

# West Mercia Joint Protocol for Reporting Missing Children and Young People

Protocols to govern all organisations working with children and young people in the West Mercia Police Area

Outlining expected practice for Police, Children Services, all staff in residential children's homes and foster carers for managing episodes of missing children



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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Children's Society 'Still Running' surveys estimated around 100,000 children under the age of 16 run away from home or care each year across the UK.
- 1.2 Many of these children stay with friends or family members, however some do not have or cannot access such support systems therefore tend to stay in harmful environments and in some cases engage in activities that may put them at risk. (*DFE - Statutory Guidance on children who run away and go missing from care or home January 2014*).
- 1.3 This protocol has been revised in conjunction with the statutory guidance.
- 1.4 There are strong links between children involved in sexual exploitation and other behaviours i.e. running away from home or care, bullying, self-harm, teenage pregnancy, truancy and substance misuse. Some children are particularly vulnerable, e.g. Children with special needs, those in residential or foster care, those leaving care, migrant children, unaccompanied asylum seeking children, forced marriage and those involved in gangs.
- 1.5 Sexual exploitation of children and young people has been identified throughout the UK, in both rural and urban areas. It is a form of sexual abuse which has a serious impact on every aspect of the lives of children and families involved. It must be stressed that it also affects boys and young men as well as girls and young women.
- 1.6 In the region of 4700 missing person reports a year are made across Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and Worcestershire. Approximately 2,900 of these cases are formally investigated by the police and 1,750 (59%) involve children under 18yrs.
- 1.7 For the 2014 /15 period, 290 children were reported missing more than twice. These 290 children generated 1290 missing reports. 1003 (38%) missing reports involved children who were looked after children, many of whom are placed within the West Mercia Police area by outside local authorities: particularly those resident in the 140 Children's care homes operated by local authorities and private care providers. It is evidenced in National Research that children living with parents in the family home are under-reported with around two-thirds of incidents never being reported to statutory agencies including the police.
- 1.8 In order to protect children from harm it is vitally important that, if a child is regularly going missing a full assessment of risk is undertaken by the Protecting Vulnerable People (PVP) missing person co-ordinator. The purpose of this role is to work in partnership with all agencies in order to reduce risk and repeat episodes, especially by individuals or at locations that are 'high risk' in order to protect the vulnerable.
- 1.9 It is also important to highlight the fact that the majority of looked-after children do not experience missing episodes; in fact most children in residential care do NOT go missing.
- 1.10 Academic research together with local analysis by Police and local authority staff show that children who run away are often very vulnerable; exposing themselves to heightened risk e.g. becoming victims of crime, sexually exploited, involved in substance misuse or crime and disorder.

- 1.11 Research shows that the level of risk to the individual child increases each occasion that they go missing. This is contrary to the misconception that the risk decreases as the young person is 'street-wise' and therefore at a consequent lesser risk. The reality is quite the reverse.
- 1.12 Since the first version of this protocol was introduced in 2003, the constituent Local Authorities and Police within the West Mercia Policing area have worked effectively together to address the problem. Using partnership, problem solving and performance management the incidents of 'repeat' runaway behaviour have been reduced.
- 1.13 This approach has also helped to safeguard some of our most vulnerable children whilst reducing the demand on resources – an improving picture.
- 1.14 However, agencies must not become complacent as the issue of young runaways remains a significant problem. This issue requires continued focus and 'working together' to ensure our children are protected from predatory influences that exist within society.
- 1.15 Contact Information

If you believe a child is at immediate risk, this should be reported without delay to the Police Service: for emergencies or for urgent / immediate reporting 101 or 0300 333 3000 as well as making contact with Children Services.

Worcestershire 0845 607 2000 (office hours) & 01905 768020 (Emergency Duty Team)

Herefordshire MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) 01432 260800  
[www.herefordshire.gov.uk/MASH](http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/MASH)

Shropshire 0345 678 9021 & EDT 0345 678 9040 (Out of office hours)

Telford and Wrekin 01952 385385 & EDT 01952 676500

### **Reporting a Child missing from care.**

West Mercia Police Communications Centre via 101 will record all details of missing children. By the utilisation of a questions set Contact Management staff will risk assess each report case to ensure the correct operation deployment classification.

### **1.16 Return Interviews.**

Completed return interview forms should be sent to the relevant West Mercia Missing Person Co-ordinators

Worcestershire and Herefordshire – [HAUSouth@westmercia.pnn.police.uk](mailto:HAUSouth@westmercia.pnn.police.uk)

Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin – [HAUNorth@westmercia.pnn.police.uk](mailto:HAUNorth@westmercia.pnn.police.uk)

Where return interviews highlight the need for urgent protective action, sharing information with the relevant services involved already with the child and with children's social care must be undertaken, in addition to the Missing Person Co-ordinators.

Map of West Mercia police area



**2.Scope** 2.1The terms child and children refer to any young person under the age of 18.

2.2 This procedure is designed for: -

- All children and young people under 18 years of age who go missing from the parental home.
- Children and young people looked after by the constituent Local Authorities placed in Local Authority Children's homes within the West Mercia Policing area boundaries.
- Children and young people looked after by ANY Local Authority placed with foster carers within the West Mercia Policing area boundaries.
- Children and young people looked after by ANY Local Authority and placed in private establishments or with agency foster carers within the West Mercia Policing area boundaries, where compliance with the protocol is specified in the contract or placement agreement.
- All children and young people placed within the West Mercia Policing area boundaries (including those aged over 18) for whom the constituent Local Authorities have continuing responsibilities under The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

2.3 From this point forward in this document, the constituent Local Authorities within the West Mercia Policing area are:

- Worcestershire County Council.
- Herefordshire Council
- Shropshire Council
- Telford & Wrekin Council

These will be termed "Children's Services."

2.4 For the purposes of this procedure "Parent" is defined as the parents, friends, relatives, or those providing private fostering arrangements who look after the child at their current place of residence.

### **3. Legislation and Definitions**

- 3.1 The legal parameters within which missing person enquiries are conducted can be found in the common law, international law and especially the provisions of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR). Some of the provisions of the ECHR have been given legal effect within the United Kingdom by virtue of the Human Rights Act 1998. Data Protection legislation places certain conditions on the 'processing' of information classed as personal data. Data held for policing purposes should only be disclosed for such purposes. Adherence to this Agreement ensures compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998.
- 3.2 In January 2014 the Department for Education published statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care supporting local authorities to meet the requirements of National Indicator 71. Guidance was issued under Section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970, which means that, except in exceptional circumstances, local authorities must comply with this.
- 3.3 The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (March 2011) strengthens the role of the Independent Reviewing officer (IRO) and extends the role of the Independent Visitor. Both have key roles in relation to children who go missing from care.

#### **Categories of Missing**

##### **3.4 Unauthorised Absence (looked after children)**

3.4.1 West Mercia and Warwickshire Police working practice for unauthorised absence only applies to looked after children for a period of up to 6 hours. There is no requirement for unauthorised absences to be reported the Police.

3.4.2 There are a number of situations where children and young people will be considered as absent without authority, most commonly when they are accidentally or deliberately late home to the placement, or when they run away from a placement following an incident or occurrence at the placement, or when their whereabouts are known AND there are minimal risks to their safety or well-being.

3.4.3 Before a child or young person becomes categorised as missing, a clear judgement needs to be made. The initial responsibility for this judgement must rest with the carer. Police do not need to be made aware of unauthorised absences from care homes.

##### **3.5 Absent (children from parental address)**

3.5.1 Absent – A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be and/or the behaviour is not out of character and there is no apparent risk. Absent will not apply to looked after children.

3.5.2 It has been agreed by West Mercia Police that six hours should be regarded as the absolute maximum for any child or young person to be categorised as absent, rather than being formally reported as missing.

3.5.3 Children (from parental address) who are not looked after children and are considered absent will be reported to Police

### **3.6 Missing/Absconded**

3.6.1 A child or young person will be categorised as 'Missing' when their whereabouts cannot be established and/or the circumstances are out of character and the context suggests the person is subject of a crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another. A child or young person in this category must be reported to the police without delay.

3.6.2 An absconder is a child or young person who is absent from the placement without permission and who is subject to an order or requirement resulting from the criminal justice process, or a secure order made in either civil or criminal proceedings. A child or young person in this category must be reported to the police without delay.

3.6.3 If an absconder is under the age of 18 years, or if the absconding does not involve a power of arrest, the Police will treat the case as BOTH a Missing Person AND an absconder. This means that it will be necessary to provide detailed information to the Police on the Missing Person form. The paragraphs in section 8 and section 9 of this protocol will apply. When the person is traced, it is likely that they will also be arrested or dealt with by the police in relation to any offence or breach.

3.6.4 However, if the person is aged 16 or over and is liable to arrest the Police will treat the person solely as an absconder and not as a Missing Person, unless there are grounds to suspect that factors other than the absconders desire to evade justice are involved in their disappearance. If the Police treat the case solely as one of absconding, in these circumstances they will actively seek the absconder for arrest. Notwithstanding, absconders in this category must also be reported to the Police without delay.

3.6.5 In the rare event of the child / young person not being located the police will continue their investigation in line with ACPO policy and there will be regular reviews and information sharing between agencies.

### **3.7 Additional Statutory Responsibilities for those exercising care for children**

3.7.1 Anyone who has care of a child or young person without parental knowledge or agreement should do what is reasonable to safeguard and promote the child's or young person's welfare. In these circumstances, they should inform the police, Children's Services and the parents of the child/young person of their whereabouts and safety. If this is not complied with, the Police could consider advice or warning under the Child Abduction Act 1984, if appropriate.

3.7.2 Anyone who 'takes or detains' a runaway under 16 without lawful authority may be prosecuted under Section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984 or Section 49 Children Act 1989.

3.7.3 It is important to understand that children and young people who go missing under the age of 16 are not legally considered as being able to live independently away from home. For children and young people over the age of 16, consideration should be given to their physical and emotional needs and the potential risk of harm when making a judgment as to whether they can live independently away from home.



## 4. Principles

4.1 This revised protocol has been agreed between:

- West Mercia Police
- Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board
- Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Board
- Shropshire Safeguarding Children Board
- Telford & Wrekin Safeguarding Children Board

This protocol should be read as **guidance**, which cannot anticipate every situation. Police, parents, Children's Services staff and foster carers should take any action that is deemed necessary to protect the safety of the child or young person, based on a robust and objective assessment of risk for each individual child.

4.2 Children and young people who go missing may place themselves and others at risk. The reasons for their absence are often varied and complex and cannot be viewed in isolation from their home circumstances and their experiences of care. Every "missing" episode should attract proper attention from the professionals involved with the missing person and they **MUST** collaborate to ensure a consistent and coherent response is given to the missing person on his/her return.

4.3 Nationally, there is a problem of 'Looked after Children' going missing repeatedly from their placements. This applies also in the West Mercia Policing Area.

4.4 Every missing episode is *potentially* serious.

4.5 Our joint aim is to reduce the incidence of all children and young people going missing and / or absent.

4.6 When a child or young person does go missing our joint aim is to prevent them suffering harm and to recover them to safety as soon as possible.

4.7 We do this by partnership working, information sharing, problem solving, and performance management.

4.8 Interventions are important in attempting to address repeat missing episodes. Interventions must be informed by and reflected in the care plan.

4.9 Interventions must also be informed by effective return interviews with returning children. A child or young person's concerns will be taken seriously.

4.10 Interventions may be focused at the individual child or young person, their parents, the care establishment or by targeting 'pull' factors in the community. It is important that any relevant information obtained is shared with all partner agencies, to ensure effective future safeguarding.

4.11 Parents, Children Services and/or Carers should report a child or young person missing to the police according to this protocol.

4.12 Children Services and/or Carers and the police will monitor compliance with the protocol and monitor outcomes jointly.

4.13 Together we will take steps to ensure improved responses and practice thereby delivering better outcomes for children and young people.

## 5. Parents and Guardians (children from parental address)

### Stage 1: Initial Action and Notification

- 5.1 When parents become aware that they do not know the location of their child in their care they should make an initial judgement as to whether the child is Absent or [Missing \(see 3.6\)](#). The Duty Sergeant/Inspector of the local policing area can be contacted for advice if the parents have any doubts as to the status of the absence or the risks involved.
- 5.2 If the child whose location is not known is subject to an order or requirement resulting from the criminal justice process they will be classed as [Absconded \(see 3.6\)](#).
- 5.3 Within this initial judgement (5.1), basic measures to try to locate the child or young person should always be undertaken if considered safe to do so, including:
- Search bedroom / house / outbuildings / vehicles
  - Contact known friends and relatives where child/ young person may be
  - Visit locations that the child is known to frequent.
- 5.4 In deciding the category of absence, the parents are advised to consider the circumstances of the child or young person and their absence. This will include detailed consideration of:
- The circumstances of the absence.
  - The age of the child or young person
  - The maturity of the child or young person.
  - Any physical or cognitive disability of the child or young person.
  - Any continuing or urgent need for the child or young person to have medication or other medical treatment.
  - Previous behaviour and history of the child or young person or young person.
  - Danger posed by the child to themselves or others.
  - General vulnerability of the child or young person.
  - The child or young person's disposition towards drug/substance abuse.
  - Whether the child or young person is perceived as running to, or running from, someone or something.
  - The risk of offending.
  - The influence of peer groups, families or friends.
  - Predatory influences on the child or young person. These may relate to others wanting to use the child or young person for crime, sex or drugs.
  - Any known risk of abduction.
  - Environmental factors including weather, time of year, community events or tensions.
- 5.4 The fact that the child or young person may have gone missing on a number of previous occasions does not reduce the risk. In fact, children or young people who repeatedly go missing are often being enticed away from their placement by risky activities that they see as exciting or by predatory influences. Furthermore, short absences may be as risky as lengthy ones.
- 5.5 Any child who is reported absent to Police and with whom no contact has been made for up to a maximum of 6 hours (from the time they were expected back) should be automatically judged to be Missing.

- 5.6 If the initial judgement made by parents is that the child is Missing, or the child has not been contacted for 6 hours and is therefore judged to be missing, it is considered a reasonable step for parents to inform the police and Children's Services that their child or young person is missing.

**Stage 2: Assessment and Classification**

- 5.7 While it is the responsibility of the Police to officially assess and classify the missing episode in order to inform their operation, parents will be required to support investigations.

**Stage 3: Child is Located**

- 5.8 It is the responsibility of the parent to contact the Police and to confirm that the missing child or young person has returned to home. If there are concerns that the child has been the victim of a crime or that they may be in danger or at risk from any person arising out of circumstances that have occurred whilst they were absent, this should be reported to the Police at this point.
- 5.9 When the whereabouts of a child is suspected, or becomes known, it is the responsibility of the parents to arrange for the child or young person's return. In exceptional circumstances the Police, in conjunction with Children's Services, may assist in the return of the child where there are specific concerns which require the safe and speedy return.

## **6. Foster Carers, Residential Care Provider and Responsible (Placing) Authority**

Children Services and carers should adopt a consistent approach to the planning and assessment of “looked after children”.

### **Stage 0: Planning, Placement and Prevention**

- 6.1 The West Mercia Missing Children Risk Assessment form (from this point forward referred to as the Risk Assessment and available in [Appendix A](#)) should be completed prior to the placement being made, or at a minimum within 72 hours of an emergency placement. The Responsible Authority should complete the risk assessment with the care provider.
- 6.2 The Risk Assessment is the initial foundation of a potential serious enquiry. It should be regarded as a detailed, considered and evidential process.
- 6.3 The completed Risk Assessment should be retained by the Responsible Authority and the Care Provider. When missing or unauthorised absence episodes are ‘anticipated’ with the Risk Assessment, the child’s Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) must be informed of any anticipated risk to ensure safeguarding arrangements are properly considered in care planning.
- 6.4 A copy of the completed Risk Assessment should be sent securely to West Mercia Police Missing Person Co-ordinator within the appropriate Harm Assessment Unit ([HAUNorth@westmercia.pnn.police.uk](mailto:HAUNorth@westmercia.pnn.police.uk) for children placed in Shropshire or Telford & Wrekin and [HAUSouth@westmercia.pnn.police.uk](mailto:HAUSouth@westmercia.pnn.police.uk) for children placed in Herefordshire and Worcestershire). The Missing Person Co-ordinator will ensure this information is available on COMPACT in preparation for a potential missing episode.
- 6.5 The Care Provider should undertake appropriate actions to minimise the risks to the child of going missing outlined within the Risk Assessment. Such actions should be included within the child’s care plan based on a full assessment of the child or young person’s current and future needs, including potential risk to self or others. It may also be necessary to notify other safeguarding partners if there is a likelihood that the child or young person might go missing from another setting (e.g. Hospital), and what action they must take if this occurs.
- 6.7 The Responsible Authority and Care Provider must ensure that a recent photograph is available to assist the process of finding the child. When a child or young person is admitted to care the consent of a person with parental responsibility will be sought for a photograph to be used in any potential subsequent missing person investigation. If possible the agreement of the child or young person should also be gained.
- 6.8 When missing or unauthorised absence episodes are ‘anticipated’ by the Care Plan, the child or young person should have explained to them. A resource prepared for children and young people is in Appendix B.

### **Stage 1: Initial Action and Notification**

- 6.9 Should care providers identify that they do not know the location of a child in their care they should make an initial judgement as to whether the child is [Unauthorised Absent \(see 3.4\)](#) with no apparent risk or [Missing \(see 3.6\)](#).
- 6.10 This initial judgement should be made in partnership with the Responsible (Placing) Authority’s Children’s Services department. The Police Control Room (101) can be

contacted for advice if the parents or foster carers have any doubts as to the status of the absence or the risks involved. In addition, if the child or young person is receiving support from other professionals (e.g. CAMHS professionals, Educational Psychologists) it may be advisable to discuss the case with them. However, if they are not readily available a decision must be made on the basis of the best available information.

- 6.11 If the child whose location is not known is subject to an Order or requirement resulting from the criminal justice process they will be classed as [Absconded \(see 3.6\)](#).
- 6.12 Within this initial judgement (6.9), basic measures to try to locate the child or young person should always be undertaken if considered safe to do so, including:
  - Search bedroom / house / outbuildings / vehicles
  - Contact known friends and relatives where child/ young person may be
  - Visit locations that the child is known to frequent.
- 6.13 If a child or young person becomes absent whilst on an external activity member of staff in charge will;
  - Arrange an initial search of the area the child or young person was last seen.
  - Notify the local Police immediately. This should be the Police Force who are responsible for the area where the child or young person was last seen. This must be undertaken immediately and not be delayed until the group has returned to the care placement.
  - Notify the child or young person's social worker or the accountable team manager both locally and within the placing authority.
  - Notify the senior manager at home (if applicable)
  - Notify the emergency out of hours duty team (if applicable)
- 6.14 In deciding the category of absence, the care provider and the Responsible (Placing) Authority's Children's Services department must consider the circumstances of the child or young person and their absence. This will include detailed consideration of:
  - The circumstances of the absence.
  - The child or young person's care plan.
  - The age of the child or young person
  - The maturity of the child or young person.
  - Any physical or cognitive disability of the child or young person.
  - Any continuing or urgent need for the child or young person to have medication or other medical treatment.
  - The legal status of the child or young person.
  - Previous behaviour and history of the child or young person or young person.
  - Danger posed by the child to themselves or others.
  - General vulnerability of the child or young person.
  - The child or young person's disposition towards drug/substance abuse.
  - Whether the child or young person is perceived as running to, or running from, someone or something.
  - Any circumstances within the placement, say with carers or other residents that may be relevant to the absence.
  - The risk of offending.
  - The influence of peer groups, families or friends.

- Predatory influences on the child or young person. These may relate to others wanting to use the child or young person for crime, sex or drugs.
- Any known risk of abduction.
- Environmental factors including weather, time of year, community events or tensions.

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

6.16 Where a child has been deemed to be Unauthorised Absent for 6 hours the care provider should contact the police to make a “missing report.”

6.18 Missing person reports are to be made to West Mercia Police Control Room (101). An aide memoir is included in Appendix C highlighting the questions you will be asked by police when making the missing person report.

### **Stage 2: Assessment and Classification**

6.19 While it is the responsibility of the Police to grade the missing person report as High or Medium risk, the care provider and responsible authority (remain responsible for the child or young person in their care) will be required to support the activity to find the child

6.20 The child’s Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) must be informed of the missing episode, what steps have been taken to find them, and when found the circumstances of this. The IRO will consider whether it is appropriate to reconvene the LAC Review as a result.

### **Stage 3: Child is Located**

6.21 It is the responsibility of the care provider to contact the Police and to confirm that the missing child or young person has returned home. If there are concerns that the child has been the victim of a crime or that they may be in danger or at risk from any person arising out of circumstances that have occurred whilst they were absent, this should be reported to the Police at this point.

6.22 When the whereabouts of a child is suspected, or becomes known, it is the responsibility of the parents to arrange for the child or young person's return. In exceptional circumstances the Police, in conjunction with Children’s Services, may assist in the return of the child where there are specific concerns which require the safe and speedy return.

6.23 Upon receipt of a found notification, the Responsible Authority’s Children’s Services should undertake a return interview unless there is a defensible reason not to and consider further children’s services intervention.

## 7. Semi Independent Living Providers

- 7.1 The legal and practice framework for the provision of 16+ semi-independent living arrangements for Looked After and Relevant young people is specified in Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers of The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations (revised May 2014)
- 7.2 These arrangements are classed as 'unregulated' and are not covered by the regulations that apply to fostering and residential placements. This is to enable semi-independent provision to realistically prepare young people for their transition to adulthood; for example, via the planned stepping down of monitoring and support. Semi-independent accommodation includes:
- Supported Board and Lodgings
  - Supported Housing projects (whether commissioned via Children's Services or Supporting People)
  - 16+ flats and house share arrangements.
- 7.3 Care leavers aged 16 or 17 in semi-independent living arrangements may be Eligible (subject to S.31 Care Order or S.20 Accommodated) or Relevant (no longer S20 Accommodated) under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.
- 7.4 The Volume 3 Guidance and Regulations do not reference care leavers going missing from semi-independent living arrangements.
- 7.5 In practice most semi-independent arrangements allow for care leavers to have periods of time, including overnights, away from their accommodation. This will be included in the placement plan, individual placement agreement (IPA) or the occupational licence; and a clear agreement reached between the provider, the care leaver and the 16+ social worker. In setting out these arrangements relevant risk assessments will be shared with semi-independent accommodation providers.
- 7.6 Whilst care leavers aged 16 and 17 have a greater degree of independence and self-determination than younger looked after children they are not adults and are subject to safeguarding procedures. It should be noted that for some care leavers the journey to adulthood may increase their level of vulnerability; for example to sexual exploitation or substance misuse.
- 7.7 Unplanned/unauthorised absences from a semi-independent living arrangement should be responded to as above in 6. Foster Carers, Residential Care Provider and Responsible (Placing) Authority.
- 7.8 16 and 17 year olds who are S.20 Accommodated and have 'capacity' can withdraw their consent to be accommodated – refusal of permission to 'stay out' beyond agreed limits can be a trigger for this. It is in the best interests of care leavers to remain in suitable accommodation. Therefore in such circumstances a LAC Review chaired by an IRO should be held to explore this decision with the young person and their support network - with the aim of maintaining the semi-independent living arrangement.

## 8. Police

### Stage 1: Initial Action and Notification

8.1 On receipt of the West Mercia Missing Children Risk Assessment form the Missing Person Co-ordinator ensures this information is available on COMPACT in preparation for a potential missing episode.

8.2 The Risk Assessment is the initial foundation of a potential serious enquiry. It should be regarded as a detailed, considered and evidential process.

8.3 The investigation and all resulting actions will be proportionate to the risk level accorded to the enquiry. Whilst partner agencies may have their own risk assessments, the West Mercia POLICE investigation will be proportionate to the ACPO risk assessment allocated as below, which may be different.

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>High</b>   | The <b>risk posed is immediate</b> and there are substantial grounds for believing that the subject is in danger through their own vulnerability, or may have been a victim of a serious crime; or the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger. |
| <b>Medium</b> | The risk posed is <b>likely</b> to place the subject in danger, or they are a threat to themselves or others.  |
| <b>Low</b>    | There is no <b>apparent</b> risk of danger to either the subject or the public.  |

### Stage 2: Assessment and Classification

8.4 Children missing from care should never be categorised as 'Absent' and will be dealt with as either unauthorised absence or missing . Where the protocol has associated risks are identified, the police will always progress a missing investigation.

8.5 The missing episode should be recorded, completed on COMPACT and an officer deployed to investigate and inform children's social care.

8.6 A police officer will attend all reports of missing children or young people.

8.7 Police will decide the risk level to be assigned to the case. This will always be High or Medium.

### Stage 3: Child is Located

8.8 The Police will attend for a face-to-face contact in order to complete a West Mercia Police Found Report (incorporating a Safe and Well Check). Should any safeguarding concerns become apparent the police officer must make an appropriate referral in line with the [West Mercia Child Protection Procedures](#). Specific consideration should be given to the increased risk of Child Sexual Exploitation to the child who went missing.



## **9. Host Authority Children's Services (for the area in which the missing episode originates)**

Children's Services and carers should adopt a consistent approach to the planning and assessment of "looked after children". The responsibilities of Host Authorities are outlined below.

### **Stage 0: Planning, Placement and Prevention**

- 9.1 Host authorities will be notified of a child moving in to their area before the placement is made, or within 5 working days should the placement have been made in an emergency. Notifications should include any previous history of missing episodes and associated risks such as child sexual exploitation or gang related activity.

### **Stage 2: Assessment and Classification**

- 9.2 When a child is reported as missing to the Police the Host Authority will be informed of the missing episode via a missing notification.
- 9.3 Should the child experience significant harm whilst missing the Host Authority should convene a strategy discussion and follow child protection procedures.
- 9.4 If the child has been missing on 3 occasions or more the Host Authority should contact the Responsible Authority to provide appropriate challenge regarding what action the Responsible Authority is taking to manage the risk.

### **Data and Analysis**

- 9.5 Looked after children who go missing, or who are away from placement without authorisation, can be at increased risk of sexual or other forms of exploitation or of involvement in drugs, gangs and criminal activity or trafficking. Early and effective sharing of information between professionals and local agencies is essential for the identification of patterns of behaviour. Data may be analysed to identify areas of concern for an individual child, or to identify 'hotspots' of activity in a local area. It will also help identify trends, for example, whether children are going missing from a particular children's home or other patterns across the local authority.
- 9.6 Data on missing episodes, including intelligence from return interviews, should be analysed regularly by all relevant partners to map problems and patterns. Regular reports should be provided to council members and the LSCB.

## 10. Schools and Organisations Running Organised Activities

### Stage 0: Planning, Placement and Prevention

10.1 This protocol does not apply to children who are missing education.

“Children missing education” refers to all children of compulsory school age:

- Who are not on a school roll or being educated otherwise (e.g. privately or in alternative provision)
- Who have been out of any educational provision for a substantial and locally agreed period of time
- Who either fail to start in a new school or appropriate education provision or become lost from school rolls or fail to re-register at a new school when they move home.

Children who are missing education are more likely to be vulnerable in one way or another – they may be from disadvantaged families or at risk of neglect or abuse. Certain groups of vulnerable children are more likely than others to go missing from education:

- Young people who have committed offences;
- Children living in women’s refuges;
- Children of homeless families, perhaps living in temporary accommodation;
- Young runaways;
- Children with long-term medical or emotional problems;
- Looked After children;
- Children with a gypsy/traveller background;
- Young carers;
- Children with transient families;
- Teenage mothers;
- Children who are permanently excluded from school;
- Migrant children, whether in families seeking asylum or economic migrants; and
- Trafficked children

10.2 The Department for Education published in 2013 the “Children Missing Education: Statutory guidance for local authorities” which requires each local authority to have a Children Missing from Education (CME) Officer and a system of recording and notification in relation to children who are known to be missing education. Schools must notify the CME Officer of any child known to be, or suspected to be, missing education.

**10.3 A child who goes missing from a school or educational establishment where they are receiving education** should not be confused with "Missing from Education" which is about a child's access, or lack of access, to education rather than their physical location.

The action to be taken when a child goes missing from a school or educational establishment is detailed below:

## **Stage 1: Initial Action and Notification**

- 10.4 If it comes to the attention of any agency (including schools and voluntary organisations) that they are unaware of the location of a child or young person they have responsibility for, they must advise the parent/carer of the organisation's duty to ensure that the matter is reported to the police and if necessary follow this up by contacting the police to verify the reporting by the parent / carer has occurred. It is not expected that reports of children truanting from school should routinely be reported to and investigated by Police. These cases should be referred to the Local Educational Welfare Officer following discussion with parents / guardians or carers.
- 10.5 The best practice expectation is that once a school (or organised activity) establishes that a child is not attending that day and if the school hasn't had a notification from a parent/carer that the child will not be attending, they should contact the parent to ensure that the child is at home rather than missing.
- 10.6 If a child or young person becomes absent whilst on an external activity the member of staff in charge will;
- Arrange an initial search of the area the child or young person was last seen.
  - Notify the local Police immediately. This should be the Police Force who are responsible for the area where the child or young person was last seen. This must be undertaken immediately and not be delayed until the group has returned to the care placement.
  - Notify the child or young person's social worker or the accountable team manager both locally and within the placing authority.
  - Notify the senior manager at home (if applicable)
  - Notify the emergency out of hours duty team (if applicable)

## 11. Informing the Media

- 11.1 In some cases, particularly where a missing child or young person is felt to be especially vulnerable (High Risk) or where they have been missing for several days it may be necessary to publicise the case via the media. Such an approach is not routine but is the usual response to serious concerns for the child or young person's safety. Either carers or the Police may suggest such an approach. Decisions to publicise should be jointly made and a meeting to discuss a media release should be convened with Police, Children's Services, care home managers, and if appropriate, the child or young person's parents.
- 11.2 However, in urgent cases primacy over such decisions must lie with the Police to ensure operational effectiveness. This will be by exception and in these cases every effort should be made to contact Children's Services and parents in an attempt to jointly agree details of the press release. The child or young person will not be identified as a looked after child unless absolutely necessary.
- 11.3 If it is believed that the case involves the abduction of a child in care, then any decision to publicise the case is likely to be urgent. This decision will be made in accordance with nationally agreed procedures by a Police officer of the rank of Superintendent. Where practicable, Children's Services will be consulted in advance and any information released will be jointly agreed.

## 12. Return Interviews

12.1 Statutory guidance stipulates that a Return Interview should be conducted with the child once they have been located to explore the reasons for running away and to identify support needs. It should be carried out by an independent person and completed within 72hrs of return.

12.2 Evidence from young people suggests that children who go missing tend to be helped most when professionals and agencies generally work together. This includes considering what support is offered to families and carers. 12.3 It may be appropriate for a young person to influence the decision about who undertakes the Return Interview, but arrangements may vary from area to area and might include:

- Return Interviews being carried out by staff who know the young people and who they may already have a good relationship with;
- A member of the social work team not directly known to the young person;
- An appropriately experienced and trained professional such as a learning mentor, Targeted Youth Support practitioner or Advocate.

12.4 It is important for staff to complete the Return Interview process fully and to gather any appropriate information in such a way that this can be used as evidenced in any other arena as required. For example this could be used when requesting a Section 2 Harboursing Notice if this is required in order to keep the young person safe.

12.5 If during the Return Interview discussion information is disclosed concerning harm to or from the young person then the staff member needs to take the relevant steps to report this either to the police and/or to the local authority if safeguarding concerns are raised. This may lead to other assessment processes including an early help assessment, Social Work Assessment or s47 investigation.

12.6 The West Mercia Joint Protocol for Missing Children adopts the Children's Society criteria for Return Interviews.

12.7 The relevant criteria are that:

- The child has been missing on 2 or more occasions;
- The child has engaged or is believed to have engaged in criminal activities;
- The child has been hurt or harmed whilst they have been missing or this is believed;
- The child has mental health issues;
- The child lives in a household where there are mental health, child protection, domestic abuse and/or substance misuse issues;
- The child is at risk of or thought to be at risk of sexual exploitation;
- The child has had contact with persons posing a risk to children, including boyfriends/girlfriends/partners that are more than two years older than the young person.

12.8 A Return Interview is an in depth conversation led by a trained professional whom the young person can trust. It should be able to help identify the reasons for running away, such as neglect, or any form of abuse and highlight any exploitation that may have occurred whilst the young person was missing. It also allows professionals to take immediate action to prevent further risks if necessary.

**If the Return Interview is not undertaken.**

12.9 All children and young people will be offered a Return Interview. However, there will be some cases in which it is felt by the case manager and their line manager that a Return Interview is not required or appropriate, for whatever reason. It is very important in these cases that both the case manager and their line manager have a discussion about this and agree together that no Return Interview is going to take place. This needs to be recorded clearly on the child's record along with the reasons for the decision.

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## 13. Police Powers

- 13.1 The Police have significant powers to safeguard vulnerable children.
- 13.2 These include powers to enter premises, to recover children whilst exercising their powers of protection.
- 13.3 There are a number of options available to police in order to address any circumstances that may suggest a crime has been committed with the second half of 5.4 It is recognised that children or young people who have been the victim of a serious offence may not always see themselves as victims or be willing to assist in the investigation, particularly in the early stages. Likewise those whom others have used for criminal purposes may not be willing to assist the Police. A complaint from a victim is not required to make an arrest.
- 13.4 Prosecution of Individuals Harboured Children: Anyone who “takes or detains” a runaway under 16 without lawful authority may be prosecuted under Section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984 or under Section 49 Children Act 1989 if the child is in care and under 18 yrs. Where children or young people are persistent absconders and continue to be harboured by the same individual consideration should be given to prosecution under the Child Abduction Act.
- 13.5 West Mercia Police have developed warning notices for harbourers ( Child Abduction Warning Notices – CAWNS) which can be used at an early stage prior to any prosecution. (See Appendix D)
- 13.6 If the harbourer is suspected of sexual exploitation or other abuse consideration should be given to securing evidence to prosecute at the earliest opportunity.
- 13.7 If evidence suggests that the harbourer has no malicious intent then the primary intent is to ensure that the warning notice is effective so that their behaviour changes and a prosecution is not necessary.
- 13.8 Under Section 50 Children Act 1983 a court can make a Recovery Order concerning a child in care, subject to an Emergency Protection Order if there are grounds to believe the he/ she has been lawfully taken away from the person responsible for his care, if he has run away or been missing from care. The order acts as a direction for the child or young person to be produced or for disclosure as to his whereabouts. If the court has reasonable grounds to believe the child or young person is on premises it may permit a constable to enter named premises to search for them using reasonable force if necessary.

## 14. Prevention Strategy

14.1 Children's Services and Police will monitor the absences of individual children and young people and absences from each residential establishment. This monitoring will be presented in a quarterly report prepared by a Police analyst and shared with Children's Services.

14.2 West Mercia Police and Children's Services will operate an escalating system of interventions to reduce the likelihood of a child or young person repeatedly going missing. There is no expectation that workers have to progress through each stage in sequence.

14.3 Intervention meetings should take place in the event of repeat episodes of children or young people going missing from care. The intervention meetings can be convened by either Children's Services or the Police but will be chaired by Children's Services responsible for the child or young person. These meetings must include Police representation.

For these meetings to work, and thereby improve our collective responses, appropriate attendance and clarity of purpose are essential.

14.4 These meetings can be deferred or suspended if the police and Children's Services agree this and work is already being conducted by any partner agency to address the missing episodes.

14.5 The intervention meetings should be held within a week of any trigger episode. The meetings should be chaired and recorded and the increased levels of concern reflected in the seniority of those attending as follows:-

14.6 One Individual having Three Missing Person Episodes in 90 Days:

14.6.1 PVP Missing Person Co-ordinator to arrange Inter-Agency Meeting with relevant partner agencies (e.g. key social worker, care home manager, parents if appropriate and other relevant or interested parties) to review placement, patterns of Missing episodes, individual 'push-pull' factors and strategies to eliminate problem(s). Should the PVP Missing Person Co-ordinator not be available the social worker for the missing child or lead professional takes the responsibility for organising the Inter-Agency Meeting.

14.6. This meeting should try to identify any 'push' or 'pull' factors in the case and any other voluntary or statutory agency, which has an interest or may take an interest, in the Missing Person's welfare and circumstances. In the case of 'pull' factors it may be necessary to target those in the community who harbour the Missing Person or exploit them with regard to crime, sex or drugs.

14.7 One individual having between Four and Six Missing Episodes in One Year:

14.7.1 PVP Missing Person Co-ordinator to arrange Inter-Agency Meeting with relevant Partner Agencies i.e. team manager from Children's Services, residential unit manager/assistant or family placement manager (as appropriate), social worker, representatives from health and/or education (as appropriate) person who conducted return interview (if different to above). The purpose of the meeting is to review placement, patterns of missing episodes, individual 'push-pull' factors and strategies to eliminate problems(s).



- 14.7.2 This level of intervention meeting is the crucial stage in avoiding serious escalation and must, therefore, be given high priority by all concerned.
- 14.8 One individual having between Seven and Nine Missing Episodes in One Year:
- 14.8.1 PVP Missing Person Co-ordinator to arrange Inter-Agency Meeting with relevant Partner Agencies i.e. team manager from children's services, Local Police Sergeant, residential manager or family placement manager (as appropriate), social worker, representatives from health and/or education (as appropriate) person who conducted return interview if different to above. The purpose of this meeting is to review placement, patterns of Missing Episodes, individual 'push-pull' factors and strategies to eliminate problem(s).
- 14.8.2 Meetings at this level should be rare provided that this Protocol has been followed with regard to earlier intervention meetings and return interviews. Additionally, should this level of missing episodes be apparent, this is clear evidence that the placement is not working. If it is not working, then it fails everyone including the child.
- 14.8.3 In addition to seeking to reduce future missing episodes and reduce any apparent risks to the child or young person, these meetings should also quality assure compliance with the protocols and the efficacy of earlier intervention meetings and return interviews.
- 14.8.4 At this stage a report about the case should be forwarded to the Force Missing Persons Strategic Lead, as the case will feature in the quarterly analyst's report on Missing Persons.
- 14.8.5 If the child or young person continues to be reported missing beyond this level the Senior Management Team for the policing area should discuss the case and consider whether it is appropriate them to intervene further or for the Assistant Chief Constable (SO) to be asked to intervene.
- 14.9 It should be noted, however, that the volume of missing episodes is not the only reason to launch an intervention or to escalate the level of intervention. The following are both examples of other reasons to launch or escalate interventions:
- Any case where the risks involved in even a single future missing episode are very high.
  - Cases where it has been identified that immediate action is necessary to ensure the well being of the person.
- 14.10 A record shall be made of all interventions on the police COMPACT Missing Person system.
- 14.11 When Children's Services or police believe that an adult is adversely involved with a child or children who are going missing from home, in addition to any action taken under section 14 of this protocol, the Police and Children's Services will consider what more can be done to protect the child(ren).
- 14.12 This may involve the making of a formal witness statement by the local authority manager, specifically prohibiting that adult from having any contact with named children or young people, without exceptions. The Police would then show the adult a copy of the statement, a photograph of the child or young person (which they would not be allowed to keep) and serve upon that adult a warning harbouring notice prohibiting the adult from having any contact whatsoever with the child or young

person and explaining any breach would be dealt with by arrest under section 2 Child Abduction Act 1984.

14.13 Alternatively the relevant local authority, supported by the Police, may decide to institute civil proceedings to obtain an injunction preventing any particular adult having any contact with a named child or young person.

14.14 Should an establishment have in excess of twenty Missing Episodes in any one year period an organisational review will be undertaken by Children Services to provide assurance to the local safeguarding children board, Police and to commissioners of the service that appropriate and effective prevention measures are being used.

14.15 PVP Missing Persons Co-ordinator to assist the local policing Superintendent to arrange and chair an Inter-Agency Meeting with relevant partners to review placement, patterns of Missing Episodes, individual 'push-pull' factors and strategies to eliminate problem(s). At the conclusion of same, the chair to review overarching factors to decide and report upon suitability to provide care 'in loco parentis'.

14.16 If doubt exists, the local policing Superintendent should commission an evidenced report for onward transmission to the Assistant Chief Constable (SO) for review. If a clear case for concern exists, the ACC (SO) may then authorise a report direct to OFSTED (formerly the National Commission for Social Care and Inspection).

## 15. Child Sexual Exploitation

15.1 There is a strong link between people (including adults and boys) being at risk of sexual exploitation and going missing from home or care - evidence suggest that 90% of children subject to sexual grooming go missing at some point (DCSF, 2009). Concerns around suspected sexual exploitation could include:

- The child is repeatedly reported missing from home;
- The child is known to be visiting locations or addresses which raise suspicions around sexual exploitation;
- The child has unexplained money, gifts, mobile phones etc;
- The child has additional vulnerability; this is linked to age or level of functioning.

If sexual exploitation is suspected or a risk then the local LSCB Child Sexual Exploitation procedures should be referred to and the child should be considered as high risk when reporting to the Police and during the subsequent investigation.

Worcestershire

[http://westmerciaconsortium.proceduresonline.com/chapters/g\\_step\\_by\\_step\\_respond\\_cse.htm](http://westmerciaconsortium.proceduresonline.com/chapters/g_step_by_step_respond_cse.htm)  
|

Shropshire

[http://westmerciaconsortium.proceduresonline.com/chapters/g\\_cse\\_practit.html](http://westmerciaconsortium.proceduresonline.com/chapters/g_cse_practit.html)

## 16. Looked after children who may have been trafficked from abroad

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

16.2 The assessment of need to inform the care plan will be particularly critical in these circumstances and should be done immediately as the window for intervention is very narrow. The assessment must seek to establish:

- relevant details about the child's background before they came to the UK
- an understanding of the reasons why the child came to the UK
- an analysis of the child's vulnerability to remaining under the influence of traffickers.

16.3 In conducting this assessment, it will be necessary for the local authority to work in close co-operation with the UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC) and immigration staff familiar with patterns of trafficking into the UK. Immigration staff who specialise in trafficking issues should be able to advise on whether information about the individual child suggests that they fit the profile of a potentially trafficked child.

### 16.4 Useful Numbers

UKHTC TAC Advisors 0844 7782406

Salvation Army Referral Line 0300 3038151

Home Office (formerly UKBA) 0161 2611682

Poppy Project 0207 7352062

Medaille Trust 0161 2252861

Stop the Traffik 0207 9214258

NSPCC 0808 8005000

16.5 Provision may need to be made for the child to be in a safe place before any assessment takes place and for the possibility that they may not be able to disclose full information about their circumstances immediately. The location of the child should not be divulged to any enquirers until their identity and relationship with the child has been established, if necessary with the help of police and immigration services. In these situations the roles and responsibilities of care providers must be fully understood and recorded in the placement plan. Proportionate safety measures that keep the child safe and take into account their best interests should also be put in place to safeguard the child from going missing from care or from being re-trafficked. It is essential that the local authority continues to share information with the police and immigration staff, concerning potential crimes against the child, the risk to other children, or other relevant immigration matters.

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)

## **17. Missing From Acute Hospital settings (A & E/Medical)**

17.1 When individuals are being reported missing from Acute Hospitals, either from an A&E Department or from a medical ward, staff at these venues must conduct a structured search of the premises prior to the police being called.

17.2 In all circumstances, staff must consider the following points before contacting the police:

- What is the risk to the individual or what risk do they present to others?
- In practical terms, what is known about the individual (A&E Specific)?
- What are the ramifications of their condition worsening?
- What actions do the hospital expect the police to take when the person is found?

17.3 Medical staff should be mindful that the Police have very few powers to return a person to a location without a valid reason such as a court order, if the criteria for s.136 of the Mental Health Act is met, if the Mental Capacity Act applies or if Police Protection Powers are deemed necessary to safeguard the individual from harm, in which case they can take them to a place of safety or A&E department.

17.4 If there is concern for a young person's safety or wellbeing, normal Child Protection Procedures should be followed, which could include making a referral to Social Care and / or discussion with the Designated Professional for the Organisation.

## **18. Other specific circumstances**

In dealing with missing people, there may be specific risk factors which need to be taken into account, as described below. Professionals involved in reporting a person missing must inform Police of any concerns around specific circumstances.

### **18.1 Forced Marriage**

This does not relate to the tradition of "arranged marriages" where the families of both parties take lead roles in identifying prospective matches, but where the decision whether to accept the arrangements remains with the individuals concerned. In "Forced marriages", one or both parties do not consent, and some form of duress is involved.

It should be noted that on occasion a family who is attempting to trace a person who is missing in an attempt to avoid a forced marriage may use the police as a "tracing service". This presents the police and other agencies with a number of difficulties, and careful management of the situation is required, particularly when the person is located, highlighting the importance of the immediate risk assessment on location of a person and on the Safe and Well Check. The risk of forced marriage also brings with it the risk of rape.

### **18.2 'Honour-Based' Violence (HBV)**

Violence in the name of so-called "honour" are assaults or murders in which people, predominantly women, are harmed or killed for behaviour which is deemed to have breached the honour code of a family or community, causing shame. The honour code means that women must follow rules that are set at the discretion of, usually male, relatives and which are interpreted according to what each male family member considers acceptable. Breaking the rules is seen as destroying the good name of the family and being deserving of punishment at the discretion of male relatives. Young females fearing for their safety may well go missing from home. If HBV is suspected then enquiries must be managed extremely sensitively.

### 18.3 Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

FGM is illegal in the UK under Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 (For England, Wales and Northern Ireland) and the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation (Scotland) Act 2005.

FGM involves procedures that are medically unnecessary, extremely painful and have serious health consequences, both at the time when the procedure is carried out and in later life. It is believed that over 20,000 girls under the age of 15 could be at high risk of FGM in England and Wales each year and the figure may be substantially higher given the hidden nature of the issue.

The age at which girls undergo FGM varies enormously according to the community. However, the majority of FGM cases are believed to take place between the ages of 5 to 8 years, and girls within this age bracket should be considered at greater risk.

FGM is undertaken on British girls in the UK as well as overseas. Girls of school age who are subjected to FGM are often believed to be taken overseas at the beginning of school holidays, particularly summer holidays, in order for there to be sufficient time for her to recover before returning to school.

### 18.4 Domestic Violence (DV) and Domestic Abuse (DA)

There is sometimes a link between domestic violence and missing persons and identifying if a missing person is a victim or perpetrator of domestic violence or child abuse may have a critical influence on the investigation and, in particular, the way the location and return of the individual should be handled. Family members may not be inclined to admit domestic violence is a factor when informing the Police of a missing child. Previous history should therefore be taken into account but professionals should bear in mind this may not be currently relevant to the missing episode. Police should work with partners where Domestic Violence is known to be involved.

## 19. **Monitoring the effectiveness of the Joint Protocol**

19.1 West Mercia Police will notify Children's Services of all reports of Missing and 'absent' children or young persons in their area. These notifications will be automatically generated by COMPACT and sent as an email to the nominated email address for each of the Children's Services.

19.2 In addition Children's Services will receive monthly data about all missing children and young people (with outcomes) in their area.

19.3 Children's Services are responsible, with their Local Safeguarding Children Board, for using this data to respond to the needs of individual children and young people and to identify patterns and trends and to develop preventative strategies to address these.

19.4 Review of Arrangements: This joint protocol will be reviewed 12 months after implementation by senior managers from West Mercia Police and all 4 local authorities.

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**Signatories to the Joint Protocol:**

**Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Board**

SIGNED.....Date.....

NAME .....

JOB TITLE & ORGANISATION.....

**Shropshire Safeguarding Children Board**

SIGNED.....Date.....

NAME .....

JOB TITLE & ORGANISATION.....

**Telford & Wrekin Safeguarding Children Board**

SIGNED.....Date.....

NAME .....

JOB TITLE & ORGANISATION.....

**Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board**

SIGNED.....Date.....

NAME .....

JOB TITLE & ORGANISATION.....

**West Mercia Police**

SIGNED.....Date.....

NAME .....

JOB TITLE & ORGANISATION.....

## Appendix A

# WEST MERCIA MISSING CHILDREN RISK ASSESSMENT

| (Demographics)  |                                      |  |  |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| Name of young person:   | Any Aliases or otherwise Known as?   | Date of Birth:                                 |  |
| Date of admission:  |                                      | Date form completed:                           |  |
| Is there a photograph available? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |                                      |  |  |
| What is their care status? Please specify:  |                                      |  |  |
| YP Mobile phone number: (check correct at each missing episode):                          |                                      |  |  |
| Name and address of GP:   |                                      |  |  |
| Name and address Dentist:   |                                      |  |  |
| Ethnicity (please tick relevant box)  |                                      |  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> White British  | <input type="checkbox"/> Indian      | <input type="checkbox"/> White/Black Caribbean | <input type="checkbox"/> Caribbean             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> White Irish  | <input type="checkbox"/> Pakistani   | <input type="checkbox"/> White/Black African   | <input type="checkbox"/> African               |
| White Other (Specify)   | <input type="checkbox"/> Bangladeshi | <input type="checkbox"/> White/Asian           | <input type="checkbox"/> Black Other (Specify) |
|   | Asian Other (Specify)                | Mixed Other (Specify)                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese               |
| Other ethnic group (Specify)  |                                      |  |  |
| <b><u>Address of residential unit or foster carer including contact details:</u></b>      |                                      |  |  |
| <br><br>  |                                      |  |  |
| <b><u>Placing authority:</u></b>  |                                      |  |  |
| <b><u>Date placed:</u></b>  |                                      |  |  |
| <b><u>Name of allocated Social Worker and or Manager including contact details:</u></b>   |                                      |  |  |
| <br><br>  |                                      |  |  |
| <b><u>Details of Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO):</u></b>                             |                                      |  |  |
| <br><br>  |                                      |  |  |

|   |
|---|
| <b>Please rate Vulnerability of young person:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> LOW <input type="checkbox"/> MED <input type="checkbox"/> HIGH |
| <b>Explain:</b>   |
| <br><br>  |

|  |
|--|
| <b>Does the young person have a Statement of Educational Needs:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <b>Which LA maintains the Statement?</b>   |
| <br><br>   |



Should the young person be considered **MISSING** and never **ABSENT**:  Yes  No

**Reasons for missing category:**

Has the Young person a history of going missing?  Yes  No

The likelihood of the young person going missing:  LOW  MED  HIGH

Is it generally out of character?  Yes  No  D/K

If they have gone missing before have they been exposed to harm?  Yes  No

**Brief explanation:**

The risk to the young person should they go missing:  LOW  MED  HIGH

**Reasons for risk level** (inc issues of self harm, suicide, the prospect of being the victim of crime)

The risk to the young person of sexual exploitation: :  LOW  MED  HIGH

**Explain:**

The risk to others should the young person go missing:  LOW  MED  HIGH

**Reasons for risk level** (include Is this child a Sex offender or perpetrator of sexual exploitation, do they have access to weapons, explain the nature of the risk including any criminality)

**Potential addresses to which the young person may head inc Occupiers name**

Address 1: (Parental address/s)

Address 2:

|            |
|------------|
| Address 3: |
| Address 4: |

| <b>Individuals with whom the young person may meet. Please indicate Adult/Child if known.</b> |  |
|---|--|
| Individual 1  |  |
| Individual 2  |  |
| Individual 3  |  |
| Individual 4  |  |

**General issues of vulnerability including potential of being harmed:**  
 (Are they subject to bullying or harassment, racial abuse, homophobia, or any other local community concerns prior to disappearance?)  
 Please specify:

**Any individuals the young person *should not* associate with. Please detail with reasons:**

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Information completed by |  |
| Designation              |  |
| Date                     |  |
| Form to be forwarded to  |  |
| Police Email address     | <a href="#">Shropshire and Telford:</a><br><a href="mailto:HAUNorth@westmercia.pnn.police.uk">HAUNorth@westmercia.pnn.police.uk</a><br><a href="#">Worcestershire and Herefordshire:</a><br><a href="mailto:HAUSouth@westmercia.pnn.police.uk">HAUSouth@westmercia.pnn.police.uk</a> |

Appendix B  
Resource for Young People

Awaiting copy from Steve Hosking, TW to include. Back from leave 18<sup>th</sup> August.

## Appendix C

### Missing report to Police - Aide Memoire

The following questions are those you will be asked if you contact the Police to report a child or young person as missing. It is good practice to ensure before calling that you have all of the information that is going to be requested. There is NO need to share this form with the Police as they will record the details when a call is made to them.

|                                      |                |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|
| Name of young person:                | Date of birth: |
| Are you able to supply a photograph? |                |

|                          |                 |
|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Date of Missing Episode: | Time last seen: |
|--------------------------|-----------------|

|                              |
|------------------------------|
| Number of previous episodes: |
|------------------------------|

Please now complete the following section including comment on all identified factors, including specific other details relating to the young person going missing at this time.

|  |
|--|
| Please give details of what they were last seen wearing: |
|--|

|  |
|--|
| What actions have been taken to locate them: |
|--|

|                              |
|------------------------------|
| Where are they likely to go? |
|------------------------------|

|                               |
|-------------------------------|
| Did they go with anyone else? |
|-------------------------------|

|                           |
|---------------------------|
| Is this out of character? |
|---------------------------|

|                      |
|----------------------|
| Are they vulnerable? |
|----------------------|

|   |
|---|
| Are they likely to commit an offence, if so what? |
|---|

|   |
|---|
| Is there a risk of self harm (suicide)? |
|---|

|   |
|---|
| Is there a risk of child sexual exploitation? |
|---|

|                                 |
|---------------------------------|
| Do they have access to weapons? |
|---------------------------------|

|   |
|---|
| Have they previously gone Missing?(anything significant to note?) |
|---|

|   |
|---|
| Have they experienced harm on previous Missing episodes if so what? |
|---|

|  |
|--|
| Have they been a victim of crime previously? |
|--|

Do they have a disability physical illness or other health issue?

Do they need essential medication?

What are the effects if medication is not taken?

Have they prepared to go missing, and How?

What were they going to do at last contact with you?

Do they have money?

Any family issues to be aware of?

## Appendix D - CHILD ABDUCTION WARNING NOTICE

I have been advised that the following young person has recently been in your company and/or that you have allowed them to be at your property/home address. [*delete as appropriate*]

| CHILD'S NAME   | AGE | DOB |
|--|-----|-----|
| <i>[Care needed where child's real name is not known to suspect]</i> |     |     |

I wish to make it clear on behalf of [*insert name of person/department with parental responsibility*] that you have no permission or authority to communicate with this young person, either directly or indirectly, or to allow this young person to enter or stay in your home or other property or your vehicle, or to be in your company, at any time of day or night before they reach the age of **16 years**.

### **YOU MUST NOT THEREFORE AT ANY TIME OF DAY OR NIGHT:**

- allow this young person to enter or stay in your house, flat, room, place of work or other property, whether you are there or not;
- allow this young person to enter or stay in any other property you are present in;
- allow this young person to enter or travel in any vehicle or caravan you own or are travelling in;
- meet with this young person or remain in their presence;
- telephone, text, e-mail, write or communicate with this young person in any way, directly or indirectly through other people;
- provide this young person with any food, drink, gift or any other item.

### **If this young person approaches or makes contact with you, you must immediately:**

- refuse to allow them to enter the property or vehicle you are in and ask them to leave or, in appropriate circumstances, leave the premises or vehicle yourself;
- contact Social Services or the Police [*insert phone numbers*] if they refuse to leave;
- break off any communication.

If you do not comply and this young person is traced to your home / property / vehicle or is found in your presence, **then you are liable to arrest and prosecution** under Section 2 Child Abduction Act 1984, which carries a maximum sentence of **7 years imprisonment**. You may also be liable for other criminal offences arising out of your contact with this young person.

Any suggestion that you are offering this young person necessary shelter or hospitality will be no defence. The Parents (Local Authority) wish to make it clear that no such services from you are required and are indeed unwelcome.

**Person Receiving Warning**

|   |  |      |  |
|---|--|------|--|
| Name  |  |      |  |
| Date of Birth   |  |      |  |
| Address   |  |      |  |
| <p>I confirm that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the officer has read and explained the contents of this warning notice to me;</li> <li>• I have/have not been shown a photograph of the young person concerned;</li> <li>• I am clear as to which young person is being referred to; and</li> <li>• the officer has handed me a copy of this warning notice.</li> </ul> |  |      |  |
| Signature   |  |      |  |
| Time  |  | Date |  |
| Reason given if person refuses to sign  |  |      |  |

**Officer Issuing Warning**

|  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
| Collar Number & Name   |  |  |  |
| Station  |  |  |  |
| <p>I confirm that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have read and explained the contents of this warning notice to the person named above;</li> <li>• I have / have not shown the person a photograph of the young person;</li> <li>• where a photograph has not been shown, I verified that the person knows which young person I am referring to by:</li> </ul> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have handed the person a copy of this warning notice.</li> </ul> |  |  |  |

|           |  |      |  |
|-----------|--|------|--|
| Signature |  |      |  |
| Time      |  | Date |  |



# Missing From Care Process Map

This process map shows the main steps that need to be taken when a child goes missing from local authority care, and where responsibility lies for those steps. It should be read alongside the full West Mercia Joint Protocol for Missing Children and Young People, and is not intended to be a comprehensive list of actions.

The Joint Protocol and Process Map have been based upon the Statutory Guidance on Children Who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care 2014.

|  | <b>Care Provider:</b><br><b>Children’s home or foster carer</b><br>See Section 6 for more detail.  | <b>Police</b><br>See Section 8 for more detail.  | <b>Responsible Authority</b><br><b>Children’s Social Care</b><br>See Section 6 for more detail.  | <b>Host Authority Children’s Social</b><br><b>Care</b><br>See Section 9 for more detail. |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Children Services and carers should adopt a consistent approach to the planning and assessment of “looked after children”</b> |  |  |  |  |
| <b>Stage 0</b><br>Planning, Placement and Prevention   | The Care Provider should undertake appropriate actions to minimise the risks to the child of going missing outlined within the West Mercia Missing Children Risk Assessment form and record these in the Care Plan. They must also keep, and regularly update, a photograph. | On receipt of the West Mercia Missing Children Risk Assessment form the Missing Person Co-ordinator ensures this information is available on COMPACT in preparation for a potential missing episode. | Early discussion should take place between the Responsible Authority and the Host Authority to notify of the placement as per <a href="#">The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 (Part 3)</a> . Convene Placement Planning meeting to include the care provider within 72 hours of placement. The West Mercia Missing Children Risk Assessment form should be completed at the meeting. The completed West Mercia Missing Children Risk Assessment must be retained by the Responsible Authority and the Care Provider and a copy sent to West Mercia Police. |  |
| Initial Action and Notification  | In partnership with the Responsible Authority, review the risk assessment to decide if the child may be initially deemed as Unauthorised Absence. In such cases, the care provider should take such  |  | In partnership with the Care Provider, review the risk assessment to decide if the child may be initially deemed as Unauthorised Absence.  |  |

actions as any reasonable and diligent parent would undertake.

Basic measures to try to locate the child or young person should be undertaken if considered safe to do so, including searching home and vehicles, contacting known friends and relatives and visiting locations that the child is known to frequent.

Carers will report that the child or young person is missing to the police and Children's Services in the Responsible Authority via the missing episode section of the West Mercia Missing Children Risk Assessment.

Additional responsibilities exist if the child becomes absent whilst on an external activity.

**Stage 2**  
Assessment and Classification

Children missing from care should never be categorised as 'Absent' according to the ACPO definition. Therefore the police will always progress a missing investigation:

Record episode, complete COMPACT Missing report, deploy officer to investigate and inform children's social care. (Host Authority as a minimum, Host and Responsible Authority if possible)

A police officer will attend all reports of missing children or young people.

Police will decide the risk level to be assigned to the case. This will always be High or, Medium. This decision should give specific consideration to the increased risk of Child Sexual Exploitation to the child.

The Police will notify the NHS England Alert System as appropriate

PVP Missing Person co-ordinator to convene an intervention meeting if the following triggers have been met:

One individual having 3 missing episodes in

The Responsible (Placing) Authority's Children's Services remain responsible for the child or young person in their care. To that end, and throughout the process, the allocated social worker will continue to review the case and engage the appropriate child protection procedures as appropriate.

During the missing episode, or if not possible on its conclusion, the child's Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) must be kept informed of the details of the missing episode.

Should the child experience significant harm whilst missing the Host Authority should convene a strategy discussion and follow child protection procedures.

If the child has been missing on 3 occasions or more the Host Authority should contact the Responsible Authority to provide appropriate challenge regarding what action the Responsible Authority is taking to manage the risk.

|  |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
|  | <p>90 days<br/>OR:<br/>One individual having between 4 and 6 missing episodes in 1 year.</p>  |   |   |
| <p><b>Stage 3</b><br/>Child is Located</p> | <p>It is the responsibility of the care provider to arrange for the child or young person's return. There may be circumstances when, in the interests of the safe and speedy return of the child or young person, the Police may accede to requests from Children's Services to assist.</p> | <p>The Police will attend for a face-to-face contact in order to complete a West Mercia Police Found Report (incorporating a Safe and Well Check). Specific consideration must be given to the increased risk of Child Sexual Exploitation to the child. Any safeguarding concerns become apparent the police officer must make an appropriate referral in line with West Mercia Child Protection Procedures.</p> | <p>Upon receipt of a found notification, children's social care should undertake a return interview unless there is a defensible reason not to and consider further children's services intervention (e.g. initial assessment). This should give specific consideration to the increased risk of Child Sexual Exploitation to the child</p> |
| <p><b>Data and Analysis</b></p>            | <p>Children's homes should be prepared to provide information on missing incidents to those conducting independent visits to monitor the effectiveness of the home.</p>   | <p>Data on missing episodes, including intelligence from return interviews, should be analysed regularly by all relevant partners to map problems and patterns. Regular reports should be provided to council members and the LSCB.</p>   | <p>Data on missing episodes, including intelligence from return interviews, should be analysed regularly by all relevant partners to map problems and patterns. Regular reports should be provided to council members and the LSCB.</p>   |
|  |   | <p>Data for children missing or away from placement without authorisation should be reported to the Department for Education by the responsible authority through their annual data returns on looked after children.</p>   |   |

# Missing from Home or School Process Map

The following process map shows the main steps that need to be taken when a child goes missing from home or school, and where responsibility lies for those steps. It should be read alongside the full West Mercia Joint Protocol for Missing Children and Young People, and is not intended to be a comprehensive list of actions.

The Joint Protocol and Process Map have been based upon the Statutory Guidance on Children Who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care 2014.

|  |   |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|---|--|
|  | <b>Home</b><br>See Section 5 for more detail. | <b>Police</b><br>See Section 8 for more detail. | <b>Children’s Social Care</b><br>See Section 9 for more detail. | <b>Other Agencies (inc Schools)</b><br>See Section 10 for more detail. |
|--|---|---|---|--|

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Stage 0</b><br>Planning and Prevention | <p>Children who are missing from education are more likely to be vulnerable in one way or another and are at higher risk of going missing.</p> <p>Schools have specific duties under the 2013 statutory guidance “Children Missing Education” (DfE 2013).</p> |
|---|---|

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>Stage 1</b><br>Initial Action and Notification | <p>An initial judgement should be made as to whether the child is <i>Unauthorised Absent</i> (see West Mercia Protocol section 3.6 for detail) with no apparent risk. The Duty Sergeant/Inspector of the local policing area should be contacted for advice if the family have any doubts as to the status of the absence or the risks involved.</p> <p>Basic measures to try to locate the child or young person should always be undertaken if considered safe to do so, including searching home and vehicles, contacting known friends and relatives and visiting locations that the child is known to frequent.</p> <p>Any child who is <i>Unauthorised Absent</i> for 6 hours without contact should be automatically judged to be <i>Missing</i>.</p> <p>If the initial judgement made by parents is that the child is Missing, or the child has not been contacted for 6 hours and is therefore judged to be missing, it is considered a reasonable step for parents to inform the police and Children’s Services that their child or young person is missing.</p> | <p>If it comes to the attention of any agency (including schools or voluntary organisations) that a child or young person is missing, they must advise the parent/carer of the organisation’s duty to ensure that the matter is reported to the police and if necessary follow this up by contacting the police to verify the reporting by the parent / carer has occurred.</p> <p>The best practice expectation is that once a school establishes that a pupil is not attending that day and if the school hasn’t had a notification from a parent/carer that the child will not be attending, the school should contact the parent to ensure that the child is at home rather than missing.</p> <p>Additional responsibilities exist if the child becomes absent whilst on an external activity.</p> |
|---|--|--|

**Stage 2**  
Assessment and Classification

On receipt of report that child or young person is 'missing' undertake risk assessment and apply the ACPO definitions to determine if the child is:

**Missing**

Record episode, complete COMPACT Missing report, deploy officer to investigate and inform children's social care.

A police officer will attend all reports of missing children or young people.

Police will decide the risk level to be assigned to the case. This will always be High or, Medium.

**Absent (from Parental Address)**

Maintain monitoring of case.

Re-categorise as missing if necessary.

All cases of absent children will be concluded within 6 hours, upgraded to a Missing Person report if child is not found.

*During this assessment specific consideration must be given to the increased risk of Child Sexual Exploitation to the child.*

**Unauthorised absence. ( Looked after children)**

*Carers will conduct all reasonable enquiries to locate child and safely return them*

*No requirement to notify the Police*

*All unauthorised absences will be concluded within a maximum of 6 hrs and reported to the Police as Missing.*

*Cases of unauthorised absences can be reported to Police as missing reporters sooner than the 6 hrs should the risk assessment increase.*

*Police will notify NHS England Alert System as appropriate.*

**Stage 3**

**Child is Located**

It is the responsibility of the parent to contact the Police and to confirm that the missing child or young person has returned to home and report if they have been the victim of crime.

It is the responsibility of the parent to arrange for the child or young person's return. There may be circumstances when, in the interests of the safe and speedy return of the child or young person, the Police may accede to requests to assist.

Consider Safe and Well check (proportionate to the circumstances) with specific consideration should be given to the increased risk of Child Sexual Exploitation to the child

Record any decision not to undertake a Safe and Well check to include the rationale for that decision

Complete Return Interview (independent unless clear rationale that a known person is in child/YP's best interest) within 72 hours of the child/YP being located. This should give specific consideration to the increased risk of Child Sexual Exploitation to the child

Where a child/YP has not been reported as missing to Police encourage parent/carers to always do so in future.

Consider threshold for statutory assessment (if one has not already been initiated) and record decision (with rationale).

**Data and Analysis**

Children's homes should be prepared to provide information on missing incidents to those conducting independent visits to monitor the effectiveness of the home.

Data on missing episodes, including intelligence from return interviews, should be analysed regularly by all relevant partners to map problems and patterns. Regular reports should be provided to council members and the LSCB.

Data for children missing or away from placement without authorisation should be reported to the Department for Education by the responsible authority through their annual data returns on looked after children.