

# **Rochdale Borough Children's Social Care**

## **Missing Children Protocol**

## 1. Context

Greater Manchester Authorities led by the Greater Manchester Police have agreed a standardised approach for dealing with missing and absent persons. Section A of that procedure details the agreed response to missing and absent children and is an agreed response across the Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA)

This protocol details the process for response within Rochdale Metropolitan Borough specifically in relation to Safe and Well Checks (SWC) and Return Interviews (RI) for children living in Rochdale MBC or living outside of Rochdale but looked after by Rochdale MBC. This protocol is produced in line with the AGMA procedure and must be read in conjunction with it. The AGMA Missing From Home Procedure is available on the Rochdale Borough Safeguarding Children Board (RBSCB) website.

## 2. Children Missing From Care

This section relates to children looked after by Rochdale MBC who are accommodated under section 20, subject to a care order (including an interim care order where proceedings are on going) or placement order and are placed in Rochdale or Greater Manchester

**All children looked after by Rochdale MBC should know as part of their placement plan who may conduct a SWC should they be reported missing and what those interviews will involve**

### **2.1 Safe and Well Checks (SWC) for Looked After Children in Rochdale and Placed in Rochdale**

Where a child is deemed as missing and is located a SWC should be carried out within 24 hours. It is the responsibility of the social worker to liaise with the police in respect of the SWC. In most cases a SWC will be offered by the police by virtue of their involvement in the locating of young people however, there may be circumstances where a child returns to a residential placement or foster placement and police are not able to complete the SWC within the specified 24 hours. In these cases it is the responsibility of social care and specifically the allocated social worker to ensure this happens. It is the responsibility of the police to notify the social worker once the child is located.

The SWC must include

- A check for any indicators that the child has suffered or is suffering harm and associated actions
- Identify where they have been
- Identify whom they have been with
- Give them a chance to disclose any offending by or against them

- Encourage the young person to discuss with their carers the arrangements for a full return interview with an independent person (Rochdale Childrens Rights service)
- Provide information about support services
- A consideration and record of the childs appearance and demeanour as well verbal information

The outcome of the interview must be recorded on police OPUS. Where a social worker has managed the SWC they must record the outcome and make this available to the police ppiu as well as on the childs ICS record. In the same way the police must provide the details to the social worker of the SWC if they have carried out the check, to ensure the recording on the childs ICS record.

### 2.3 Return Interviews

**All children looked after by Rochdale MBC should know as part of their placement plan who may conduct a return interview should they be reported missing and what those interviews will involve**

This is a more in depth interview and is best carried out by an independent person. For children in the care of Rochdale MBC living in Rochdale or Greater Manchester this service has been commissioned out and is carried out by the Childrens Rights Service which is currently managed through a contract with the Children's Society

It is the responsibility of the social worker to refer a child to the Children's Rights service for a return interview, within 24 hours of the childs return. (Appendix 1 Referral Form)

The Children's Rights Service will arrange and complete an interview within 72 hours of the childs return. If an interview cannot be completed within 72 hours this should be recorded on the childs ICS record with the reasons and explanations which should also be provided to the child

Clearly a child cannot be forced to go through a return interview but it is for the parents/ carers/social worker/children rights advocate to try to offer and encourage this and explain the reasons for it. There must also be some flexibility about who carries out the interview. Whilst best practice is that this is carried out independently by an advocate from the childrens rights service there will be instances where a child would prefer to discuss the events with someone they know and trust and this should be considered and where appropriate a professional with the skills to complete this, should be supported to do so. Whoever completes this interview must be briefed by the social worker on the process and provide a recording of the interview which will be placed on the childs ICS record as an attachment to the missing record.

It is important return interviews are completed in the following circumstances

- Child has been missing for over 24 hours
- Has been missing on three or more occasions in a calendar month
- Has engaged or is believed to have engaged in criminal activities during their absence
- Has been hurt or harmed during their absence ( or is believed to have been)
- Has known mental health issues

- Is at known risk of CSE or trafficking
- Has contact with persons posing a risk to children

The return interview should

- Identify and deal with any harm the child has suffered.
- Understand and try to address the reasons why a child went missing
- Discuss and work on ways to prevent it happening again

The interview should be recorded and the details provided to the police and the social worker so that this can be recorded in the child's ICS record. Consideration should be given to the convening of a care planning meeting and/or a looked after children's review. In any case the IRO for the child should be notified of the missing incident and outcome

#### **2.4 Children looked after by Rochdale living outside of Greater Manchester**

The same principles apply for both the SWC and return interviews as above

The SWC is likely to be completed by the local police and details should be sought by the social worker so this is recorded on the child's ICS file. If local police do not complete the safe and well check this is the responsibility of the social worker.

However it is recognised that for some children living some distance from Rochdale Borough there will need to be negotiation about who is best placed to complete the return interviews. The interview cannot be carried out by the care provider and must be completed by the social worker, police or Children Rights Service

#### **2.5 Children placed in Rochdale from Other Local Authorities (COLA)**

Other local authorities have a statutory responsibility to notify Rochdale of any child placed in Rochdale.

Rochdale MBC takes the safeguarding of all children in its Borough seriously however it is acknowledged that its powers to intervene for COLA placed in Rochdale Borough is limited but as far as possible the same principles will apply.

The arrangements for carrying out the SWC rests with the police and the record being made available to the responsible/placing Local Authority social worker.

It will be for the responsible local authority to complete the return interview through negotiation with the police and possibly Rochdale emergency duty team. However where this is not completed and a report provided to the police within the agreed 72 hours this will be referred to the Rochdale Safeguarding Unit by the police.

The Safeguarding Children Unit will be responsible for escalating any safeguarding issues in relation to the missing event and management of the care plan for the young person to the safeguarding unit in the responsible authority. The safeguarding unit will keep records of these cases which will be reported to the Rochdale Safeguarding Children Board. (RBSCB)

## **2.6 Children Missing from Home who are not Looked After**

For children missing from home the SWC will be completed by the police and recorded. It will be for the police in line with the AGMA procedure to make the assessment as to whether the case reaches a threshold of risk and referral to social care. The police can also liaise with other agencies to ensure a common assessment is considered/completed

Where the case is referred into social care it will be for the allocated social worker to negotiate with parents who is best placed to carry out the return interview and refer to Children's Rights as appropriate. It maybe that another agency is best placed to complete the safe and well check for example EWO, School Health etc. and this should be considered within the referral and allocation process

The escalations in relation to safeguarding issues for children who have been placed in Rochdale Borough will be provided by the Safeguarding Unit to the RBSCB via the quality assurance sub group.

## **3 Contact**

**To refer to the Children's Society to request a Return Interview.**

E mail referral (Appendix 1) to [rcrs@childrenssociety.org.uk](mailto:rcrs@childrenssociety.org.uk) Subject: Return Interview

**For discussion with the Children's Society call 01706 345600**

Appendix 1

**Referral for Return Interview**

Email to [rcrs@childrenssociety.org.uk](mailto:rcrs@childrenssociety.org.uk) Subject: Return Interview

Name of Child and DOB	
Legal Status	
Name of Social Worker and Contact Number	
Address of Foster Placement/Care home and Contact Number	
Name of Carers/Key worker	
Date Missing	
Date Returned	

**Context**

(Include. History/History of missing/Events prior to missing/Risks)

**A referral form should be accompanied with a full discussion with the Advocate to ensure they have all relevant information to carry out the interview**

## Appendix 2

### Missing person return interview

To be completed by the Advocate

1. *What happened to make you go missing? (Planned, bored, something happened, to get away*
2. *What happened whilst you were missing? (where did you go, who were you with, any trouble, anybody else saw you/met you, how did you get back, how did you feel)*

*What can be done to stop you going missing again?*

*Any issues / concerns raised by young person?*

Child Protection referral required? Yes / no

Referral made by:

Date:

Questions for return interview

	Yes	No	Any comments
<b>Why:</b>			
Anything in the home?			
Peer pressure?			
Going to get drugs/alcohol			
Wanting family contact?			
To clear your head?			
Did you plan to run away- take clothes, food, money?			
Did you just want to stay out?			
Did friends encourage you to stay out?			
Were you kept out against your will?			
<b>When out:</b>			
Were you scared to return?			
Did you at any point want to return?			
Did anything bad happen to you – hurt, injured, drugged, abused, (physical, sexual mental)			
Were you held captive?			
Were you offered			

drink/drugs – how much, what was it, was it bought, given or stolen and where from?			
Where did you stay – friends house, other family members, didn't know them, in a car, walked the streets, outside in the open?			
What did you do for food money clothing?			
Did you manage to shower, and if so where?			
Did you manage to change your clothes, and if so where?			
Was there anything you needed whilst away?			
Did you make contact with anyone whilst away, friends, family carers?			
Did you get involved with the police?			
Did you commit crime – on your own, with someone, did someone ask you to do it?			
	Yes	No	Any Comments
<b>Returning</b>			
Did you return of your own accord?			
Where you returned by someone?			
Did you ask to be			

picked up?			
Were you scared to come back?			
How do you feel now you are back?			
Is there anything you need?			
How have you been treated since you came back?			
Did you have unprotected sex while you were away? Do you need to visit the GUM Clinic?			
Have you got any complaints you would like to make?			
Did you tell anyone where you lived or the phone number?			

Return interview conducted by:

Date:

Time: