



Multi-Agency Protocol for Children who go Missing

Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool & Lancashire

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1. Introduction

This protocol is important for the safeguarding of children and families across Pan-Lancashire, or those using services in the area. It should be read and must be implemented by all practitioners and managers working with children who are at risk of going missing or who are already doing so.

It is intended that this protocol will assist in developing robust responses to missing children. It should be used to engage partner agencies in developing preventative services for children who are at risk of going missing.

It has been written jointly by the local authorities in Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool and Lancashire, Lancashire Constabulary, and representatives of Health services. All agencies, safeguarding partners and relevant agencies (as defined by Section 16E (3) of the Children Act 2004) responsible for implementing the procedures in this protocol will regularly review and audit its implementation and the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements in each local authority area will monitor the effectiveness of the arrangements¹.

There is an expectation that all agencies and care practitioners working with children who are missing implement this protocol and ensure that all relevant staff are aware of it and how to use it. It should be used for all children.

Scope

The protocol is designed for all practitioners from all agencies (statutory, those commissioned by statutory agencies and relevant agencies) and their appointed care representatives that work with children within Pan-Lancashire.

The protocol will apply to all children placed within the county or local authority boundaries for whom Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, Blackpool Council or Lancashire County Council have continuing responsibilities.

The local authority retains responsibility for all children in their care, wherever they are living. In these cases, the local authority will require the care provider to comply with all local authority protocols, as well as safeguarding protocols for the area in which the child is placed. Other local authorities that have children living within the Pan-Lancashire area are required to adhere to this protocol.

¹ Lancashire Constabulary will continue to look at Right Care, Right Person as an operating model alongside this protocol.

2. Definitions

The following definitions apply to this protocol and relate to children who go, or have gone, missing.

A full list of relevant definitions can be found at appendix A.

- Child: Anyone who has not reached their eighteenth birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people'.
- Missing person: *"Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located, and their wellbeing or otherwise confirmed"* (APP College of Policing 2023)
- Within this protocol the term 'home' refers to the current place that the child resides, including but not exclusive to living with their family, in a residential children's home or foster home.
- Within this context, 'children in our care' 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 Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) transfers, children on remand and children subject to a supervision order with a residence requirement.

Missing Children Risk Categories

Classification of risk and response

The definition of each relevant category (High and Medium) and what each category means in terms of police operational response is detailed below:

- High risk
The risk of serious harm to the missing child or the public is assessed as very likely. This category almost always requires the immediate deployment of police resources – action may be delayed in exceptional circumstances, such as searching water or forested areas during hours of darkness. In many of these cases, there will also be consideration of serious crime. All of the issues that need to be addressed in those cases will need coordination with any missing person enquiry.
- Medium risk
The risk of harm to the missing person or the public is assessed as likely, but not serious. This category requires an active and measured response by the police and other agencies in order to trace the missing person and support the person reporting.

The Police will use the national decision-making model when making an assessment on each individual missing person investigation. Further information is located in section 5.3 (Role of the Police).

Absent

Following a review of the absent category in October 2020, Lancashire Police and Pan-Lancashire authorities no longer use this terminology for children that are missing. This term should not be used to describe any child missing from any setting.

Children looked after who are away from their home without authorisation

Sometimes a child in care may be away from their home without authorisation, this is known as unauthorised absence. This is not a missing incident as whereabouts of the child are known. In the event of unauthorised absence, carers should undertake checks in the first instance before informing the allocated social worker or Emergency Duty Teams (EDT). If authorised absence is not given, the care setting should make every effort to collect the child and return them home.

If there is a risk of significant harm to the child, the Police should be contacted for further discussion regarding additional support that may be required.

3. Principles

This protocol reflects statutory guidance but cannot anticipate every situation. Anyone working with children in a professional capacity MUST show 'professional curiosity' and should be looking at risk and the levels of risk involved for each individual child. Risk, not process will always drive what actions need to be taken and deemed necessary to protect and safeguard the child.

Our joint aim is to prevent the incidence of a child going missing and to ensure their safety at the earliest opportunity. Each missing episode is potentially serious and roused in different and complex issues and every "missing" episode cannot be viewed in isolation from the circumstances, the lived experience of the child and previous missing incidents. Any response should be one that is appropriate to the level of risk, takes account of the needs of the child and multi-agency in the sharing of information and service response.

Interventions are important in attempting to address repeat missing episodes for all. Interventions for those that are in care must be informed by and reflected in the placement information record and in the care plan. Interventions must also be informed by effective police or care setting, 'safe and well checks', as well as 'return interviews'. All views and concerns of the child will be recorded and reflected in future plans and interventions.

It is vital that we understand 'WHY' they went missing, in order to support them and meet their present and future safeguarding needs, and to seek to prevent further missing episodes. We do this through listening to the child; partnership working (Working Together); information sharing; problem-solving; and performance management.

Our joint aim is to locate the child and return them to a place safety as soon as possible and prevent them from suffering harm.

All the agencies involved in this protocol are working towards being more 'trauma informed' in all policies and practice. To be 'trauma informed', analysis of all the information relating to the child and about those that may pose a risk to the child will be common practice in all agencies and across partnership working.

4. Contact Information

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) Blackburn with Darwen

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is the initial point of contact for contacts / referrals in relation to a child welfare or child protection concern. MASH provides a robust, multi-agency led approach to identifying vulnerable children and ensuring they are provided with the correct level of support.

Social workers within MASH initially screen all contacts / referrals in order to determine a response, jointly with our partners where appropriate. MASH ensures effective communication between key agencies where it facilitates appropriate information sharing and immediate and secure access to records and data. MASH determines whether the contact / referral requires further assessment by a Children's Social Care assessment team. MASH also identifies vulnerable children who do not meet the statutory thresholds for social care support and facilitates the signposting to other services and implementation of support via the Family Hubs where appropriate.

The response to children missing is led by the multi-agency Engage Team and a manager from this team will assist in screening all missing reports, adding any information on risk and unmet need from any previous missing incidents.

Request for Support Hub (Blackpool)

The Request for Support Hub (RfSH) is Blackpool's integrated access point for Children's Social Care, combining Early Help and safeguarding functions to ensure children and families receive timely, appropriate support.

The RfSH promotes effective multi-agency collaboration by enabling secure, lawful information sharing. This supports accurate assessment of need and risk, ensuring referrals are directed to the most suitable service.

The RfSH incorporates the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), which plays a vital role in coordinating responses to safeguarding concerns through shared intelligence and joint decision-making.

By streamlining processes and improving consistency across agencies, the RfSH strengthens protective measures for vulnerable children and enhances outcomes for families.

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) Lancashire

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) provides a robust approach to identifying vulnerable children and ensuring they are provided with the correct level of support. The MASH has also been successful in identifying vulnerable people who do not meet the statutory thresholds for social care support and facilitates the signposting to other services. This includes the Child and Family Wellbeing Service and other early help partners, Early Intervention Teams, Community Safety Teams, Neighbourhood Policing Teams and voluntary organisations.

The MASH is the initial point of contact for a safeguarding alert (sharing of a concern) and is responsible for screening the alerts in order to provide a multi-agency response to determine whether or not the alert requires further investigation by the specialist safeguarding team.

The MASH has led to more effective communication between key agencies as it facilitates appropriate information sharing and immediate and secure access to records and data.

Contact Information for Local Authority Children's Services:

- Blackburn with Darwen Council: 01254 666400 (if out of hours: 01254 587547)
- Blackpool Council: 01253 477299 or by emailing missingchildren@blackpool.gov.uk (if out of hours: 01253 477600, or by emailing: outofhours@blackpool.gov.uk)
- Lancashire County Council: 0300 123 6720 (if out of hours: 0300 123 6722)

Notifying Police

All missing children should be reported to the Police via 101, following completion of all checks outlined in Appendix B & Section 5.4 (Education).

If there are immediate concerns for the child's welfare and safety, the Police should be contacted on 999.

Both the 999 and the 101 system will route a call into the Force Control Room. The police will respond as per this protocol and the classification of risk (section 2) that is applied to the incident.

Lancashire Constabulary Basic Command Unit (BCU) Missing Person Co-ordinators:

- East BCU: East-MFHCO-ORDINATOR@lancashire.police.uk
- South BCU: South-MFHCO-ORDINATOR@lancashire.police.uk
- West BCU: West-MFHCO-ORDINATOR@lancashire.police.uk

Notifying relevant Health professionals

The business support units in the Blackburn with Darwen and Lancashire local authority areas will inform health services.

HCRG Care Group (Lancashire)

- The missing child is a Child in Care: Vcl.019.lookedafterteam@nhs.net
- The missing child is not cared for by the local authority': Vcl.019.safeguardingteam@nhs.net

East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust (Blackburn with Darwen)

- For all missing children not in care: universal019@elht.nhs.uk

Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust (Blackburn with Darwen) - Enhanced children in care and care leavers nurse team

- For missing child in care or care leaver: CLA.Team@lscft.nhs.uk

5. Procedures for a missing child

5.1 Responsibilities of parents/carers/professionals

Parents and carers or anyone else caring for the child at the point a child goes missing are required to take reasonable steps to locate the child and ascertain their safety. The Police will expect that the basic measures will have been undertaken to try and locate the missing child prior to contacting the police as detailed in Appendix B.

If the child or member of the public is believed to be at immediate risk of significant harm, then the police should be contacted immediately on 999 and continue to follow this protocol.

Once initial checks have been completed and the child is known to be 'missing', the police should be informed without delay via 101.

If the child is known to have a Trigger Plan or a Philomena Protocol (see section 5.6), this should be highlighted to the police along with any current immediate risk factors when reporting the missing child. This will enable the police to make a quick risk evaluation on each situation and make a decision, based upon that, as to the classification of the investigation and appropriate operational deployment.

Once the Police have been deployed and further information has been obtained from the source of the call, then a full risk assessment can be made and the investigation can commence.

Where a child has an allocated social worker, the reporting person should then inform Children's Social Care by contacting the allocated social worker/duty social workers, or Emergency Duty Teams (EDT) if the missing episode occurs outside of 9-5 working hours.

5.2 Role of the Police

Upon receiving a report from a parent/carer/professional, the police will work with them to agree what action needs to be taken both by the person reporting/or by the police. It may be that, based on information obtained, the police may not record the details as a missing incident at this time, however, other policing responses may be identified. The rationale for that decision will be recorded and next steps relayed to the reporter.

The consent of a person with parental responsibility will be sought for a photograph to be used in any subsequent missing person investigation and at that time, if deemed appropriate then consent for the use of the media in the investigation should be sought. Once a child is recorded on the CONNECT police systems as a missing person, Children Social Care will be advised, via the automated system, that the child is officially recorded as missing. A copy of the risk assessment will also be forwarded. Where possible a notification will be generated to the child's education establishment through OP ENCOMPASS.

Any professional who identifies an adult who is in the company of a child without parental knowledge or agreement, should also do what is reasonable to safeguard and promote the child's welfare. If it is appropriate the Police will consider advice or issuing a Child Abduction Warning

Notice (CAWN). Section 2 notices (Section 2 of Child Abduction Act 1984) apply when an adult allows a child (under 16 years) to be in their company and their actions may be perceived as facilitating that child to be away from the person with parental responsibility without authority.

If the child is under local authority care, then a Section 49 notice (Children Act 1989) can be issued for those children under the age of 18 years.

The issuing of either notice will place a marker on the Police National Computer (PNC) that a child abduction warning notice has been issued and gives officers guidance if the child is found in the company of that named adult.

Risk Assessment

A Risk Assessment is carried out for each missing person episode. Every assessment should reflect the unique characteristics of the child within their living arrangements and community context. This assessment is subject to continuous review whilst under investigation. Key to this is a continuous and open dialogue with all those key elements that form part of the investigation.

The definition of each category (High or Medium) and what each category means in terms of police operational response is detailed above at Section 2. No missing child will be classified as 'Standard risk' or 'Absent'.

Should any person disagree with the assessment applied to the investigation then that person should contact the force control room on 101 and request to speak to the officer who made the decision or the current supervisor reviewing the missing person investigation. Where this disagreement is not resolved, the Safeguarding Partnerships' ['Conflict Resolution Policy'](#) must be used.

Child Rescue Alerts (CRA)

A child rescue alert is a partnership between the police, the media and the public that seeks the assistance of the public where it is feared that there is a real, immediate risk to the life of a child. The aim is to quickly engage an entire community via the media (including social media channels) in the search for a child, an offender or any specified vehicle through reports of relevant information to the police. The CRA is flexible and can be used in a targeted way in one or more specific geographic locations or can be launched immediately on a regional or national level or grown organically as information is received or the level of media response dictates. It is a dynamic tool for consideration by the Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) in the highest risk cases.

By the use of the CRA brand, the effectiveness of publicity will be greater and hold more public attention than other high risk media appeals."

European countries do have their own individual alert systems but if the UK requested such an alert the request would need to go through INTERPOL so would be classed as INTERPOL enquiry. The National Crime Agency will also support enquiries outside the UK in Europe and the wider world.

Missing and Wanted

There may be times when a missing child is also wanted by the Police for:

- Suspected involvement in a criminal investigation
- An outstanding warrant or court matter
- Absconding from lawful custody/care
- Entering the country without appropriate authority.

The police will evaluate each investigation individually and respond based on priority. The goal is to achieve the safest, most efficient outcome. Where a child is suspected of being vulnerable to criminal exploitation and is wanted, the reporting agency via the Trigger Plan/Philomena Protocol or through sharing of all known information, inform the police so that children are safeguarded first.

The supervisory officer and investigating officer will decide the response based on a risk assessment, guided by the national decision model, and document the decision. They will consider the risk to and vulnerability of the child and public, and the need for criminal justice processes. The views of the reporting person will be considered, and the rationale for treating the person as missing will be discussed with them. Decision-makers must balance the needs and risks of the investigation with the duty to keep interested parties updated.

Where the police decide to prioritise the 'wanted' categorisation, a missing report will still be recorded to reflect the appropriate level of investigation. A missing report will be updated while a 'wanted' investigation continues. Children's Social Care missing from home processes will still continue.

Police will consider risk of exploitation as part of their investigation. Any child can be a victim of exploitation, not just those open to child exploitation teams.

Where any agency disagrees with prioritisation of 'wanted' investigations above a 'missing' investigation, that person must contact the police sergeant who made the decision to discuss and resolve any differences. Where this disagreement is not resolved, the Safeguarding Partnerships' ['Conflict Resolution Policy'](#) must be used.

Return of the child

It is the responsibility of the parent/carer/professional to contact the Police and the local authority (home authority if the child is placed in our area) immediately to confirm that the missing child has returned. If the whereabouts of the 'missing child' become known, it is the responsibility of the parents or carers to arrange for the child's return.

There will be circumstances where parent/carer/care setting collection is not appropriate, and as such an appropriate conversation will take place with the Police to identify the most suitable action.

Police 'Safe and Well Check' or 'Prevention Interviews'

The purpose of the 'Safe and Well Check'/'Prevention Interview' is for Police and partners to start to understand the reason /causes of why the child went missing and what has happened to that child.

The Police will also be looking to establish if:

- The child is safe and well and has not suffered any harm, including sexual and/or criminal exploitation;
- The child has been a victim of crime;
- The child has been involved in any criminality including coercion due to being criminally exploited;
- If there are any ongoing risk or factors which may contribute to the child going missing again (push and pull factors);
- Investigations need to be instigated to determine who may have caused harm to the child.

'Safe and Well Checks'/'Prevention Interviews' should therefore be carried out in all cases.

The Police should be in the first instance the professionals that carry out a 'Safe and Well Check'/'Prevention Interview'. However, research and experience tell us that missing persons, especially children, may be unwilling to engage in this process and especially with a police officer.

If it is apparent, on the return of a child, that they have been the victim of a crime whilst missing, or that they may be in danger or at risk from any person, arising out of circumstances that have occurred whilst they were missing, then the Police must complete the 'Safe and Well Check'/'Prevention Interview' and start an investigation in conjunction with partner agencies.

If a child is not open to Children's Social Care, then it should be the police that will carry out the 'Safe and Well Check'/'Prevention Interview' and the information shared with Children's Social Care. The 'Safe and Well Check'/'Prevention Interview' should only be carried out by another professional if the police have assessed it is safe to do so. The Officer in Charge (OIC) will be responsible for ensuring that the 'Safe and Well Check'/'Prevention Interview' is recorded and inputted onto the Police system. This should be documented in the CONNECT investigation.

In certain circumstances another professional may be better placed to carry out this task. If this is the case, then the decisions rationale is recorded on both CONNECT and, on the systems used in the agency conducting the 'Safe and Well Check'/'Prevention Interview' (usually a care setting). The circumstances to consider would include:

- The overall risk level, given all the circumstances of the incident and understanding the risks and intelligence surrounding the child is assessed as LOW and this is agreed by both the Police and the responsible carer;
- There are no known or suspected circumstances that the child has either been involved as a victim or a suspect of criminality (including exploitation) whilst missing;
- The rationale is recorded within CONNECT and within care setting records.
- The 'Safe and Well Check'/'Prevention Interview', if NOT carried out by police, will be done by another suitably experienced and named care professional. The key being that some degree of independence is preferred; in a 'family' setting it may be best if this was not carried out by a parent;

- A child will always be seen by police if the previous 'Safe and Well Check'/'Prevention Interview' was carried out by another professional.

On the rare occasions that it is agreed between a carer and the Police that a 'Safe and Well Check'/'Prevention Interview' can be carried out by somebody other than the Police, it is important that they record the following points:

- How the child presents, including their demeanour, physical state, clothing and any other factors that may be relevant to any future investigation
- What care and safeguarding plans have been put in place in order to prevent further incidents.

All information should then be passed to the police BCU Missing Person Co-ordinator for inclusion in the investigation (contact details in Section 4). If at any time the carer suspects that criminality has occurred, then they should end the process and call the police to attend and take over.

BCU Missing Person Co-ordinators will be the recipient of the return interview reports for the Police, using the contact information in Section 4. It will be the responsibility of the Missing Person Co-ordinator to disseminate the intelligence from the report, ensuring that it is recorded appropriately on CONNECT. If further investigation is needed, they will pass this to the most appropriate officer/team.

Police are to ensure that the Trigger Plan & Philomena Protocol (Section 5.6) is available on their systems for any occasions when the child is missing to ensure a prompt and coordinated response is implemented to locate the child.

5.3 Role of Health

In the Blackburn with Darwen and Lancashire local authority areas the business support officers will inform the area's 0-19 team or the Children in Care health team (if appropriate) via email, see Section 4 for contact details. The appropriate health practitioner will subsequently liaise with the parents/carers and offer support for the child to assess for any unidentified/unmet health needs as required. If the child is in the care of the local authority and outstanding their statutory review health assessment, this will also be offered to the child.

The process for children missing from home in Blackpool through Blackpool Teaching Hospitals (BTH) follows the following process:

- Children are discussed and managed in the Daily Exploited and Missing (DEM) meeting (a daily multiagency meeting attended by BTH Child Exploitation Nurses
- Details of strategy meetings that are planned following the DEM will be sent to School Nurses.

Liaison with other health professionals who are involved with the child's care should take place if appropriate. Each child's circumstances should be considered on an individual basis.

Health agencies are to ensure that the Trigger Plan & Philomena Protocol (Section 5.6) is available on their systems and for this to be updated with relevant health needs and risk information, for any

occasions when the child is missing to ensure a prompt and coordinated response is implemented to meet the needs of the child.

5.4 Role of Education

The education setting's Absconding School policy must be in line with this policy. Education setting's Children Missing Education (CME) must be in line with their respective local authority education service policy.

Once a pupil is identified as absent without permission by any member of staff during the school day, the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) will be informed. The DSL will use professional judgement, reference any existing risk assessments and plans to help establish the student's whereabouts and determine the urgency required for reporting and responses. Where the checks below do not locate the child and concern remains, notify the Police.

Designated Safeguarding Lead should, together with key staff, assess the child's vulnerability.

Educational staff will:

- Try to locate the student and try to establish the whereabouts of them in the school and use CCTV to establish they have left the building
- Try to contact the student via their mobile telephone if known
- Contact a person with parental responsibility to establish if they have had contact with them – if this person accepts responsibility for the child, the educational establishment do not need to carry out further actions
- Email the people /person with parental responsibility
- Contact extended people on the emergency list
- Approach friends/students who may know their whereabouts
- Contact other professionals involved with the child to see if they have had contact with them
- Consider a home visit.

If the child is subject to a Child Protection Plan or is a Child in Need, inform the allocated worker, or if unavailable the duty worker.

If the child has not been located or contacted or if you have been unable to talk to the parents/carers, contact the Police. You must continue to attempt to make contact with the parents

Notifying the Police

The information required by the Police to assist in locating and returning the pupil to a safe environment is as follows:

- The pupil's name/s; date of birth; status (for example looked after child); responsible authority
- Where and when they went missing
- Previous missing episodes and where they went
- Who, if anyone, they went missing with
- What the child was wearing plus any belongings they had with them such as bags, phone etc.; include mobile number
- Description and recent photo
- Medical history, if relevant

- Time and location last seen
- Circumstances or events around going missing with relevant safeguarding information
- Details of family, friends and associates
- Contact details of safeguarding lead if it was after school hours
- Details of action the educational setting have already taken.

The police will then assess all information in order to establish if this is a missing person investigation or another police incident.

Whilst the incident is ongoing, the educational establishment will continue to liaise with the Police and act in accordance with Police instructions.

Where the child returns to school before the Police have arrived, then the Police must be informed and own educational establishment safeguarding procedures need to be followed. Where the child returns to school of their own volition, then the Police must be informed and own school procedures need to be followed.

If the Police locate the child and bring them back to the school, the Police will conduct the 'safe and well' interview and the school will follow school procedure.

Once an incident is concluded

Once a child has returned to the education setting, either via police assistance or of their own accord, please ensure to check on the emotional wellbeing of the child and establishing the reasons for the incident by asking what 'happened to you for you to leave the site?' as well as following your own safeguarding policies and procedures.

Based on the information gathered from the child or through the 'safe and well'/'prevention interview' feedback, the following tasks must be completed:

- Review the education risk assessment
- Reviewing behaviour management plans
- Additional interventions which may be required within the educational setting
- Sourcing additional support from outside the educational setting
- Monitor and review the amount of absent without permission episodes
- Discuss with parents any additional vulnerabilities.

Education agencies are to ensure that the Trigger Plan & Philomena Protocol (Section 5.6) is available on their systems and for this to be updated with relevant education and learning needs and risk information, for any occasions when the child is missing to ensure a prompt and coordinated response is implemented to meet the needs of the child.

If there is any suggestion of, or the child makes a disclosure of child sexual and/or criminal exploitation or other abuse, then contact the police and refer to your MASH/RfSH as per your child protection procedures.

Encompass

Where police share information with a school about a recent missing incident, it will contain information the police hold at the outset of a missing report being made. Subsequent information about the outcome of the missing child investigation, any 'safe and well check'/'prevention interview' or 'return interview' information will not be included in the Encompass notification. In some cases, police will complete a 'Vulnerable Child' Police Safeguarding Referral (PSR) and this will be completed and shared when a missing investigation has been concluded.

The school should establish what information about risk, vulnerabilities and unmet needs is contained within the information from 'safe and well check' and 'return interview' through the local authority contact details in Section 4.

Where a child has refused to engage in 'safe and well check' and 'return interview' processes, the school can be an important link with other services completing the checks and interviews, from providing a safe space for completing the check/interview, to gathering intelligence about the child's behaviour, attainment and attendance changes before and after the missing incident.

5.5 Role of Local Authority Children's Services

During the missing episode

During a medium risk assessed incident, should a child be missing for a period of 48 hours, a Strategy Meeting will be convened. For high-risk cases, Strategy Meetings will be in line with local MASH and Children's Services procedures. In the event professionals do not feel a Strategy Meeting is required for a missing child, the matter will require management oversight as per the local authority procedures.

Follow up Strategy Meetings and the timescale for this should be decided within the initial strategy meeting and be decided by the key professionals involved with that child and the level of risk involved with the child's missing episode.

When a strategy meeting is arranged for a child that is missing, the strategy request should be sent to the relevant BCU Referral Manager.

The purpose of the Strategy Meeting must be for the local authority responsible for that child to determine the child's welfare and plan rapid future action. For children living in the Pan-Lancashire areas, having been placed by its home authority in this area, the host authority is statutorily responsible to convene the Strategy Meeting when the child has gone missing from their area. This can be delegated to the home authority to complete, but both authorities should be present in the meeting.

Children looked after who are away from their home without authorisation

Sometimes a child in care may be away from their home without authorisation, this is known as unauthorised absence. This is not a missing incident as whereabouts are known. In the event of unauthorised absence, carers should undertake checks in the first instance before informing the allocated social worker or EDT.

Where the carers have not authorised absence, the care setting should make every effort to collect the child and return them home. If there is a risk of significant harm to the child, the Police should be contacted for further discussion regarding additional support that may be required.

Return Interview

'Safe and Well Checks' and independent return interviews provide an opportunity to take into account children's views, inform case planning and assist wider strategic planning for professionals. The outcomes of the checks and interviews should therefore be recorded on case files so that they can be shared with professionals.

Statutory missing from home guidance [Statutory Guidance \(DfE; 2014\)](#) states that when a child is found or returns to their home, they must be offered an independent return interview. Independent return interviews provide an opportunity to uncover information that can help protect children from the risk of going missing again, from risks they may have been exposed to while missing or from risk factors in their home.

The interview should be carried out within 72 hours of the child returning to their home or care setting. This should be an in-depth interview and is normally best carried out by an independent person (i.e., someone not involved in caring for the child) who is trained to carry out these interviews and is able to follow-up any actions that emerge. Children sometimes need to build up trust with a person before they will discuss in depth the reasons why they ran away.

The 'return interview' is different from the police 'safe and well' check. For all children the return interview should be offered in a neutral place where they feel safe.

Prior to the return interview, the professional must gather any information from the 'Safe and Well Check' (and past missing incidents) so that they are fully informed of all known and suspected push and pull factors.

The interviews are completed as follows:

- If the child is looked after by and has gone missing within Blackburn with Darwen local authority the Engage team would complete the return interview
- If the child is looked after by and has gone missing within Blackpool local authority, the Awaken child exploitation team would complete the return interview.
- If the child is looked after by and has gone missing within Lancashire local authority, the Missing from Home service would complete the return interviews.
- If a child has gone missing within Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool, or Lancashire, but is looked after by another local authority, then it is the *responsibility of the placing authority to complete the return interview*. In such instances, the Police will notify the local authority in which the child is living of the missing incident, and that local authority will inform the placing authority to allow them to arrange for the return interview to take place.

Following the interview any immediate welfare and safeguarding concerns can be addressed and further recommendations can be given on reducing the risk of a child going missing from home again. These recommendations should be based upon the push/pull factors which have been

identified and analysed within the interview. Welfare concerns will require referral to early help services'; safeguarding concerns will require referral to MASH/RfSH (or shared with the child's existing allocated worker).

For further information on return interviews please see the following link that explains the process and purpose of the return interview.: [Children who run away or go missing from home or care - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk).

Once the return interview has been completed, a copy will be shared with Police and may be shared with other services deemed appropriate for the child, subject to consent and confidentiality (where a child is deemed to have suffered significant harm during the missing incident, there is lawful basis under the Children Act and Crime & Disorder Act to share without consent).

Parents and carers will not routinely receive a copy of the return home interview but will be informed of any relevant safeguarding matters and will be provided with confirmation that the interview has taken place by the allocated independent worker.

The return interview information obtained must be securely emailed without delay to the BCU Missing Person Co-ordinator, the local authority lead for the areas that the individual went missing from, and Health professionals.

Where return interviews highlight the need for urgent safety planning, the sharing of this information with the appropriate people/agencies/BCU Missing-Co-ordinators must be done without delay.

Review of continued missing episodes

In the event a child has had three missing episodes in 90 days, a Missing from Home Risk Management Meeting needs to be convened by the child's allocated worker and include: Police Missing Person Co-ordinator; parent/carer and child; and other relevant multi-agency professionals involved in the support plan. This Missing from Home Risk Management Meeting needs to be convened within five working days.

In the event concerns are raised before this time, a meeting can be held subject to professional judgement upon the level of risk associated with that child.

This risk management meeting should address the following:

- Push/pull factors of the missing from home episodes
- Any safeguarding concerns and interventions required
- Any hotspots of concern
- Information from 'safe and well checks' and return interviews and what can be done to prevent that child going missing again
- The child's voice and their wishes and feelings
- Creation/updating of Trigger Plan (Philomena Protocol)
- When the Trigger Plan needs to be reviewed.

The missing from home risk management meetings can be incorporated within another multi-agency meeting and do not have to be held separately away from these.

Ensuring the child's participation in these missing from home risk management meetings are key and therefore children should be invited where possible however in the event they do not wish to or it's not appropriate for them to attend, creative solutions on seeking the child's voice should be considered by the chair of the meeting. Professionals should ensure that sensitive information and intelligence is not discussed in the presence of the child or parent/carer.

The child's allocated worker will chair missing from home risk management meetings and where concerns continue or the risks to safety of a child during missing episodes increases, then the Team Manager or the Senior/Service Manager should be invited to attend the next risk management meeting for management oversight.

5.6 Trigger Plan & Philomena Protocol

The purpose for a Trigger Plan is to assist in locating and safeguarding children who go missing from home regularly. The Philomena Protocol is a Police-led initiative to assist them in responding to missing incidents more efficiently and requires carers to maintain information readily about children who regularly go missing or are at risk of doing so. In the Pan-Lancashire area, partners have agreed that the Trigger Plan and Philomena Protocol will be one document (attached at Appendix C).

The Trigger Plan & Philomena Protocol will articulate what prevention work is being carried out and, on return of the child, what prevention work will be done moving forward. This will support other plans used within a care setting.

A Trigger Plan & Philomena Protocol should be completed for a child following three missing episodes in 90 days. For children in care settings, where there are areas of significant concern such as poor mental health, physical health needs, disabilities or identified push and pull factors which suggests the child may go missing again, a Trigger Plan & Philomena Protocol should be completed. For child being placed in a care setting in the Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool and Lancashire areas by another authority, the home or placing authority Trigger Plan & Philomena Protocol must be completed by the child's social worker and maintained and updated by the care setting.

A Trigger Plan & Philomena Protocol is produced by the allocated worker but is supported by all partner agencies who have input or knowledge on the child. This includes their needs, risks and vulnerabilities and will include their basic health information, additional diversity needs, mental health, information around their peer networks, social media use, key associations and locations where they spend time. Further to this the Trigger Plan & Philomena Protocol can advise Police on the particular response required for the child when they are located.

The Trigger Plan & Philomena Protocol needs to be updated as per any new information regarding the child or any significant event. This should be reviewed monthly by the allocated worker. However, if there is new information relating to risk/need relevant to a child's missing episodes, the

document should be updated as frequently as required. The document needs to be shared following each update with all partner agencies including foster carers and home setting.

A copy of the trigger plan should also be added to the systems of the local authority.

Meetings to discuss the risk management of a child's missing episodes will be completed in line with the protocol for each Pan-Lancashire authority.

Children looked after by other local authorities living in the Pan-Lancashire areas

The expectation is that notification by the relevant home authority for a child is completed by the placing authority and any relevant documents including the Trigger Plan/Philomena Protocol, home placement plan and care plan are shared.

When a child from another local authority is found within the Pan-Lancashire area and notification has not been received, follow up enquiries will be made to request relevant information from the placing authority.

Care providers should inform their BCU Missing Person Co-ordinator of any children placed by another local authority within the Pan-Lancashire area and share any Trigger Plans/Philomena Protocol that are in place.

When a child is from the Pan-Lancashire authority areas and is living outside of their local area, the relevant host authority will be notified, and any relevant documents including the Trigger Plan & Philomena Protocol, placement plan and care plan are shared. Individual local authorities follow their own procedures when the child is missing, and the allocated worker must familiarise themselves with procedures in the local host authority.

There is an expectation that when a child in care moves to a new home, the placement planning meetings will consider the risk around missing episodes and an agreed safety plan will be developed. If a Trigger Plan & Philomena Protocol is already in place this will be shared with the carers.

Detail of information sharing and joint working expectations relating to placing authorities (child's home authority), placement providers in the Pan-Lancashire geography and host agencies can be found at the following link: [Children Living Away from Home](#).

6. Return interviews: safety, assessment and information gathering

The return interview is important in safeguarding the child in the future, including providing information of how to prevent future missing episodes. The return interview is an opportunity to inform case planning, take account of the child's views and inform wider contextual planning and responses.

If a child cannot be engaged in the first return interview offered, then consideration should be given by the local authority whether there is a more suitable professional to try and encourage participation in the interview.

Where a practitioner is unable to engage with a child, parents and carers should be offered the opportunity to provide any relevant information. The aim of this is to ensure further instances of missing from home/care can be prevented and identify early any support required.

For children that are not open to the local authority, each child needs to be considered on an individual basis and reviewed whether the right level of intervention is being received by the family in order to ensure missing episodes do not escalate.

Where parental consent is not obtained for the child to participate in a return interview, a review of the information held for the child and analysis of any missing episodes will be undertaken with management oversight to determine the thresholds and level of risk. This is to ensure escalation is not required before the episode is closed.

The person conducting the return interview should: identify and respond to any harm the child has suffered, including harm that was not disclosed as part of the 'Safe and Well Check'. Either before they went missing or whilst missing:

- recognise the child's individual and family circumstances including the child's characteristics, vulnerabilities and risk factors
- understand and try to address the reasons and motivation(s) why the child went missing, including any push and pull factors
- seek information about potential destinations, associates and the circumstances in which the child was found/returned
- help the child feel safe and help them understand they have options to prevent repeat instances of missing
- provide information to the child on how to stay safe (statutory /community /family /friends resources, helplines etc) if they go missing again.

Following the return interview (and Police 'Safe and Well Check') the different agencies should work together, remain professionally curious and share information to:

- identify immediate safeguarding needs;
- build a comprehensive picture of why the child went missing;
- understand what happened whilst they were missing;
- identify who they may have come in to contact with whilst missing and where they were

- analyse the individual missing episode alongside any past episode for patterns provide support in preventing future missing episodes and ensuring all needs and risks are identified and responded to in accordance with statutory guidance.
- what support they require upon returning to home or their care placement in accordance with the 'Working Together' guidance.

All actions taken in fulfilling these requirements should be clearly recorded in the child's records including management authorisation and reasons for any departures from the required guidelines and timescales. Recording and information sharing practice must be in line with the safeguarding partnership policies and procedures ([Welcome to the Procedures Manual](#)).

7. Assurance Arrangements

Each agency will collate and report performance management and quality assurance information internally within their organisation. The effectiveness of each agency's arrangements in meeting the requirements of this protocol should be monitored regularly by each agency and reported to their respective safeguarding partnership.

To fulfil their role, the safeguarding partnership will give due consideration to the safeguarding risks and issues associated with children who go missing from home or care. The safeguarding partnership will seek assurances that partners from children's social care, police, health, education, care providers and other services are working together effectively to safeguard children who go missing. The safeguarding partnership will ensure that the protocol is adequate for the safety of their local children and that it is kept up to date.

The safeguarding partnership will require from all partners working with children who go missing to report the following on a regular basis:

- reports analysing and scrutinising data on children missing from home and care;
- analysis of information from return interviews, including analysis of the child's views and wishes; and
- reports from children's homes used by or within the local authority on the effectiveness of measures to prevent children from going missing.

The safeguarding partnership's conflict resolution process will be used by all agencies, local to the area and placing in the local areas, to resolve any disagreements [Conflict Resolution Policy](#).

8. Appendix A – Definitions

The following definitions are relevant to this protocol and relate to children who go, or have gone missing.

- 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.
- Care Experienced: An eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989.
- Child: Anyone who has not reached their eighteenth birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people'.
- Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE): CCE occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child into any criminal activity:
 - in exchange for something the victim needs or wants;
 - for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator;
 - through violence or the threat of violence.

The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. CCE does not always involve physical contact, it can also occur through the use of technology. The criminal exploitation of child is not confined to county lines but can also include other forms of criminal activity such as theft, acquisitive crime, knife crimes and other forms of criminality.

- Child Sexual Exploitation: Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is not defined in law. CSE is a form of sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child under the age of 18 into sexual activity in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. CSE does not always involve physical contact, it can also occur through the use of technology.
- County lines: County Lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas [within the UK], using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of 'deal line'. They are likely to exploit a child to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.
- Frequent Missing Child: This is a child that has been missing and formally reported as such, 3 times in a 90-day period.
- Host local authority: The local authority in which a looked after child is placed, when placed out of the responsible local authority's area.
- Human Trafficking: the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. 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. 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).

- Child in Care: 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.
- Missing child: A child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers.
- Missing from care: A child in care who is not at their care home or the place they are expected to be (e.g. school) and their whereabouts is not known.
- Missing person: *Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located, and their wellbeing or otherwise confirmed" (APP college of policing 2023*
- National Referral Mechanism (NRM): a national framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support.
- Repeat Missing Child: This is a child that has been missing and formally reported more than once.
- Responsible Local Authority: The local authority that is responsible for a child's care and care planning.

9. Appendix B – Basic Initial Checks

Concerns that your child / a child in your care is missing

Initial checks:

- Have you searched the home address (or asked parents/carers)?
- Have you attempted to contact the missing child?
- Have you made contact with and visited family and friends?
- Have you checked known addresses/ places frequented/ local area?
- Do you have access to their location online?
- Have you checked social network sites?
- Have you checked whether the child has turned up at an education provision if appropriate?
- Have you checked to see if the child has taken any belongings with them?

If the above checks have taken place and you are still concerned that the child is missing then contact Police on 101 to report your concerns. If you have immediate concerns for their safety call Police on 999. If the child is looked after by the local authority then please contact the child's allocated social worker or EDT (emergency duty team that operates outside of the 9am-5pm working hours) to report the missing episode, sharing the Police log number.

If you are aware that the child has a Trigger Plan/Philomena Protocol, please inform the Police call handler.

Police will ask you a series of questions to find out more around the circumstances leading up to the child going missing. They will ask when the child was last seen, what they were wearing, who they were with, if they were displaying any concerning behaviours prior to going missing.

- The Police will actively look for the child and, if found, they will communicate with parents / carers around the safe return of the child.
- The Police may carry out a safe and well check/Prevention Interview upon the child's return home.

A child who has been missing from home has the right to speak to a professional in relation to their missing episode. This will be arranged by your Local Authority Children's Services. This is to provide an opportunity for the child to speak with an independent person about their missing episode, their experience and any harm that may have occurred. Following the return home interview any immediate safeguarding concerns can be addressed promptly, and further recommendations (including in the Trigger Plan/Philomena Protocol) can be given on reducing the risk of a child going missing from home again.

The above basic checklist will be used in conjunction with the Police's 'Level of Intervention Model' as outlined below:

Police Levels of Intervention Model

The framework introduces the Levels of Intervention Model that recognises that when a child is late home or not where they are supposed to be, there is always some level of risk but there are different levels of intervention:

- Non-intervention - the parent or carer may decide to wait a little longer before intervening to see if the child returns home of their own accord.
- Parental/ Carer Intervention - the parent or carer may decide to go looking for their child themselves by contacting relatives, friends and searching places the child frequents.

- Police Intervention - if the parent or carer is unable to find their child after conducting reasonable enquiries that a responsible parent would complete before contacting the police, and the child has not returned home of their own accord as would be expected, the parent or carer would then report the child as missing to the police. The framework seeks to empower carers, professionals, and police officers to make the right decision in the best interests of children when they are not where they are supposed to be.

The model is not linear. The framework focusses on antecedent behaviour, trigger incidents, out of character behaviour, and post-incident behaviour that may inform risk, to ensure looked after children are reported as missing to the police immediately when they are in unsafe situations and may be at risk of suffering significant harm.

The framework also supports the promotion of the Trigger Plan/Philomena Protocol. That seeks to record important information about a child who may go missing to assist in assessing the level of risk and assist in locating the child if they do subsequently go missing.

10. Appendix C – Trigger Plan & Philomena Protocol

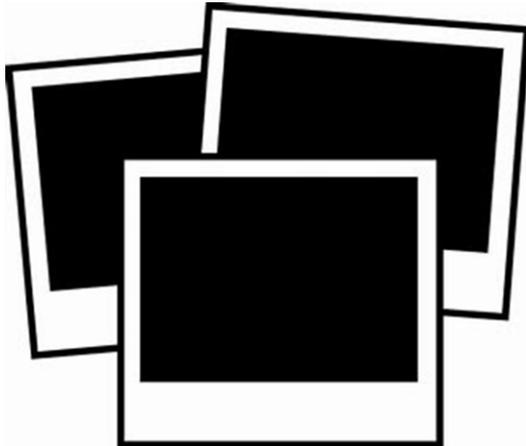
Child's Missing from home TRIGGER PLAN & PHILOMENA PROTOCOL

The purpose of this 'Trigger Plan & Philomena Protocol' (TP&PP) is to set out an effective tactical response to protect and prevent children 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 high.

The TP&PP will be completed by the allocated worker who knows the child best. If the child is not currently open to services, the TP&PP will be completed by the worker carrying out the return interview. It is the responsibility of the allocated worker to ensure that the TP&PP is up to date and accurate and any changes are passed to Lancashire Constabulary.

The TP&PP is a key document that will be used by the local authority, the staff in care settings and the Constabulary, should it be agreed that the child is missing.

Child's name (also include preferred or nicknames)	
Age and D.O.B	
Child's mobile number	
Nationality & Ethnicity (Any language needs)	
Gender Identity	
Care/ Legal status	
Current address and contact details	
Allocated Worker Name and Role	
Allocated Worker contact number	
Child exploitation risk level (CSE and/or CCE)	
Child's physical description	
Height	
Build	
Hair colour/style	
Eye colour	
Distinguishing features (birth marks / scars, piercings etc.)	

Photograph of child


Approximate date the photo was taken:
--

Social Media Accounts		
Platform	Username	Password

Child's Mobile Number:	
Make / Model:	
IMEI Number if known:	
Network:	
Child's Email Address:	

Background and Summary of all identified risks and vulnerabilities
 Posed to the Missing person and professionals and professionals engaging with them

Things to be considered:

1. What event(s) trigger the child's risks / trigger missing episodes?
2. Any significant Dates – Birthdays of Parents/siblings, deaths etc
3. Significant places of interest:
4. Does anyone pose a risk to the child (Please provide detail): Has a Child Abduction Notice (S2/ S49) or Community Protection Warning/Notice ever been served?
5. Does the Child pose a risk to anyone? (Please provide evidence)
6. Does the child have any known health conditions (physical, mental) or learning/educational needs that could effect vulnerability? Any medication taken for health conditions?
7. Any addictions to drugs, alcohol or gambling?
8. Indicators of exploitation (CSE, CCE, Harmful Sexual Behaviours, Radicalisation)?

PARENTS/CARERS AND FAMILY (address, contact number and comments)

Name	Address, contact number and comments

ASSOCIATES (address, contact numbers and comments) N.B are there any S2s of S49s

Name	Address, contact number and comments

RELEVANT ADDRESSES AND LOCATIONS FREQUENTED / FOUND AT (Are there any CPWs or CPNs)

Address	REASON FOR RELEVANCE (include dates and locations previously found)

What is the plan for when the child goes missing?

What action needs to be taken and by whom? (This should reflect what the child tells us would support a safe return and include expectations for parents, carers and professionals and an agreement for notifying the police and social care).

What support is required from the police or other partner agencies when the child is missing to assist in locating them?**What is the proposed prevention plan once the child is found?****Agreement with Child**

Expectations around the time they should normally be home	
Agreement on maintaining contact whilst away from home	
What should we look out for to prevent missing incidents	

Date of Trigger Plan:

Completed by:

Please share this form with the relevant Missing Person Co-ordinators via the email addresses below, and relevant professionals. Ensure a copy is uploaded to the child's case file.

- East BCU: East-MFHCO-ORDINATOR@lancashire.police.uk
- South BCU: South-MFHCO-ORDINATOR@lancashire.police.uk
- West BCU: West-MFHCO-ORDINATOR@lancashire.police.uk