worker in consultation with the residential unit Manager/Shift Leader/Foster Carer should review the Pre-Incident risk assessment and send this to Police.

The allocated social worker should alert the Independent Reviewing Officer when a child or young person is reported as missing from their placement. The allocated social worker must complete the Senior Leadership Alert ([5.3 Senior Leadership Alert](#)).

If there are specific issues of safety or public order difficulties involved in returning the child, then action should be agreed between the Police, the Residential Unit Staff/Foster Carer and the Social Worker/ Out of Hours Service. If the local authority think they know where a child in care is, they should actively consider approaching the courts for a Recovery Order.

Please see the London Child Protection procedures for who notifies for children missing from education or an activity.

5.2 Recording in Mosaic

Please refer to the Recording Missing Children Training Guidance document for further information.

5.3 Senior Leadership Alert

If the child is open to Children's Social Care and missing then the Senior Leadership Alert ([Appendix 6](#)) is to be completed.

This should be completed **within 24 hours** of a child being confirmed **missing** and sent to the relevant Head of Service by the social worker and team manager. If a child is missing for 48 hours or longer, the Senior Leadership Alert must be completed and sent to the Director by the relevant Head of Service.

The Senior Leadership Alert is an internal process within Children's Social Care, Youth Inclusion and Education. In specific situations, the process could activate other events such as Rapid Reviews led by Merton Safeguarding Children's Partnership <https://www.mertonscp.org.uk/> and statutory notifications external to the Council.

Within the Senior Leadership process, the Director (Children's Social Care & Youth Inclusion / and or Education) will take the decision as to what will be escalated to the Director of Children's Services or the Chief Executive in the Director's absence: this will be notified on a case-by-case basis following review of the concerns raised. Where there is a potential media interest, the Assistant Director will take the decision, in conjunction with the Director of Children's Services, to provide an internal briefing note for council members to be informed.

The child's school should always be informed as they may have valuable information, which would assist in establishing his/her whereabouts. Any such information should immediately be given to the Police.

In cases where new information becomes available and/or the child remains missing for a protracted period, the risks should be reassessed and the notification updated.

The Pre-Incident Risk Assessment ([Appendix 4](#)) and/or Police Trigger Pack ([Appendix 5](#)) should also be updated after every occasion a child is 'missing' and there is a change in their needs or pattern of behaviour.

5.4 Strategy Meetings

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

- Where children / young people are missing for more than 48 hours.
- Where the child is aged under 12
- Where there are significantly high and complex risks
- As directed by the C&F HUB
- Where young people persistently go missing and persistently fail to take part in the RHI process
- Where there is reason to believe the parents are not acting accordingly – follow usual safeguarding procedure
- Where children have a Child Protection Plan or who are subject to a Section 47 enquiry
- Review strategy meetings should be held fortnightly (at minimum) when a child is missing for 5 days or longer

If the Police or other referring agency believes that the circumstances surrounding the child's missing episode put the child at risk of significant harm, then they should discuss these concerns with C&F HUB or with the child's social worker where appropriate.

Such situations might include:

- If the parents do not seem worried and have not reported their child missing to the Police.
- Where a child under five years has been missing from home, Police and other practitioners should consider whether the level of supervision of the child is adequate.
- Where a child under ten years has been missing from home and there is reason to believe parental issues (e.g. substance abuse, domestic violence) may have been a factor.
- Repeated (more than three within 28 days) missing from home episodes, especially where there appears to be a lack of appropriate parental response.
- Where a child or young person is vulnerable (e.g. has a learning disability, physical disability, history of self-harm, has a medical condition that makes them vulnerable).
- Where a child runs away to be at an address or with adults who give cause for concern.
- Where there are concerns about possible exploitation

The strategy meeting must take place as soon as possible and **within no more than three working days** of the missing event and should involve representatives from all relevant agencies (police and health), including education services.

Where the child has a Child Protection Plan officers from Child Abuse Investigation Team and the Police Missing Person Unit Should be invited¹.

The Strategy Meeting must consider the following:

- Making further attempts to contact the child/young person's known relatives, friends, regular places of visit etc. Consideration should be given to writing to relatives and friends about the Department's concerns and the expectation that the relatives/friends will inform the Department should they obtain any relevant information.
- Involving the school as they may have valuable information, which would help in establishing his/her whereabouts and will need know about decisions regarding what to do when they return. Partner agencies should receive information from each other on the basis of their need to know and in order to take action to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child.
- Writing to other local authorities and local agencies with the information about the missing child/young person.
- Use of publicity². This will require appropriate agreement with the Director who will assess the individual case circumstances. The Council's press office and the Police will also need to be consulted. The child's parents must be informed prior to a press release being made and consent should be received from them and/or those with parental responsibility. Legal Services should be consulted with if there are any issues regarding obtaining consent.
- Contacting the Missing Person's Helpline. This group provides a specialist service to Children's Social Services when any of their children in care go missing, including asylum seeking children. This working arrangement with local authorities forms the basis of an information sharing agreement with Social Services.
- Seeking a Recovery Order and deciding how the order should be exercised i.e. should there be a joint visit with police and Social Care staff.

¹ See the London Child Protection Procedures, Sections 8-9

² Social workers should be aware that it is an offence for a person to publish material which is intended to, or is likely to identify a child as being involved in court proceedings under the Children Act 1989. However, the court can give leave for this restriction to be waived if the child/young person's welfare requires it.

- Notifying national authorities and agencies, such as Department for Work and Pensions and Child Benefit agencies
- Appropriate legal interventions if there is any suspicion that the child may have been removed from UK jurisdiction.
- Whether a S47 investigation should be completed (including completion of a Child and Family Assessment).
- Agree supports to be offered to the family. During the missing episode support will be offered by the Police, CEOP and Children's Social Care. On return Catch 22 will provide support to the family.
- Whether a further strategy meeting should be called before the child/ young person has been missing for 7 days.

The decisions of the strategy meeting and the timescales must be clearly recorded within the strategy record.

Further strategy meetings can be held whenever the professionals involved wish to hold one, and must take place at a minimum, once per month if the child is missing for an extended period.

All agencies should note their discussions, decisions, actions taken and messages received/given. Residential Unit Staff and Foster Carers should record the information in the daily log/diary, with a duplicate entry for the child's file (e.g. photocopies).

Police actions about their response at different levels of risk can be found on the College of Policing website.

Strategy Meetings where the child is missing for more than 28 days

Whenever a child is missing for more than 28 days, Children's Social Care should arrange regular review strategy meetings.

All Police missing person's files will remain 'live' until the child is located and returned to their home, or whose circumstances are considered appropriate

For Children in care or those known to Children's Social Care, while the child remains absent, his/her allocation and Missing work-step should be identified as 'open' on the Children's Social care record by the allocated social worker.

Children should not be de-accommodated whilst missing unless this is an agreed plan endorsed by the Director.

The Leadership Alert should be updated after each strategy meeting and outline what measures require authorisation to locate the child (e.g. media coverage).

6 Locating the Child and their Return

Where agencies meet with a child or young person who is known to be 'missing' information should be passed to the police as to the location of the child. The child should be informed of this.

6.1 Planning the Return when the Child is Located

If a child in care is missing the Police and parents, Social Worker and Residential Unit Staff/Foster Carer should begin contingency planning for when the child is located. Plans should include:

- Will the child return to the placement/home address or are they safe in the location where they are found?
- If the child is to return, how will s/he be transported to their placement/home address?
- Where and when will the police conduct the safe and well check?
- **Confirm who will conduct the Return Home Interview** when s/he is located/returned and liaise with that person to do so.

Normally the Residential Unit Staff/Foster Carer or Social Worker/Emergency Duty Team out of hours will make arrangements for the transportation of a child to his/her placement/home address.

The Police are not given the power to use force to take children into Police Protection. There will be occasions when a child is found in a location that may be considered unsuitable, but where there would be no legal grounds for taking them into police protection or where to do so would be unsustainable. Children's Social Services will need to liaise with the Police to discuss what steps may be necessary in order to safeguard the child's welfare.

The child's parents/carers and all agencies informed of the missing episode should be advised of the child's return without delay. For children allocated to Children's Social Care this should be the allocated social worker.

6.2 Police Safe and Well Check

Safe and well checks are conducted by police officers. The Police will establish that the child is safe and well by asking a brief series of questions to establish where the child was while missing, what they did and who they were with. If the child makes an allegation of crime that occurred whilst they were missing or that contributed to him/her running away, the Police will record this allegation and take appropriate action.

Safe and Well Check/Prevention interviews are essential if the police, along with partners, are to enable problem solving in cases of missing person. They are also an essential part of the return process to recognise vulnerability and criminality that missing children may have been exposed to, and to be in a position to respond accordingly.

The circumstances of each low and medium risk case will dictate the methodology of the Police Safe and Well check/Prevention interview.

Within **24 hours** of police locating the missing child or being notified of their return, the police will either:

1. Liaise via telephone with the parent/carer/medical professional in charge of the child and confirm wellbeing (no deployment, follow aide-memoire, Merlin updated)
2. Liaise directly via telephone/video call with child and confirm wellbeing (no deployment, follow aide-memoire, Merlin updated)
3. Deploy and conduct formal face-to-face prevention interview (follow aide memoire, Merlin updated)

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

The Police Missing Person Unit will notify the C&F HUB of all young people who have received a police safe and well-check.

6.3 Independent Return Home Interviews (RHIs)

Independent Return Interviews should be offered to all children who have been reported missing and returned home or back to their placement and should be offered within 24 hours of their return. The RHI should take place within 72 hours of their return and be held in a neutral place where the child feels safe and should be independent of the child's family, placement or care.

The interview is an opportunity to identify and understand any risks and issues experienced by the child. Providing children with an opportunity to talk is key to safeguarding them. The interview should explore the push and pull factors for the missing episode in addition to the identification of risk factors for the child. The interview should:

- identify and deal with any harm the child has suffered – including harm that might not have already been disclosed as part of the 'safe and well check' – either before they ran away or while missing;
- understand and try to address the reasons why the child stayed away or went missing;
- help the child feel safe and understand that they have options to prevent repeat instances of them running away or going missing;
- provide them with information on how to stay safe if they decide to run away or go missing again, including helpline numbers.

6.4 Who carries out the Return Home Interview

When a child is allocated to a social worker, the carer and social worker should consider the most appropriate person to conduct the Independent Return Home Interview. The child should be asked who they wish to speak to. This could be a social worker other than the child's social worker, a teacher, a school nurse, Youth Justice Worker, a voluntary sector practitioner or a police officer whom the child knows and trusts.

In most cases the independent person will be a representative from Merton's commissioned Risk and Resilience Service delivered by Catch22. They can deliver interviews with young people living at home in Merton and those placed within an hour's travel distance of Merton. They can also offer telephone interviews for children and young people placed further afield, if appropriate. If an in-person interview is required for children placed further away Catch22 can attempt to locate a missing person service that the social work team can commission.

Catch22 does not offer RHIs for young people placed in Merton by other London Boroughs. This is the responsibility of the placing authority. RHIs can, however, be purchased from Catch22 for these young people.

The Police Missing Person Unit will notify Catch22 of all young people who have received a police safe and well-check in order for Catch22 to contact the young person and arrange a return home interview. The Police Missing Person Unit may not always be informed of a young person's return if they are in care and placed far out of borough. Therefore, the social worker should notify Catch22 of the imminent potential for a Return Home Interview and, once Catch22 receives the Police PAC number, they can activate the process.

Where it has been agreed that the interview will be carried out by an agency other than Catch22 it is the allocated social worker's responsibility to inform Catch22 they will not be required to conduct the RHI.

Catch22 prioritises Return Home Interviews on receipt of referral using the following criteria:

RED: Serious Risk. Where a child is in care, has a CP plan, has been previously known to social care or where a potential safeguarding risk is identified, e.g. serious injury to the child, aged 13 or under or exploitation risk.

AMBER: High Risk. There are significant concerns. Requires more information

GREEN: Medium Risk. There are concerns regarding child's wellbeing but there appears to be no immediate risk of harm.

BLUE: Low Risk. There is no immediate or potential safeguarding concern. Appears to be a 'one off'

6.5 Information obtained during RHI and support beyond

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

Copies of the interview are upload onto Mosaic and reviewed by appropriate social worker (where they have one). The CSF contextual team will be responsible for recording RHIs where the young person does not have a Social Worker. The allocated social worker is responsible for ensuring the interview is recorded in the child's electronic file within 48 hours of the interview and **the pre-incident risk assessment form and/or Police Trigger pack updated accordingly.**

Catch22 are also commissioned to offer a period of support beyond the RHI for those at high risk of repeat episodes. Support packages are evidence based, time limited and goal oriented. The Risk and Resilience Service is an integrated service working with young people at risk of exploitation, presenting with substance misuse concerns or contextual safeguarding. Following missing episodes a young person can be engaged in a holistic package of support, which may include:

- Development of strategies aimed to reduce risk or harm, such as reducing association with risky peers / adults, prevention of substance misuse, sexual health strategies.
- Practical and emotional support (including mediation) with young people and their families.
- Support to families/parents to enable them to understand why the child has run away, identification of CSE and CCE risks and prevention strategies.
- Promoting and linking young people with positive activities within local community

6.6 Non-engagement in Return Home Interview process

Working with the RHI process is voluntary; however, young people who persistently go missing, whether missing from home or care, and do not take part in RHIs may also be at high risk. A strategy meeting should always be considered for young people persistently not taking part in RHIs. This may be organised by the social worker or by HUB tasked to conduct RHIs where the young person is not involved in social care. Non-engagement in RHIs should be reported to C&F HUB.

6.7 Recording the Return Home Interview (RHI) in Mosaic

Please refer to the Recording Missing Children Training Guidance document for further information.

7 Strategic Oversight and Governance

7.1 Lead persons responsible for this procedure

- Children's Social Care – Head of Adolescent and Safeguarding Services
- Metropolitan Police – Detective Chief Inspector for Safeguarding, SWBCU
- Catch 22 Risk and Resilience Service – Service Manager

The Head of Service for the respective service areas hold responsibility for children Missing within their teams. The weekly Missing meeting sits under the Head of Service for Adolescent and Safeguarding Service who holds strategic oversight of children Missing via Strategic MACE panel. Reports providing updates on patterns, themes and trends discussed in Strategic MACE are provided to the Promote and Protect Young People Subgroup of the Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership.

Children's residential units should supply monthly information to the Commission for Social Care Inspection about children who have gone missing.

Weekly interagency meetings monitor the immediate exchange of information regarding missing young people and the implementation of this policy and corresponding protocol.

7.2 Weekly Missing Meeting

Prior to missing meeting data filter meeting takes place weekly to review CYP who have gone missing and agreed agenda for week based on risk. The Weekly meeting, chaired by head of Service or service manager. The purpose is to review all children and young people reported missing in the previous 7 days and to consider ongoing plans for high-risk young people who have returned.

Representatives of the Police Missing Person's Unit, Catch22, Contextual Safeguarding Team, Health lead, Education Inclusion, Insights and Reviewing Service Manager and allocated social workers / team managers attend the meeting.

The main aims of the weekly missing meeting are to:

- Review the last week of missing reports to share intelligence and information relating to individual missing children/young people.
- Establish responsibility for conducting RHIs where there are ambiguities (such as a number of multi-agency professionals involved).
- Identify and discuss high priority cases and/or young people with a high number of missing episodes especially those who frequently do not engage in RHIs.
- Generate intelligence for investigations, identify any trends or problem locations, and ensure they are dealt with.
- To provide advice and guidance to professionals in relation to cases where children/young people are reported as missing or absent.
- To identify any training needs of professionals and inform the PPYP sub-group.

The weekly missing meeting is intended to act as a safety network to ensure all missing young people are being worked with appropriately. **Workers should not wait for the weekly missing meeting to either report a child as missing or to arrange a strategy meeting.** Further information regarding this meeting is contained within the weekly Missing Meeting terms of reference.

The weekly Missing Meeting will not duplicate the work undertaken by the MACE Panel, which

considers young people who are at risk of Exploitation and/or Serious Youth Violence and have been missing.

The Service Manager / chair of Missing Meeting will agree high priority cases that require a referral into MACE panel. These will be children and young people where specific vulnerability or risk is identified (i.e. age, learning disability, several missing episodes); this will include those placed in Merton by other local authorities. The social worker will be asked to attend the panel, present the care plan, and risk assessment.

7.3 Young people placed in other boroughs and looked after by Merton

The C&F HUB will be notified of young people looked after by Merton and placed out of borough who have gone missing and these will be included in the weekly meeting for review. However, Social workers and team managers should ensure all instances are included, including Out of Hours reports, and were not alerted to C&F HUB, in the weekly meeting.

7.4 Young people placed in Merton by other boroughs

The weekly missing reports will include young people placed in Merton by other local authorities and who have been reported missing. The meeting will ensure that information has been provided to the placing authority social care department.

If a placement provision has several high-risk young people placed with them who are going missing, Catch22 or the Contextual Safeguarding manager can offer support to the care provider.

If a young person placed in Merton by another authority has a persistent level of missing episodes a Director-to-Director letter will be drafted to alert the placing authority's Director of the level of missing episodes and concerns about risk of exploitation.

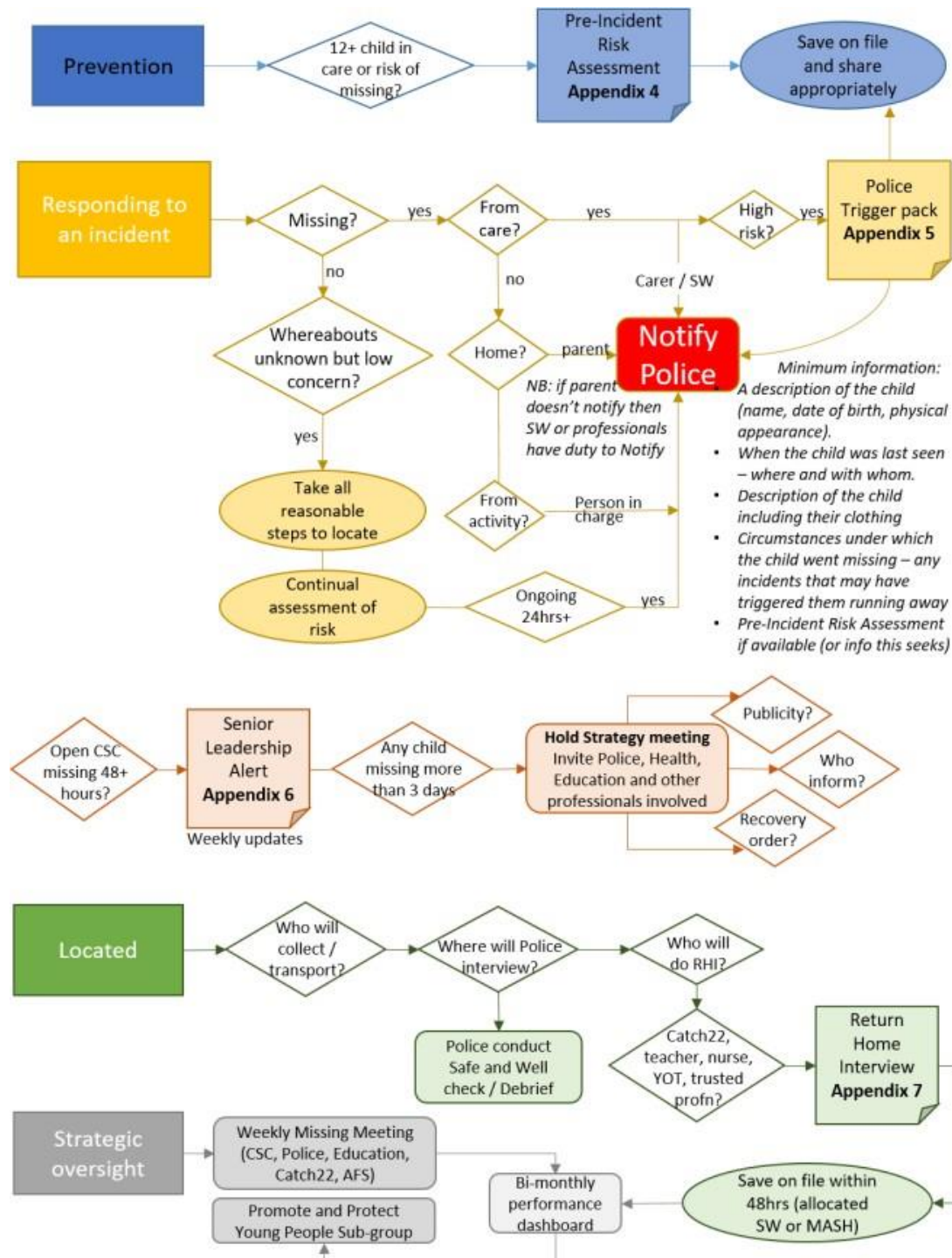
7.5 Bi-monthly strategic oversight

In strategic MACE higher risk CYP are reviewed on monthly basis for monitoring. The Promote and Protect sub-group of the MSCP meets on a bi-monthly basis. The meeting will receive and review:

- Performance reports about missing episodes, trends and uptake of RHIs from the research and information team.
- Consider any partnership issues and ensure there is a co-ordinated approach to resolve any barriers or issues.
- Identify any training needs of professionals and inform the Merton Learning and Development sub group.
- Provide regular updates to the MSCP, highlighting progress on the action plan, areas for practice and policy development, outcomes of any working groups and any data or statistics required for audit and scrutiny purposes.
- Link policy and practice initiatives to children at risk of context harm (exploitation, gangs / serious youth violence, harmful sexual behaviour)

Appendix 1: Flowchart of Process – London CP Procedures

Social workers, carers and other professionals to be aware of the Push and Pull factors of Missing Young People ([Appendix 2](#)) and have Contact Details to hand ([Appendix 3](#))



Appendix 2: Current Research Findings

A young person who goes missing for more than one night or frequently is an indicator from research for:

- Sexual Exploitation
- Drug dealing and criminal exploitation
- Radicalisation
- Trafficking
- Labour exploitation

There are a number of variables, depending on the age of the child and their personal circumstances. Below is a summary of the key 'push' and 'pull' factors for why a child or young person may go missing:

Push Factors

Problems at home: for those who ran away repeatedly, particularly high levels of family problems and disruption were identified.

Family Break-up: conflict with parents or stepparents is the most common reason given by children for running away. The need to escape difficulties between parents including domestic violence, drug and alcohol problems and persistent arguments were a major influence for some young people; as were boundary and control issues and feelings of unfair treatment for others. Running away was rarely motivated by the need for excitement

Over a quarter of the children in the Safe on the Streets survey were attempting to escape physical and emotional abuse, rejection or neglect. British and American studies support the finding that abuse and neglect are important factors underlying the decision to run away, especially for children who first run away from home before the age of 11; and even among those who have run away only once or twice

Mental Health problems: a disproportionate number of young people that run away from home have some sort of mental health problems

Bullying: children who are severely bullied are more likely to run away from school, home and care. Problems at school are only likely to be a direct trigger for running away for a relatively small minority of children.

Pull Factors

Running to be near friends or family – especially when a young person is in care and there are problems in contact arrangements with family and friends.

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

Appendix 3: Useful Contacts

Metropolitan Police Missing Person Reporting

Tel: 020 8649 4045

Email: VW-PPD2@met.police.uk.cjsm.net

C&F HUB: Tel: 020 8545 4226

EDT: Tel: 020 8770 5000

Catch 22

Provides RHIs for young people missing from home or care via direct referral from the police.

Please Note: Although Catch 22 conduct most RHIs, they do not conduct all of them. For more information, see [6.4 Who carries out the Return Home Interview](#)

Tel: 020 3701 8641

UTURN Contextual Safeguarding Team

Email: ContextualSafeguardingReferrals@merton.gov.uk

Merton Youth Justice Team

YOS_TEAM@merton.gov.uk

Tel: 020 8274 4949

CAMHS

Tel: 020 8254 8061

Missing Persons Charity:

Tel: 0208 392 4527, 24 hours/day

Jigsaw4U Advocacy and Independent Visiting Services (for Children in Care)

Tel: 020 8687 1384

HOSPITALS:

St George's – 0208 672 1255

St Helier – 0208 296 2000

National Missing Person's Runaway Helpline

0808 800 70 70

National 24-hour Freephone Helpline for anyone aged 17 or under who has run away or been forced to leave home. Confidential advice is given, referrals made to other organisations and it can help a child or young person get to a place of safety or pass on a message.

Appendix 4: Social Care Pre-Incident Risk Assessment

The Social Care Pre-Incident Risk Assessment should be recorded on the child's file in all agencies working with the child.

Wherever possible staff should enhance their ability to make a Social Care Pre-Incident Risk Assessment by acquainting themselves with the current body of knowledge about children who go missing.

Child's full name and DOB: (Alias if known)	Next of Kin relationship, name & address:
Address where child currently resides (Family home, Residential Unit, Foster Carer)	
Residential Unit/Foster Carer Contact Tel No's	Contact Name:
Doctor:	Dentist:
Child's Oyster card number:	Child's email address if known:
Child's Mobile Phone Number: Pin – if known:	Child's N.I. Number:
Occupation/School/College:	Occupation/School/College contact number:
Description of the Child	
Ethnic Origin & Ethnic Appearance:	
Height & Build:	Gender:
Appearance incl. Eye colour, hair, glasses, tattoos, piercings, facial hair, other distinguishing features (include a recent photograph):	

Family History (Brief details):

Information about friends and relatives etc., that may be visited/ spoken to:
--

Date	Time	Name/Phone Number & Address	Comments / notes

<u>Missing Child Risk Assessment Record</u>
--

Risk Factors	Details and Explanation
Previous missing episodes – frequency / patterns / where usually found.	
Previously suffered or was exposed to harm whilst missing.	
Age and maturity	
Social Care Status	
Child's view on current placement/stability of their relationships at home	
Level of Supervision/support that can be provided for the child	
The views of parents/carers in their child's needs and the action that needs to be taken if their child is missing	
Needs essential medication or treatment e.g. asthma inhaler, insulin.	
Lacks reasonable awareness of the risks associated with running away and/or may not have the physical ability to interact safely with others or in an unknown environment, e.g. visually impaired, significant learning needs.	

Known to associate with adults or children who present a risk of harm e.g. Sexual Offenders, Offenders Against Children.	
Mental illness or psychological disorder that may increase risk of harm to themselves or others including risk of suicide or self-harm	
Drugs and/or alcohol dependency	
Employment / Financial / School or College Problems	
Victim or potential victim, of forced marriage, FGM or trafficking, including sexual exploitation, harassment or persistent bullying	
Any other information?	

Appendix 5: Trigger Plan



Trigger plan agreed: [Click here to enter a date.](#)

Missing Person Trigger Plan

Subject Name: [Add subjects name]

This is a Missing Person Trigger Plan, its purpose is to outline the agreed multi-agency response for individuals who are considered to be at risk of going missing, and where there is a significant risk of harm to the subject or the volume of times they go missing is considered to be excessive.

SUBJECT		POLICE OWNER	
Name		Name and Rank	
Date of Birth		OCU	
PNCID		Unit/Team	
Cris/Crimint		Location	
		Contact	
		Email	

APPEARANCE	
NATIONALITY	
IC Code	
Height	
Build	
Dress	
Eyes	
Hair	
Tattoos / Scars	
Other	
CURRENT HOME ADDRESS & CONTACT	
Address	
Mobile	
Home	
Email	

SUBJECT PHOTO



Approximate date photo taken:

[Click here to enter a date.](#)

PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY	
Name	
Address	
Mobile	
Home	

PARENTS / CARERS AND FAMILY (addresses / contact numbers & comments)	
NAME	ADDRESSES / CONTACT NUMBERS & COMMENTS

ASSOCIATES (addresses / contact numbers & comments)	
NAME	ADDRESSES / CONTACT NUMBERS & COMMENTS

RELEVANT ADDRESSES AND LOCATIONS FREQUENTED	
ADDRESS	REASON FOR RELEVANCE (include dates and locations previously found)

OTHER	
MEDICAL ISSUES	
OYSTER CARD NUMBER	
SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS	

ORDERS	
ORDER TYPE	DETAILS OF ORDER (Include act/section and dates)

LOCAL AUTHORITY	
Local Authority where LAC	
Social Worker (Name/Contact number and email)	
Out of hours contact Emergency Duty Team (EDT)	
<i>Overview of the subject and associated risk</i> Click here to enter text.	
IMMEDIATE ACTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN REPORTED MISSING	
<i>Actions for consideration when the subject is reported missing, this should not be a generic action plan, this should be bespoke for the subject. Multi-agency actions should be agreed as part of a strategy meeting and include actions to be taken by all persons involved with the subject, including carers/parents.</i>	
POLICE: Click here to enter text.	
MULTI-AGENCY: Click here to enter text.	

OTHER INFORMATION NOT COVERED ELSEWHERE
<i>Use this field to add any other information that may be considered useful should the subject go missing</i> Click here to enter text.

Appendix 6: Leadership Alert

The Leadership Alert process is for internal use within Children, Schools and Families only.

This form is used to provide sufficient and necessary information to alert Heads of Service, Director, and the Executive Director of Children, Schools and Families to significant incidents and enable required actions to be tracked. The Leadership Alert criteria, timescales and responsibilities are set out in the Leadership Alert guidance.

The internal Leadership Alert process underpins how the Children, Schools and Families Directorate manages serious incidents concerning the safety, welfare and education of children and young people and incidents where there is potential media interest even where the incident itself is not sufficiently serious to warrant a Leadership Alert.

The Leadership Alert process provides an effective and clear communication route for keeping senior leaders, the Chief Executive, Cabinet Members for Children's Services and Education, the Leader of the Council and other elected Members informed and for required actions to be tracked.

Employees completing Leadership Alerts should attach the completed form to the 'Notification of a Missing Child or Young Person' workflow step in Mosaic and then send the 'Missing Child - Senior Leadership Alert' request to their line manager for review and onward escalation as necessary. Where an Director forwards a Leadership Alert to the Executive Director of Children's Services all members of DMT will be emailed with the Leadership Alert attached.

Within the internal Leadership Alert process, the Executive Director of Children's Services (or in their absence the Director) will make the decision as to what will be escalated to the Chief Executive, Cabinet Members for Children's Services and Education, the Leader of the Council and other elected Members.

Statutory notification of serious incidents to external bodies such as Ofsted, DfE or the National Review Panel are made under different processes. These processes are managed and overseen by the Director of Children's Services, Directors, Head of Quality assurance and Professional Development and the Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership Executive. The Director Children's Services (or in their absence the Director) will make the decision as to which incidents are notified to external bodies.

Type of alert:	☐ New	☒ Update
Date of Alert:	Click here to enter a date.	
What was the significant incident: brief details of the issue		
Date of the significant incident:		

a) Information relating to the child:	
Full name (including other names used by the child/family)	Click here to enter text.
DOB:	Click here to enter a date.

Ethnicity:	Click here to enter text.			
System ID numbers: (Mosaic, Care First etc.)	Click here to enter text.			
Names of brothers and sisters: (including system ID number(s) if known)				
Address:				
Nursery/School/College/Elective Home Education/Not in Education, Employment or Training:				
Does the child have a physical or learning disability?	☐ Yes		☒ No	
b) Legal status				
Is the child looked after by the London Borough of Merton?	☐ Yes		☒ No	
	(i) s.31	☐	(ii) s.20	☐
Is the child looked after by another local authority?	☐ Yes		☒ No	
If yes, which local authority:	Click here to enter text.			
Is the young person a care leaver or previously looked after by Merton:	☐ Yes		☒ No	
Is the child the subject of a Child Protection Plan in Merton?	☐ Yes		☒ No	
If Yes, under which category/ies:	Click here to enter text.			
Is the child the subject of a Child Protection Plan in another local authority?	☐ Yes		☒ No	
If yes, which local authority:	Click here to enter text.			
Is the child / family open to Children's Services:	☒ Yes		☐ No	
Children's Social Care	☐			
Disabled Children's Team	☐			
Youth Offending Team	☐			
Education Welfare	☐			
Statutory SEN Service	☐			
Early Help / Targeted Service	☐			

Allocated practitioner:		Contact number:	
Team Manager:		Contact number:	
Head of service			
c) Key Issues			

What are we worried about?	
Specify recommendations that require a decision?	
What actions are being taken to deal with the issues (including brothers / sisters and peers) - timescales and by whom?	

MANAGEMENT ACTIONS:

MANAGEMENT ACTIONS:		
Team Managers review and analysis of the incident:		
Date of Review:		
Actions taken and recommendations:		
Team Manager Name:	Signature:	Date of escalation:
Escalated to:		

HOS oversight review and analysis:		
Date of Review:		
Actions and Recommendations:		
Date when an update from the Service is required by:		
HoS Name:	Signature:	Date of Escalation
Michelle Waldron		
Escalated to:		

Assistant Director's review and any further action:	Click here to enter text.	
Assistant Director Decision:	Date of decision / escalation:	
No further escalation		
Escalate to DCS		
Recommendation for external Statutory Notification		

Alert recommended to Leader of the Council / Cabinet Members for Children's Services and Education / Chief Exec / Communications Team (Please specify)		Click here to enter text.
Alert recommended to the Scrutiny Committee / Corporate Leadership Team		Click here to enter text.
Alert recommended to all elected Members / Head of Communications due to media interest / community impact.		Click here to enter text.
Assistant Director Name:	Signature:	Date:

d) Director of Children, Schools and Families review and any further action:	Click here to enter text.	
DCS Decision if further escalation or external statutory notification required: Click here to enter text.	Date of decision / notification by DCS to senior colleagues:	
Alert required to Leader of the Council / Cabinet Members for Children's Services and Education / Chief Exec / Communications Team.	Click here to enter text.	
Alert required to Scrutiny Committee and Corporate Leadership Team	Click here to enter text.	
Alert required to all elected Members / Head of Communications due to media interest / community impact.	Click here to enter text.	
DCS Signature:	Date:	