

# **CHILDREN WHO RUN AWAY OR GO MISSING FROM HOME OR CARE POLICY**

April 2024

Document Owner: Pamela Foster, Service Manager – Edge of Care and Targeted Services  
Chloe Vose, Shield Team Manager

Review date: September 2026

## **Contents**

### **Section 1 – Background**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Introduction   | 4  |
| Scope  | 5  |
| Principles   | 6  |
| Definitions of children missing and explanation of terms | 7  |
| Warrants and missing                                     | 11 |
| Children missing from education                          | 11 |
| Knowsley SHIELD (Harm Outside the Home & Missing) Team   | 13 |

### **Section 2 – Knowsley Children Missing From Home (including Child in Need, Child Protection and Early Help)**

|                              |    |
|------------------------------|----|
| Principles                   | 13 |
| Reporting a child as missing | 13 |
| Longer term missing          | 15 |
| Return of the child          | 16 |
| Return Interview             | 18 |

### **Section 3 – Knowsley Children Missing From Care**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Pre-placement                              | 20 |
| Away from placement without authorisation  | 21 |
| Before contacting the police               | 22 |
| Going missing on an external activity      | 23 |
| Reporting to the police a child is missing | 24 |
| Longer term missing                        | 25 |
| Return of the child                        | 26 |
| Return interview                           | 28 |
| The role of care planning                  | 29 |

### **Section 4 – Other Responsible Local Authorities' Children Missing From Care who are placed in Knowsley**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Pre-placement                              | 30 |
| Away from placement without authorisation  | 32 |
| Before contacting the police               | 33 |
| Going missing on an external activity      | 34 |
| Reporting to the police a child is missing | 34 |

|                     |    |
|---------------------|----|
| Longer term missing | 36 |
| Return of the child | 37 |
| Return interview    | 38 |

## **Section 5 – Strategic arrangements**

|                         |    |
|-------------------------|----|
| Governance arrangements | 39 |
| Strategic review        | 40 |
| Training and induction  | 40 |
| Complaints              | 40 |

## **Appendices**

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| Appendix A | Missing Strategy Meeting Template                   |
| Appendix B | 9 in 90 Days Meeting Template                       |
| Appendix C | Knowsley Missing and Found Notification Process OOB |
| Appendix D | CSC Return Interview Template                       |
| Appendix E | Missing Person Interview Agreement Form             |
| Appendix F | Reporting a Child Missing Crib Sheet                |

## Section 1 - Background

### 1.1 Introduction

Going missing is a dangerous activity. A child who goes missing just once faces the same immediate risks as those faced by a child who regularly goes missing. However, children who go missing when they are young, and/or more frequently are more likely to face longer-term problems.

The following procedure has been created to provide a joined up multi agency response to children who are missing or have gone missing from home and care.

Research by The Children's Society has led to an estimate suggesting that some 100,000 children go missing every year. Essentially, when they go missing, children are either running from a problem such as neglect or abuse at home, or to somewhere they want to be. They may have been coerced to run away by someone else. Whatever the reason for their running, The Children's Society estimates that approximately 25% of those children who go missing are at risk of serious harm.

There are concerns about the links between children running away and the risks of sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, violent crime and misuse of alcohol and drugs. Additionally, research shows that the level of risk to the individual child escalates with each episode they go missing and repeat episodes have been identified as a significant indicator of high risk to the child.

The immediate risks associated with going missing include:

- No means of support or legitimate income - leading to high-risk activities
- Involvement in criminal activities including gang crime
- Victim of Abuse
- Victim of crime, for example through sexual assault and criminal exploitation
- Risk of trafficking
- Alcohol/substance misuse
- Deterioration of physical and mental health
- Missing out on education
- Increased vulnerability.

Longer-term risks include:

- Long-term drug dependency / alcohol dependency
- Crime
- Homelessness
- Disengagement from education
- Child sexual exploitation
- Child criminal exploitation including county lines
- Poor physical and/or mental health.

The responsible authority with partner agencies has a responsibility to ensure that children who go missing from home or care are monitored closely and receive return interviews to ascertain the underlying issue/s and timely interventions that meet their needs.

## **1.2 Scope**

These procedures relate to:

- Children looked after by Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council, placed in either foster care, local authority or privately run children's homes within or outside the borough of Knowsley.
- Children looked after by responsible councils outside of Knowsley, placed with care providers within Knowsley.
- Children missing from their home address or other non-care related addresses, including schools or hospitals.

For the purposes of this policy, a child is defined as anyone who is under 18 years of age. Care leavers can comprise of children from 16-25 years of age.

A missing child will be defined as one where the missing episode has been reported to the police and is recorded on the police COMPACT system.

Knowsley Borough Council retains responsibility for Knowsley children looked after who are placed outside the local authority boundaries. For these children, Knowsley Children Social Care (CSC) will require the placement provider to comply with this protocol and those local to their area.

This policy should be read alongside:

1. Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care. January 2014.
2. Merseyside Police Missing Persons – Management, Recording & Investigation Policy & Procedure. Dec 2017.

Other responsible authorities placing children within Knowsley boundaries will be required to comply with:

1. Pan Merseyside Missing Children Procedure. May 2018
2. Knowsley Missing Policy 2024

### **1.3 Principles**

The following principles should be adopted by all agencies involved with children who may go missing:

- All individuals have a responsibility to report a child if they are missing. If a parent or carer does not report a child missing within a reasonable timescale when their whereabouts are unknown, this should be seen as displaying compromised parenting and should be considered as a potential safeguarding concern.
- It is imperative that services working with children are able to and actively identify those who are commencing a pattern of missing behaviour and provide the appropriate interventions at the earliest opportunity to prevent future incidents which may place them, or others, at risk.
- Many children will exhibit normal adolescent behaviour in testing boundaries, and it is not helpful to consider every incident of lateness or absence for all children as high risk. However, some children will need to be treated as missing immediately due to their vulnerability. This protocol is based upon the principles of individual risk assessment, by carers and agency professionals and by Merseyside Police in classifying and responding to the incident.
- Accurate and up-to-date information from the child's past and present is key to appropriate risk assessment and response to missing, and other, incidents. This should include if there is any suggestion the child may have travelled abroad. Information from previous assessments, immediate welfare checks or return Interviews should be fed back to Police and carers so this picture of behaviour and experiences can be developed.
- The police will only become involved after the reporting individual has completed all reasonable checks to locate the individual. Missing children remain the responsibility of the person / organisation which has legal parental responsibility for the child, even after they have been reported missing.
- The primary function of the police is to investigate the disappearance and attempt to locate the child prior to any harm befalling them. Police response and associated actions will be based on a police risk assessment of the incident and knowledge of the individual(s) concerned, which will utilise information from partners and those who know the child.
- It is a statutory requirement that all children who have an episode where they are reported as missing should have an independent interview on their return. A copy of all return interviews should be sent to [C.BCU.MFH@merseyside.police.uk](mailto:C.BCU.MFH@merseyside.police.uk) so that intelligence and patterns can be analysed and used to inform service delivery.

- Children’s views must continue to be considered when responding to incidents and any expectations put on children through this policy should be discussed with them, as part of the care planning and review process and during other interventions for children not in local authority care.

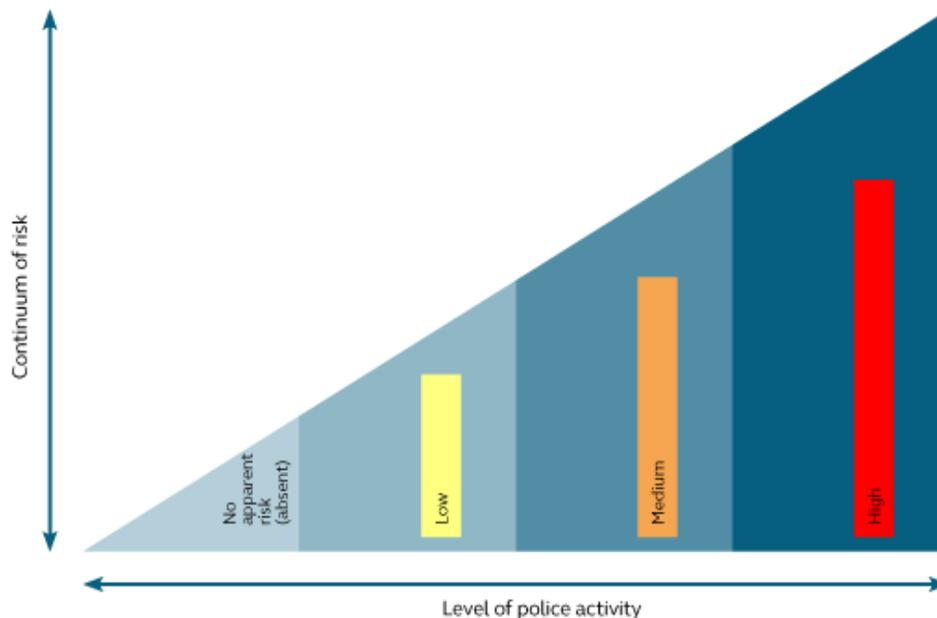
## **1.4 Definitions of Children Missing and Explanation of Terms**

### **DEFINITIONS OF CHILDREN MISSING**

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

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

Missing definition



If the child is categorised by Merseyside Police as ‘absent’, the person calling the Police will be asked if there are safeguarding concerns or risks, to inform the Police response. If there are no safeguarding concerns or risks, they will be advised to call the Police if there is a change in circumstances, which would increase the risk level, or if the person returns.

Some children absent themselves for a short period and then return, with their whereabouts known to their parent/carer. Sometimes children stay out longer than agreed, either on purpose to test boundaries, or accidentally. A child, who has failed to return home but their whereabouts are known

and/or staying at a known location with a friend or family where there is no identified risk, would not be treated as either 'missing' or 'absent' under police definitions.

If the parent/carer assesses that the child is at risk due to any factor/s known to them, then the child should be reported to the Police without delay and the believed risk communicated. The Police will respond to this as a 'concern for safety'. It should be recognised that police powers to return an individual to a care address are limited unless they are on a care order or Police Protection Order is considered necessary.

Merseyside Police Missing Persons Policy 2017, states that **ALL CHILDREN AGED 13 YEARS AND UNDER WILL BE CATEGORISED AS 'MISSING' AND NOT CATEGORISED AS 'ABSENT' UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES.**

**\*\* A child who has failed to return home but their whereabouts are known and there is no identified risk, would not be treated as missing under police definitions.** \*\* "Known" could be that they have physically been seen or other confirmation of their whereabouts.

Where a person under the age of 18 is reported missing in circumstances where it is suspected they are subject of CSE/CE, then ordinarily they should be recorded as High Risk, unless the Response Inspector (Bronze 4) documents a case for management at a lower risk level.

Merseyside Police will ask the following standard set of questions whenever an individual is reported missing:

- Child's full name
- Full description of individual (Inc clothing and distinctive marks)
- Who are their known associates?
- Has the individual been reported missing before?
- Has the child made any preparations for being missing/absent?
- Is their behaviour out of character?
- Do they have access to a mobile phone?
- Do they use social network sites? (Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram etc.).
- Do they have access to a vehicle?
- Do they have cash/access to cash?
- Is the Philomena Protocol available to officers (for children in regulated care homes)

The following questions are used as Critical Questions, to assist the Police in determining whether the individual is 'missing' or 'absent'.

- Is the child on any essential medication?
- Does the child suffer from any physical (disabilities) or mental health issues?
- Has the child previously self-harmed or made threats to self-harm or injure another person?

- Would you consider the child is being sexually or criminally exploited?
- Are there any additional vulnerabilities (creating a risk to the child or the public)

If Merseyside Police have a CSE or CE flag recorded on their systems or have any intelligence that a child is at risk of such, then ordinarily they should be recorded as High-Risk following receipt of the missing report, unless the Inspector documents a case for management at a lower risk level. In all cases, the appropriate referral form must be completed and submitted to the local MASH. In such cases, also refer to the PAN Merseyside Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Protocol 2020

### **No apparent risk (absent / away from placement)**

There is no apparent risk of harm to either the child or the public.

Actions to locate the child and/or gather further information should be agreed with the person notifying the Police.

### **Low risk (missing)**

The risk of harm to the child or the public is assessed as possible but minimal.

Proportionate enquiries should be carried out to ensure that the individual has not come to harm.

### **Medium risk (missing)**

The risk of harm to the child or the public is assessed as likely but not serious.

This category requires an active and measured response by the police and partner agencies in order to trace the missing child and support the person reporting.

### **High risk (missing)**

The risk of serious harm\* to the child or the public is assessed as very likely.

This category almost always requires the immediate deployment of police resources – action may be delayed in exceptional circumstances, such as searching water or forested areas during hours of darkness.

There should be a press/media strategy and/or close contact with outside agencies. Family support should be put in place where appropriate.

\*Risk of serious harm has been defined as (Home Office 2002):

**'A risk which is life threatening and/or traumatic, and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to**

be difficult or impossible.’

If a child who has been missing or absent is considered to be at risk or experiencing child criminal or sexual exploitation **also** refer to the [PAN Merseyside Exploitation Protocol](#) and Knowsley Child Exploitation Protocol 2024.

If a child is thought to have been trafficked **also** refer to the PAN Merseyside Trafficking Guidance 2022.

**Child Looked After / Child Experienced**– A child is ‘looked after’ by a local authority if they are ‘in care’ by reason of a court order, or if they are provided with accommodation for more than 24 hours by agreement with parents/carers.

**Accommodated** – A child is accommodated if they are looked after by the local authority with the voluntary agreement of parents/carers, or the child if they are over 16 years old.

**Responsible local authority** – The authority that is responsible for the child’s care and care planning. This would usually be the placing authority.

**Host local authority** – The authority in which the child is placed when placed outside of the responsible authority’s area.

**Care leaver** – an eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989.

**Missing Person Coordinator** – Approval of the National Police Chief’s Council definition is conditional on the role of missing person coordinator or someone performing this function in each police force. NPCC advise that ideally the role has close links with arrangements to deal with Child Exploitation (CE)

**Child abduction** - Where a child has been abducted or forcibly removed from their place of residence, this is a ‘crime in action’ and should be reported to the Police immediately.

**Forced marriage** - Some children run away because they are at risk of abuse. Forced marriage in particular can lead to young women running away from home

Further guidance on this can be found in the LSCP procedures manual – visit [www.knowsleyscb.org.uk](http://www.knowsleyscb.org.uk) and also <https://www.gov.uk/forced-marriage>

**Child Exploitation** – Children may run away or go missing from home or care following grooming by others who are seeking to exploit them sexually. Children can also be exploited for the purposes of

criminal activity. Children who are regularly reported as either missing from home or care are particularly vulnerable to being exploited.

Further guidance can be found at [www.knowsleyscb.org.uk](http://www.knowsleyscb.org.uk)

**Child Trafficking** - Some missing children subsequently become trafficked, often for the purposes of sexual exploitation. They may be trafficked across both small and large geographical areas – visit [www.knowsleyscb.org.uk](http://www.knowsleyscb.org.uk)

**Independent Return Interviews** - This is an in-depth interview and is best carried out by an appropriately trained practitioner independent of providing care to the child within 72 hours of the return. In Knowsley this is commissioned through Catch 22 with the lead practitioner at level 2, 3 or 4 (if an open case,) following up any actions that emerge and informing future planning. Other responsible authorities who have placed a child in Knowsley can commission Knowsley to complete their return interviews on their behalf.

### **1.5 Warrants and Missing**

If a warrant has been issued with the power to arrest a child and that child has also been reported as missing, the police may decide not to treat this as a missing person. It may be deemed more appropriate for the police to actively seek the child for arrest under the powers of the warrant. There may however be occasions that there are grounds to suspect that there may be other factors than the child evading arrest that need to be taken into consideration which need to be communicated to the police.

### **1.6 Children Missing from Education**

Children miss education either because they do not have a school place, or they are having some other difficulties in attending school. This makes them vulnerable and more likely to be at risk of neglect or abuse.

Knowsley has a preventative approach to Children Missing Education; this is hoped to reduce the number of children who do go missing from education. The procedure brings together several procedures that support the Hub (Pupil Mobility Database) to reduce the risk of Children missing education and enable professionals to work together to locate, track and return children to education. The procedures involve a multi-agency approach to tracking children and linking in and sharing information about vulnerable pupils to safeguard against children going missing. The contact email address is [cme@knowsley.gov.uk](mailto:cme@knowsley.gov.uk) or 0151 443 5118 to make an enquiry or a referral.

Certain groups of children are more likely to miss education, they include:

- Children who have committed offences.
- Children that are being exploited

- Children living in women’s refuges.
- Children of homeless families, perhaps living in temporary accommodation
- Young runaways
- Children with long-term medical or emotional difficulties
- Looked after children.
- Children from a 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
- Trafficked children

For detailed guidance on Children Missing Education see “Revised statutory guidance for local authorities in England to identify children not receiving a suitable education (DCSF 2016)”.

It is the statutory duty of the Local Authority to ensure all its children are receiving education or otherwise. Knowsley has a Children Missing Education (CME) Lead and a system for recording and monitoring those children who fall into this category. The CME Lead works with colleagues in order to secure and maintain educational provision. School attendance data is also cross referenced with child exploitation data to ensure that all safeguarding concerns are appropriately responded to.

For children without a school place contact:

The School Admissions Team

Telephone: 0151 443 5143

Visit [www.knowsley.gov.uk](http://www.knowsley.gov.uk) (search for school admissions).

### **1.6 Non-school attendance**

There is a duty on the schools to identify and support children with attendance difficulties. Knowsley has a statutory duty to enforce the legislation when a parent fails to secure regular attendance for their child. Each school has the support of their Statutory School Attendance Officer who should be contacted for assistance on attendance issues.

### **1.7 Knowsley’s SHIELD Team (Harm Outside of the Home and Missing)**

**Shield** is a multi-agency team to protect children against harm outside of the home. The Shield Team’s vision is to keep children safe and free from harm (exploitation) by being a centre of excellence. The Shield team aims to work together with children, families, and the community to offer a range of services to reduce the harm by:

- Providing a central point for all professionals to receive expertise with reference to harm outside the home (child exploitation).
- Providing a coordinated and proactive response to dealing with harm outside the home: prevention, safeguarding and prosecution.
- Reducing and preventing children from harm outside the home and reduce the number of episodes of children going missing.
- Promoting the development of positive relationships with children and their families affected by harm outside the home.
- Improving evidence gathering and information sharing to inform problem profiling and prosecutions.



The Shield Team  
 Telephone; 0151 443 5028  
 Email: [Shield@knowsley.gov.uk](mailto:Shield@knowsley.gov.uk)

## **Section 2 – Knowsley Children Missing From Home (including Child in Need and Child Protection)**

### **2.1 Principles**

A co-ordinated response is required for children who are missing from home. Children who are going missing from home and education are at an increased risk of exploitation and all agencies should be alert to the relevant risk indicators.

There is an expectation that parents or guardians will report their child as missing. Failure to do so should be considered as a potential child protection issue and if appropriate the Knowsley Safeguarding Children’s Board (KSCP) procedures followed.

### **2.2 Reporting a Child as Missing**

In the first instance, parents and family members are expected to undertake the following basic measures to try and locate their child if considered safe to do so:

- Search bedroom / house / outbuildings / vehicles;
- Contact known friends and relatives where the child may be;
- To visit locations that the child is known to frequent, if it is safe to do so.
- Report their child as missing to Merseyside Police via telephoning 101, or in cases of an emergency 999.

When a professional becomes aware that a child is missing, they should advise the parent or carer to notify the Police immediately, if the parent has not already done so. If there is any concern the parent has not, and will not, report the child missing, the professional should report the child missing to the Police by telephoning 101 or 999 in a case of emergency.

Merseyside Police will ensure that the professional's missing report is recorded as a missing episode. Action should be taken as appropriate to the duration of time the child has been missing for. In any agency assessments of risk and safeguarding concerns, consideration should be given to the fact that the parent / carers have not reported their child as being missing and the risk this has placed the child in and a safeguarding referral will need to be sent into Knowsley Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

To inform the police about a missing child **dial 101. In exceptional circumstances if a very vulnerable child goes missing and an immediate, urgent response is needed dial 999, explain the circumstances of the child's disappearance and the reasons for your concern.** The police will need to know:

- The child's name
- The child's date of birth
- Where, when and with whom the child went missing
- What the child was wearing
- A description of the child
- Agreement to provide a recent photograph
- Their medical history
- The time and location they were last seen
- Circumstances of going missing
- Details of any friends or associates
- Details of any places they are known to visit

Please find crib sheet (Annex F) to help through the process of placing a missing report.

A Police Officer will conduct a risk assessment forming the basis for resulting proportionate actions. They will make ongoing enquiries, sharing information with parents and other agencies as appropriate.

Early and effective sharing of information is essential for the identification of patterns of behaviour. **If the Police, on being informed of a child is missing from a family home environment identify "high risk" concerns the Merseyside Police Missing Persons Procedure 2017 should be expedited.** Merseyside Police Procedure states that **"high risk" concerns require the immediate deployment of Police resources** and that a member of Police Senior Management Team is involved.

The professional does not need to inform the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) of the missing child report, as this will automatically be undertaken by the Police. However, if any assessment identifies any safeguarding concerns, they should make a professional safeguarding referral to the MASH.

Merseyside Police ensure that their missing persons database automatically notifies all children being reported as missing / absent to the Knowsley Children Services each following working day.

The Shield Team (Knowsley Harm Outside of the Home and Missing Team) / MASH will screen all missing reports that are not open to Children Services or do not have an allocated Family First lead practitioner and decide as to the level of presenting need and refer the child to the appropriate level of service if required. If the child has an allocated social worker or family first worker, then they have the responsibility to screen all missing reports and take appropriate action.

### **2.3 Longer term missing**

#### **Missing for 72 hours**

A multi-agency Strategy Meeting must be convened by Children's Social Care and includes the Police, Education, Health, and any other relevant agencies within 72 hours of a child being missing. This strategy meeting should be chaired by the relevant team manager. In the Strategy Meeting, notifying Press Communications and escalation to the Director of Children's Services (DCS) should be considered. At this Initial Strategy Meeting, consideration must be given as to who is best placed to maintain contact with parents/carers ensuring that all parents/carers with responsibility are considered. If the level of risk indicates that a strategy meeting is required earlier than 72 hours, then it must be organised in shorter timescales.

#### **Complex Missing Episodes (County Lines)**

When responding to more complex missing concerns ie international or national county lines and exploitation or cross boarder complexities, the Shield Team Manager will chair the missing strategy meeting if available. If not, then a Team Manager of the responsible team will chair.

Further considerations should be given during the strategy meeting due to the complexities with county lines, including all cross-border professionals and police from the area travelled from and area believed to be in. The strategy meeting should explore if an OSARA or Investigation plan is required by the police. If there is a likelihood of future missing episodes for the child linked to county lines then a pre-planning multi-agency meeting should be arranged to consider trigger plans, contingency planning, communication cross borders and retrieval plans. Please see Appendix A for things to consider in a Missing Strategy Meeting.

## **Cases of where a child continues to be missing**

Following the multi-agency Strategy Meeting, **if a child continues to be missing after 72 hours, weekly multi-agency review meetings should be convened.** Please see Appendix A for things to consider in a Missing Strategy Meeting.

In instances where concerns regarding the welfare of a missing child are high, resulting in public awareness raising through a press release, the Council's Communications team must be notified. The CSC team manager would notify the Head of Service who in turn will inform CSC Assistant Director and Council Communications Press Office.

In instances when CSC are informed that the police have made the decision for a press release and have sought agreement from the parents, the CSC team manager would notify the Head of Service who in turn will inform the CSC Assistant Director and the Council Communications Press Office.

If a child is assessed as high risk and is missing for **5 days** or a child is assessed as medium risk and is missing for **7 days**, a Command Team Review should be led by the Police and the Assistant Director of Children Services should be informed at this point (if not informed previously).

**At 28 days** the Police will refer to the Merseyside Public Protection Unit to review the progress of the investigations.

### **2.4 Return of the Child**

Family, friends, or carers locating a child missing from home should return them to their home address.

Where a risk is present, a police officer may accompany the family/carers, or the police may be requested to return the child to the place of residence only if it is safe to do so.

Parents/carers must inform the police when a child returns of their own accord.

The police will conduct an interview known as a 'safe and well check' to establish the child's wellbeing and safety, and whether they were the victim of abuse or a crime whilst missing. Enquires will be made into:

- Individual circumstances, including family circumstances in which the child has gone missing
- Their motivation for running
- Their possible destination
- Their recent patterns of absences (if any)
- If the parent/s appear unable, or unwilling, to work to support and meet the needs of children

The Shield Team / MASH will screen all found reports that are not open to Children Services or that do not have an allocated Family First lead practitioner and make a decision as to the level of presenting need and refer the child to the appropriate level of service if required. If a parent declines the offer of an Early Help Plan, or a Return Interview, and there are other causes of concern, a further discussion must take place in the MASH.

If the child has an allocated social worker or family first worker, then they have the responsibility to screen all found reports and take appropriate action.

### **3 missing episodes in 30 days**

When a child has had 3 missing episodes in a 30-day period as missing meeting will be held, a 3 in 30 meeting. This threshold has changed from 3 in 90 days to be in line with the [Pan Merseyside Missing Children Procedure](#) process. If a child is missing 3 times in around a month period, not being completely restrictive to a 30-day period, a 3 in 30 meeting should still be considered. If a child has been missing from home on more than **3 occasions within a 30-day period**, there should be consideration if there are any safeguarding concerns. If safeguarding concerns are identified a multi-agency Strategy Meeting under sec 47 should be convened. Where the police or other agencies assess that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm a referral to Knowsley Children's Services must be made immediately through: [Knowsleymash@knowsley.gov.uk](mailto:Knowsleymash@knowsley.gov.uk)

If no immediate safeguarding concerns present then the next Team Around the Family (TAF), Child in Need or Core Group meeting should analyse the pattern of missing episodes and adapt the plan accordingly to respond to influential factors considered. Prompt to analyse the missing episodes have been built into templates to ensure a tailored response is put into place.

If the family are not open to Early Help or Children Services, then Shield will organise a 3 in 30 multi-agency meeting to respond to the emerging pattern of missing episodes.

Shield to also consider whether there is a role for Catch 22 to complete direct work in relation to missing risks.

### **9 missing episodes in 90 days (9 in 90)**

If the child has been reported missing on 9 occasions in 90-day period, then the social worker should contact the Knowsley Quality Assurance Unit to discuss the appropriateness of 9 missing episodes in 90 days (9 in 90) meeting. Please see Appendix B for 9 in 90 meeting templates. The meeting notes need to be saved as an attachment to a "9 missing in 90 days meeting" case note.

The Missing From Home (MFH) Coordinator should be invited to the 3 in 30 and 9 in 90 meetings, however there needs to be a confidential section at the start of the meeting for police and other agencies to share confidential information that cannot be disclosed in front of the child and their

parent/carers attendance. A Shield worker will attend 9 in 90 meetings to provide their expertise in harm outside of the home and missing.

The Social Worker, Police and Catch 22 are required to provide their own analysis of the missing episodes at the meeting to ensure that plans are tailored to response to the individual push and pull factors that are influencing the missing pattern.

## **2.5 Return Interviews**

**Regardless of how long a child has been missing, upon their return an independent return interview should be offered to all children who have been missing from home.** The individuals who undertake the independent return interview in the local area should be informed of the missing incident and contact the family to offer the Independent Return Interview. The return interview should be recorded on the child's records and should also be provided to Merseyside Police MFH Coordinator, so this can be recorded on Police electronic systems, to inform any future missing investigations.

If safeguarding concerns are raised during the return interview, then Catch 22 commissioned service should make a safeguarding referral to the MASH or social worker.

The purpose of the return interview is to:

- Identify factors which led to the missing episode
- Prevent further missing episodes
- Inform any subsequent missing person investigation
- Share intelligence and information

Particular attention should be paid if a child is suspected of being involved in or at risk of trafficking or exploitation as they may be fearful of giving information.

Prior to any interview conducted with a child the interviewer should inform them who this information will be shared with, when and why and gain consent before sharing. If consent is not given to disclose but in the interests of safeguarding the child or other children it is necessary to share the information, then it should be disclosed.

The return interview should be carried out within 72 hours of the child being located or returning from the missing episode.

The Shield Team / MASH will screen all return interviews that are not open to Children Services or that do not have an allocated Family First lead practitioner, and make a decision as to the level of presenting need and refer the child to the appropriate level of service if required:

- No further action
- Signposting
- Early Help
- S17 Child & Family Assessment
- S47 Child Protection

If a parent refuses the offer of an Early Help Plan, or a Return Interview, and there are other causes of concern, a further discussion must take place in the MASH.

If the child has an allocated social worker or family first worker, then they have the responsibility to screen all found reports and take appropriate action.

## **Section 3 – Knowsley Children Missing From Care**

### **3.1 Pre-placement**

Prior to each accommodation arrangement for a Child Experienced, the responsible social worker must consider within the care planning process all potential risks to the child including an assessment of the potential for them to go missing. The child and their parent/carer should be involved in the planning process, and it should be related to that individual's needs, previous history, and views. Missing episodes prior to the child becoming 'looked after' must be considered.

Care should be taken when establishing where the child should be accommodated:

- Is the placement able to meet the needs of the child?
- Is the placement a good match in terms of other children in the placement? (Consideration of harm outside of the home / child exploitation)
- Are there external factors in the area of the placement which need to be taken into account when considering the placement?

When placing outside of Knowsley, it is even more critical to properly assess the above issues. If there is a need to discuss specific risks or issues, Knowsley should speak to the Safeguarding Unit in the authority in which the child will be living.

When a placement is confirmed, the responsible social worker must always follow the formal notification process as detailed in 'Out of authority placement of looked-after children: Supplement to The Children Act 1989 Volume 2: Care Planning, placement and review guidance; July 2014', this will inform the new authority that a looked after child is being placed in their area.

The initial placement plan is an opportunity for the care provider and the social worker to discuss with the child any issues around going missing and absent and to explain the rules and responsibilities of all involved. It is also the opportunity to provide the carer with details of the child and their family and history. This will help carers to understand any risks to the child or themselves if they go missing and it may help to locate the child and a copy should be provided to the child's placement. The placement plan should cover:

- Any trigger points for absence or missing episodes.
- Risks to themselves, the public and/or the carer before, during or after a missing episode including when being picked up.
- What steps can be taken to reduce the likelihood of the child going missing and coming to any harm or harming others.
- Friends and family details and contact numbers as well as addresses commonly found at.

- Expectations of the child: for example, curfews and, when and how to make contact, and the consequences of lateness etc.
- Expectations of the care provider: for example, at which point the Police will be notified, what processes will follow an incident, who will collect a child if they are missing, details of who conducts immediate assessments on their return and arrangements for full return interviews.
- Agreements around rules for staying overnight at friend's houses or going on trips. This is frequently cited as a major issue by children who wish to behave like their peers who are not looked after. Local Authority Circular (2004) suggests that "decisions on overnight stays should normally be delegated to foster carers and residential care staff. Arrangements for such decisions should be written into the delegated authority tool. There is no statutory duty for DBS checks to be carried out on adults in a private household where a child may stay overnight and so restrictions should only be placed on looked after children if there are exceptional circumstances.
- Outline the return interview arrangements.

If there are specific concerns or risks to children, then consideration by the responsible social worker should be given to liaison with local community policing, to the extent of sharing potential addresses and locations where children might run to and possibly engaging the police in speaking to the child about potential dangers in the local area.

### **3.2 Away from placement without authorisation**

Some children looked after absent themselves for a short period and then return, with their whereabouts known to the carer. Sometimes children stay out longer than agreed, either on purpose to test boundaries, or accidentally. Examples of situations where Away from Placement without Authorisation may apply are below;

- Failing to return on time
- Staying at a known location with a friend or family where there are no known risks

A child, who has failed to return home but their whereabouts are known and there is no identified risk, would not be treated as either 'missing' or 'absent' under police definitions.

Unauthorised absences will be overseen by the social worker and via care planning, each unauthorised absence should be captured on a case note. EDT to use the case note title of authorised absence if information is received out of hours, otherwise allocated social worker to input case note. Shield will audit the unauthorised absences on a quarterly basis to see if there are any patterns / exploitation.

If the care provider assesses that the child is at risk due to any factor/s known to them, then the child should be reported to the Police without delay and the believed risk communicated. The Police will respond to this as a 'concern for safety'. It should be recognised that police powers to return an

individual to a care address are limited unless they are on a Care Order or Police Protection Order is considered necessary. Children must not be reported missing as a behaviour management tool and police protection must not be considered merely as a tool to return an individual.

Instances of children being away from placement without authorisation should not be reported to the police. If the assessment of the carer is that there is no apparent risk for their immediate safety but are away from home without permission, it is still important that staff/carers record these incidences as absences in the child's record. In addition to this staff/carers should always start a dated/timed record of their contacts, risk assessment and decisions throughout the episode from the point that they are aware of the child's absence, in case the level of risk changes and decisions are auditable.

If the child's whereabouts are known or suspected, Knowsley responsible social worker will decide whether to allow the child to remain at that location, albeit temporarily, or to arrange for their return. If the decision is to arrange their return and there is reason to believe that there may be public order difficulties, the police will assist. Police assistance in these circumstances does not mean that the child is categorised as missing. Each such occurrence needs to be evaluated based upon the factors mentioned above and upon other information gleaned from the child, friends, family and associates.

The responsibility for managing unauthorised absences lies with the staff of the residential home or carer. It is not the responsibility of the police to influence or determine the decision of whether a person is missing or reported as unauthorised absence.

It is important to consider whether the circumstances of the disappearance would now render the child at risk of harm, for example, the child requires medication at a set time or, weather conditions have severely deteriorated.

### **3.3 Before Contacting the Police**

**When considering whether to report a child 'missing' it is expected that the response of their carer will always firstly be that of a responsible parent and they should make all attempts to find the child and support them to return to their placement.** Consideration should be given to the age and maturity of the child, whether they are known to self-harm, misuse substances, are at risk of child sexual and or criminal exploitation, and whether it is known where the child had gone or may actually be, or, whether the child is alone.

Where a child is looked after and placed in a Children's Home or in foster care, it is acknowledged that their carer will use their knowledge of the child and make decisions based on that knowledge and act as a reasonable parent would. Although the carer naturally will be concerned about the child, they may decide to allow a period to elapse before contacting the Police, dependent on, for example, the age and maturity of the child and any existing looked after childcare plan and associated risk assessment.

When a child is identified as not being at a location they are expected to be, the reporting individual (care provider / foster carer / social worker etc.) must take proactive steps to trace the child's whereabouts prior to contacting the police. Such steps would include:

- Physical checks of the residence, including the child's bedroom and any other location the child may be hiding within the house / building.
- Physical checks of any garden, garage, sheds, grounds and surrounding area(s) or any location the child is known to frequent.
- Attempting to contact the missing person directly, via mobile phone, text, or social networking sites such as Twitter or Facebook.
- Contacting the missing child's family and friends.
- Make reference to any risk assessments, placement plans or action plans that allow for some leeway with curfews for 'boundary testing'.

Carers should call Merseyside or relevant Police area to report the child as missing via calling 101, or, in an emergency via 999.

Carers must also inform without delay:

- The parents/those who have parental responsibility (unless indicated otherwise on the care plan).
- The key social worker or appropriate team manager.
- If out of hours, the responsible authorities out of hours service, and the social worker and appropriate team manager at the start of the next working day.

### **3.4 Going Missing on an External Activity**

After careful consideration of the National Police Chief's Council NPCC definitions, if a child goes 'missing' whilst on an external activity, the carer or responsible staff member will be required to:

- Arrange an initial search of the area the child was last seen.
- Notify the local police immediately. This should be the police force responsible for the area where the child was last seen. This report should NOT be delayed until the carers have returned to their home area.
- Notify the child's social worker or team manager
- Notify the senior manager at home (if applicable).
- Notify the emergency out of hours duty team (if applicable).

### **3.5 Reporting a Child as Missing**

**If the child is not located, the reporting individual should contact Merseyside Police without delay either by dialling 101 or, if there are immediate concerns and if the child is felt to be at high risk, ring the emergency number on 999.** In all cases, the police will provide an incident log number and it is important that a note is kept of this number in the child's case record.

Parents and carers with parental responsibility for the child should be notified at the time reports are made to the police and on the child's return if it does not put the child at any additional risk for example in cases of forced marriage.

In instances where concerns regarding the welfare of a missing child are high, resulting in public awareness raising through a press release, the Council's Communications Press office must be notified. The CSC team manager should notify the Head of Service who in turn will seek approval from the Assistant Executive Director for the press release and then notify the Council's Communications Press office. The police should submit a draft press release to the Head of Service for approval before it is processed.

If there is a concern that the carer has not reported the child missing, and will not, report the child missing, the professional who is aware the child is missing should notify the police by telephoning 101 or 999 in case of an emergency. The professional should then immediately notify the responsible social worker as a safeguarding concern.

The police will need to know:

- The child's name
- The child's date of birth
- Where, when and with whom the child went missing
- What the child was wearing
- A description of the child
- Agreement to provide a recent photograph
- Their medical history
- The time and location they were last seen
- Circumstances of going missing
- Details of any friends or associates
- Details of any places they are known to visit

A Police Officer will conduct a risk assessment forming the basis for resulting proportionate actions. They will make ongoing enquiries, sharing information with parents and other agencies as appropriate.

Early and effective sharing of information is essential for the identification of patterns of behaviour. **If the Police, on being informed of a child is missing from a family home environment identify “high risk” concerns the Merseyside Police Missing Persons Procedure should be expedited.** Merseyside Police Procedure states that **“high risk” concerns require the immediate deployment of Police resources** and that a member of Police Senior Management Team is involved.

### **Knowsley Child placed in Knowsley**

If the Knowsley child is placed within Knowsley, the professional/carer does not need to inform the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) of the missing child report, as this will automatically be undertaken by the Police. However, if any assessment identifies any safeguarding concerns they should make a professional safeguarding referral to the allocated Social Worker.

If the child is placed in Knowsley, Merseyside Police ensure that their missing persons database automatically notifies all children being reported as missing / absent who are placed in Knowsley each following working day. The responsible social worker will then screen all missing reports and take appropriate action.

### **Knowsley Child placed outside of Knowsley**

If the Knowsley child is placed outside of Knowsley then the responsible social worker must complete the missing notification form in ICS. This alert is then received in the Admin Missing Tray in ICS. The Alert is then processed by business support admin. Please see Appendix C for missing and found notification process for a child placed outside of Knowsley.

## **3.6 Longer term missing**

### **Missing for 72 hours**

A multi-agency Strategy Meeting must be convened by Children’s Social Care and includes the Police, Education, Health and any other relevant agencies within 72 hours of a child being missing. Please see Appendix A for Strategy Meeting template.

This strategy meeting should be chaired by the relevant team manager. In the Strategy Meeting, notifying Press Communications and escalation to the Director of Children’s Services (DCS) should be considered. At this Initial Strategy Meeting, consideration must be given as to who is best placed to maintain contact with parents/carers ensuring that all parents/carers with responsibility are considered. If the level of risk indicates that a strategy meeting is required earlier than 72 hours then it must be organised in shorter timescales.

### **Complex Missing Episodes (County Lines)**

When responding to more complex missing concerns ie international or national county lines and exploitation or cross boarder complexities, the Shield Team Manager will chair the missing strategy meeting if available. If not, then a Team Manager of the responsible team will chair.

Further considerations should be given during the strategy meeting due to the complexities with county lines, including all cross-border professionals and police from the area travelled from and area believed to be in. The strategy meeting should explore if an OSARA or Investigation plan is required by the police. If there is a likelihood of future missing episodes for the child linked to county lines then a pre-planning multi-agency meeting should be arranged to consider trigger plans, contingency planning, communication cross borders and retrieval plans. Please see Appendix A for things to consider in a Missing Strategy Meeting.

### **Cases of where a child continues to be missing**

Following the multi-agency Strategy Meeting, **if a child continues to be missing after 72 hours, weekly multi-agency Strategy meetings should be convened.** At this stage the Council and Police Communications Press Offices must always be informed (if not informed previously) and a joint Press/Media Strategy should be considered.

To ensure communication between CSC, placement, and Police a review strategy discussion must take place before the weekend.

If a child is assessed as high risk and is missing for 5 days or a child is assessed as medium risk and is missing for 7 days, a Command Team Review should be led by the Police and the Assistant Director of Children Services should be informed at this point (if not informed previously).

**At 28 days** the Police will refer to the Merseyside Public Protection Unit to review the progress of the investigations.

### **3.7 Return of the Child**

On the child's return, carers should make clear to the child that they are relieved to see the child is safe and well. Their general condition should be assessed immediately, and if appropriate, medical attention should be arranged. Food and drink should also be a priority. The safety and welfare of the child should also be ensured especially if it seems that they have run away because of bullying or harassment.

Family, friends, or carers locating a child missing from home should return them to their home address. Where a risk is present, a police officer may accompany the family/carers, or the police may be requested to return the child to the place of residence only if it is safe to do so.

The police should be informed immediately following the voluntary return of a child who has been reported missing or absent. Parents and responsible social workers and all others informed of the missing should be advised of the child's return without delay. They should be informed of any information gathered on their return.

The police will conduct an interview known as a 'safe and well check' to establish the child's wellbeing and safety, and whether they were the victim of abuse or a crime whilst missing. Enquires will be made into:

- Individual circumstances, including family circumstances in which the child has gone missing
- Their motivation for running
- Their possible destination
- Their recent patterns of absences (if any)
- If the parent/s appear unable, or unwilling, to work to support and meet the needs of children

### **Knowsley Child placed in Knowsley**

If the Knowsley child is placed in Knowsley, Merseyside Police ensure that their missing persons database automatically notifies all children being reported as found who are placed in Knowsley each following working day. The responsible social worker will screen all found reports and take appropriate action.

### **Knowsley Child placed outside of Knowsley**

If the Knowsley child is placed outside of Knowsley, then the responsible social worker must complete the found notification form in ICS. This alert is then received in the Admin Missing Tray in ICS. The Alert is then processed by business support admin. Please see Appendix C for missing and found notification process for a child placed outside of Knowsley.

### **3 missing episodes in 30 days**

If a child has been missing from care on **3 occasions within a 30 day period**, there should be consideration if there are any safeguarding concerns. If safeguarding concerns are identified a multi-agency Strategy Meeting under sec 47 should be convened. Where the police or other agencies assess that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm a referral to the social worker must be made immediately.

If the missing pattern is not being discussed in any other meetings and there are no immediate safeguarding concerns present, then the responsible social worker should organise a care planning meeting to analyse the pattern of missing episodes and adapt the plan accordingly to respond to influential factors considered. A prompt to analyse the missing episodes have been built into the care

planning meeting template to ensure analysis of the missing episodes is captured and then a tailored response is put into place.

Shield to also consider whether there is a role for Catch 22 to complete direct work in relation to missing risks.

### **9 missing episodes in 90 days (9 in 90)**

If the child has been reported missing on 9 occasions in 90 day period, then the social worker should contact the Knowsley Quality Assurance Unit to discuss the appropriateness of a 9 missing episodes in 90 days (9 in 90) meeting. Please see Appendix B for 9 in 90 meeting template. The meeting notes need to be saved as an attachment to a “9 missing in 90 days meeting” case note.

The Missing From Home (MFH) Coordinator from the area the child is residing in should be invited to the 3 in 30 and 9 in 90 meetings, however there needs to be a confidential section at the start of the meeting for police and other agencies to share confidential information that cannot be disclosed in front of the child and their parent/carers attendance. A Shield worker will attend 9 in 90 meetings to provide their expertise in harm outside of the home and missing.

The Social Worker, Police and Catch 22 are required to provide their own analysis of the missing episodes at the meeting to ensure that plans are tailored to response to the individual push and pull factors that are influencing the missing pattern.

### **3.8 Return Interviews**

**Regardless of how long a child has been missing, upon their return an independent return interview should be offered to all children who have been missing from home.** The individuals who undertake the independent return interview in the local area should be informed of the missing incident and contact the child to offer the Independent Return Interview. The return interview should be recorded on the child’s records and should also be provided to the local Missing From Home (MFH) Coordinator, so this can be recorded on Police electronic systems, to inform any future missing investigations.

If safeguarding concerns are raised during the return interview then this should be referred to the responsible social worker.

The purpose of the return interview is to:

- Identify factors which led to the missing episode
- Prevent further missing episodes
- Inform any subsequent missing person investigation
- Share intelligence and information

Particular attention should be paid if there are signs of or evidence of harm outside the home (trafficking or exploitation) as they may be fearful of giving information.

Prior to any interview conducted with a child the interviewer should inform them who this information will be shared with, when and why and gain consent before sharing. If consent is not given to disclose but in the interests of safeguarding the child or other children it is necessary to share the information, then it should be disclosed.

The return interview should be carried out within 72 hours of receipt of the found notification by police.

### **Knowsley Child placed in and within 30 mile radius of Knowsley**

Knowsley commissioned service will complete the independent return interview and this will be recorded on the child's file. The responsible social worker will screen all return interviews and take appropriate action required.

### **Knowsley Child placed out of a 30 miles radius of Knowsley**

Knowsley commissioned service will clarify what return interview arrangements are in place and will consult with the Shield Team Manager on the most appropriate method of completing the return interview.

If the distance is too far and there are no appropriate commissioned services in the area that the child is placed then consideration will be given to a telephone contact to complete the return interview by Knowsley's commissioned services. If a return interview can be commissioned elsewhere upon receipt of any return interview the responsible social worker must save a copy on liquid logic linked to the missing episode. The responsible social worker will screen all return interviews and take appropriate action required.

### **Exceptional decisions on return interviews**

If a decision is made by the social worker to complete their own return interview based upon individual child's circumstances, then they must complete a return interview template (please see Appendix D) and link it to the missing episode.

## **3.9 The Role of Care Planning**

Every child looked after must have a care plan based on a comprehensive assessment of their needs that takes into account their wishes, feelings and aspirations for the future. All care plans must be kept under review. The review meeting must be chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).

The statutory review should consider the adequacy of the care plan in addressing why a child has gone missing and in ensuring adequate strategies are in place to address future missing episodes. The review should consider all push/pull factors in relation to missing episodes (e.g sexual or criminal exploitation, running to spend contact time with family).

## **Section 4 – Other Responsible Local Authorities’ Children Missing From Care who are placed in Knowsley**

### **4.1 Pre-placement**

Prior to each accommodation arrangement for a Child Looked After, the responsible local authority social worker must consider within the care planning process all potential risks to the child including an assessment of the potential for them to go missing.

Care should be taken when establishing where the child should be accommodated:

- Is the home able to meet the needs of the child?
- Is the placement a good match in terms of other children in the placement? (Consideration of exploitation risks)
- Are there external factors in the area of the placement which need to be taken into account when considering the placement?

The responsible local authority social worker must always follow the formal notification process as detailed in ‘Out of authority placement of looked-after children: Supplement to The Children Act 1989 Volume 2: Care Planning, placement and review guidance; July 2014’. If children are being placed within Knowsley, then the notification form alongside any risk assessments including child exploitation concerns should be sent to Knowsley notifications at [Knowsleymash@knowsley.gov.uk](mailto:Knowsleymash@knowsley.gov.uk)

Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council (KMBC) commissions a voluntary agency to provide independent return interviews for Knowsley children. Other responsible local authorities can commission KMBC to organise all their return interviews, the cost being £150 per interview. Knowsley does require written confirmation. (See Appendix E - missing person interview agreement form). As part of the commissioned service the following will take place:

- A level 4 social worker will make contact with the child’s responsible social worker;
- A face-to-face return interview will be completed by the commissioned service, we will aim for this to take place within 72 hours;
- Two attempts will be made to make contact;
- Placement and responsible social worker will be provided with a copy of the completed return interview form and any concerns will be discussed;

- Continued on-going communication from the Shield Team (Harm Outside the Home and Missing Service) should there be further missing person reports.

Knowsley is unable to negotiate an episode-by-episode basis and therefore upon written confirmation and unless specified otherwise that we will continue to complete further interviews on behalf of the other responsible authority. Following all the above, if the child declines the return interview, then the cost will be £50. Knowsley will invoice for this service every quarter. Case responsibility remains with the other responsible local authority i.e addressing the reasons for the child's missing episode.

If the responsible local authority plans to make alternative arrangements for the return interview to be completed then a copy of the return must be sent via secure email to [Shield@knowsley.gov.uk](mailto:Shield@knowsley.gov.uk) in line with the DfE Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care. The information contained in the return will be used in our analysis of risks in the area.

The initial placement plan is an opportunity for the care provider and the social worker to discuss with the child any issues around going missing and absent and to explain the rules and responsibilities of all involved. It is also the opportunity to provide the carer with details of the child and their family and history. This will help carers to understand any risks to the child or themselves if they go missing and it may help to locate the child and a copy should be provided to the child's placement. The placement plan should cover:

- Any trigger points for absence or missing episodes.
- Risks to themselves, the public and/or the carer before, during or after a missing episode including when being picked up.
- What steps can be taken to reduce the likelihood of the child going missing and coming to any harm or harming others.
- Friends and family details and contact numbers as well as addresses commonly found at.
- Expectations of the child: for example, curfews and, when and how to make contact, and the consequences of lateness etc.
- Expectations of the care provider: for example, at which point the Police will be notified, what processes will follow an incident, who will collect a child if they are missing, details of who conducts immediate assessments on their return and arrangements for full return interviews.
- Agreements around rules for staying overnight at friend's houses or going on trips. This is frequently cited as a major issue by children who wish to behave like their peers who are not looked after. Local Authority Circular (2004) suggests that "decisions on overnight stays should normally be delegated to foster carers and residential care staff. Arrangements for such decisions should be written into the placement plan or equivalent." There is no statutory duty for DBS checks to be carried out on adults in a private household where a child may stay overnight and so restrictions should only be placed on looked after children if there are exceptional circumstances.
- Outline who will be completing the return interview.

If there are specific concerns or risks to children, then consideration by the responsible social worker should be given to liaison with local community policing, to the extent of sharing potential addresses and locations where children might run to and possibly engaging the police in speaking to the child about potential dangers in the local area.

#### **4.2 Away from placement without authorisation**

Some children looked after absent themselves for a short period and then return, with their whereabouts known to the carer. Sometimes children stay out longer than agreed, either on purpose to test boundaries, or accidentally. Examples of situations where Away from Placement without Authorisation may apply are below.

- Failing to return on time.
- Staying at a known location with a friend or family where there are no known risks.

A child, who has failed to return home but their whereabouts are known and there is no identified risk, would not be treated as either 'missing' or 'absent' under police definitions.

If the care provider assesses that the child is at risk due to any factor/s known to them, then the child should be reported to the Police without delay and the believed risk communicated. The Police will respond to this as a 'concern for safety'. It should be recognised that police powers to return an individual to a care address are limited unless they are on a care order or Police Protection Order is considered necessary. Children must not be reported missing as a behaviour management tool and police protection must not be considered merely as a tool to return an individual.

Instances of children being away from placement without authorisation should not be reported to the police. If the assessment of the carer is that there is no apparent risk for their immediate safety but are away from home without permission, it is still important that staff/carers record these incidences as reported absences in the child's record. In addition to this staff/carers should always start a dated/timed record of their contacts, risk assessment and decisions throughout the episode from the point that they are aware of the child's absence, in case the level of risk changes and decisions are auditable.

If the child's whereabouts are known or suspected, the responsible local authority social worker will decide whether to allow the child to remain at that location, albeit temporarily, or to arrange for their return. If the decision is to arrange their return and there is reason to believe that there may be public order difficulties, the police will assist. Police assistance in these circumstances does not mean that the child is categorised as missing. Each such occurrence needs to be evaluated based upon the factors mentioned above and upon other information gleaned from the child, friends, family and associates.

The responsibility for managing unauthorised absences lies with the social worker, staff of the residential home or carer. It is not the responsibility of the police to influence or determine the decision of whether a person is missing or reported as unauthorised absence.

It is important to consider whether the circumstances of the disappearance would now render the child at risk of harm, for example, the child requires medication at a set time or, weather conditions have severely deteriorated.

### **4.3 Before Contacting the Police**

**When considering whether to report a child 'missing' it is expected that the response of their carer will always firstly be that of a responsible parent and they should make all attempts to find the child and support them to return to their placement.** Consideration should be given to the age and maturity of the child, whether they are known to self-harm, misuse substances, are at risk of child sexual and or criminal exploitation, and whether it is known where the child had gone or may be, or, whether the child is alone.

Where a child is looked after and placed in a Children's Home or in foster care, it is acknowledged that their carer will use their knowledge of the child and make decisions based on that knowledge and act as a reasonable parent would. Although the carer naturally will be concerned about the child, they may decide to allow a period of time to elapse before contacting the Police, dependent on, for example, the age and maturity of the child and any existing looked after childcare plan and associated Risk Assessment.

When a child is identified as not being at a location they are expected to be, the reporting individual (care provider / foster carer / social worker etc.) must take proactive steps to trace the child's whereabouts prior to contacting the police. Such steps would include:

- Physical checks of the residence, including the child's bedroom and any other location the child may be hiding within the house / building.
- Physical checks of any garden, garage, sheds, grounds and surrounding area(s) or any location the child is known to frequent.
- Attempting to contact the missing person directly, via mobile phone, text, or social networking sites such as Snapchat, Instagram, or Facebook.
- Contacting the missing child's family and friends.
- Make reference to any risk assessments, placement plans or action plans that allow for some leeway with curfews for 'boundary testing'.

Carers should call Merseyside Police to report the child as missing via calling 101, or, in an emergency via 999.

Carers must also inform without delay:

- The parents/those who have parental responsibility (unless indicated otherwise on the care plan).
- The key social worker or appropriate team manager.
- If out of hours, the responsible authorities out of hours service, and the social worker and/or appropriate team manager at the start of the next working day.

#### **4.4 Going Missing on an External Activity**

After careful consideration of the National Police Chief's Council NPCC definitions, if a child goes 'missing' whilst on an external activity, the carer or responsible staff member will be required to:

Arrange an initial search of the area the child was last seen.

Notify the local police immediately. This should be the police force responsible for the area where the child was last seen. This report should NOT be delayed until the carers have returned to their home area.

Notify the child's social worker or team manager

Notify the senior manager at home (if applicable).

Notify the responsible emergency out of hours duty team (if applicable).

#### **4.5 Reporting a Child as Missing**

**If the child is not located, the reporting individual should contact Merseyside Police without delay either by dialling 101 or, if there are immediate concerns and if the child is felt to be at high risk, ring the emergency number on 999.** In all cases, the police will provide an incident number and it is important that a note is kept of this number in the child's case record.

Parents and carers with parental responsibility for the child should be notified at the time reports are made to the police and also on the child's return provided that it does not put the child at any additional risk for example in cases of forced marriage.

In instances where concerns regarding the welfare of a missing child are considered to be high, resulting in public awareness raising through a press release, Knowsley Council's Communications team must be notified in advance by the responsible local authority. This notification can be via [Shield@knowsley.gov.uk](mailto:Shield@knowsley.gov.uk)

If there is a concern that the carer has not reported the child missing, and will not, report the child missing, the professional who is aware the child is missing should notify the police by telephoning 101 or 999 in case of an emergency. The professional should then immediately notify the other local authority responsible social worker as a safeguarding concern.

The police will need to know:

- The child's name
- The child's date of birth
- Where, when and with whom the child went missing
- What the child was wearing
- A description of the child
- Agreement to provide a recent photograph
- Their medical history
- The time and location they were last seen
- Circumstances of going missing
- Details of any friends or associates
- Details of any places they are known to visit

A Police Officer will conduct a risk assessment forming the basis for resulting proportionate actions. They will make ongoing enquiries, sharing information with parents and other agencies as appropriate.

Early and effective sharing of information is essential for the identification of patterns of behaviour. **If the Police, on being informed of a child is missing from a family home environment identify "high risk" concerns the Merseyside Police Missing Persons Procedure should be expedited.** Merseyside Police Procedure states that **"high risk" concerns require the immediate deployment of Police resources** and that a member of Police Senior Management Team is involved.

If the notification of placement within Knowsley has been received then the professional/carer does not need to inform the Knowsley Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) of the missing child report, as this will automatically be undertaken by the Police. However, if any assessment identifies any safeguarding concerns, they should make a professional safeguarding referral to Knowsley MASH and the responsible social care team.

If the child is placed in Knowsley, Merseyside Police ensure that their missing person's database automatically notifies the responsible social worker and Knowsley MASH/Shield.

The responsible social worker will screen all missing reports and take appropriate action. Knowsley MASH/Shield will read all missing reports and will contact the responsible social worker if:

1. If there any safeguarding concerns apparent,
2. If 3 missing episodes in 30 days or 9 missing episodes in 90 days, and/or
3. If the responsible authority commissions Knowsley for their return interviews.

If the missing details do not hit the above criteria, then the missing notification will be closed down in Knowsley.

## **4.6 Longer term missing**

### **Missing for 72 hours**

A multi-agency Strategy Meeting must be convened by the responsible Children's Social Care and includes the Police, Education, Health and any other relevant agencies within 72 hours of a child being missing. This strategy meeting should be chaired by the responsible local authority's team manager. In the Strategy Meeting, notifying Press Communications and escalation to the Director of Children's Services (DCS) should be considered. At this Initial Strategy Meeting, consideration must be given as to who is best placed to maintain contact with parents/carers ensuring that all parents/carers with responsibility are considered. If the level of risk indicates that a strategy meeting is required earlier than 72 hours then it must be organised in shorter timescales.

Shield will contact the responsible authority to enquire when this strategy meeting is taking place. If the responsible authority is unable to provide the arrangements at the point the child has been missing for 72 hours, then a letter will be sent from Knowsley Quality Assurance Unit to the responsible Quality Assurance Unit to escalate concerns over the responsible authorities' response to their child being missing.

### **Cases of where a child continues to be missing**

Following the multi-agency Strategy Meeting, **if a child continues to be missing after 72 hours, weekly multi-agency Strategy meetings should be convened by the responsible authority.** At this stage the Council and Police Communications Press Offices must always be informed (if not informed previously) and a joint Press/Media Strategy should to be implemented.

If a child is assessed as high risk and is missing for 5 days or a child is assessed as medium risk and is missing for 7 days, a Command Team Review should be led by the Police and the responsible and host Assistant Director of Children Services should be informed at this point (if not informed previously).

**At 28 days** the Police will refer to the Merseyside Public Protection Unit to review the progress of the investigations.

The Missing from Home Coordinator will need to be notified of the arrangements for weekly strategy meetings whilst the child is missing. If the responsible authority is unable to provide the arrangements within a weekly timeframe, then a letter will be sent from Knowsley Quality Assurance Unit to the responsible Quality Assurance Unit to escalate concerns over the responsible authorities' response to their child being missing.

## **4.7 Return of the Child**

On the child's return, carers should make clear to the child that they are relieved to see the child is safe and well. Their general condition should be assessed immediately, and if appropriate, medical attention should be arranged. Food and drink should also be a priority. The safety and welfare of the child should also be ensured especially if it seems that they have run away because of bullying or harassment.

Family, friends or carers locating a child missing from home should return them to their home address. Where a risk is present, a police officer may accompany the family/carers or the police may be requested to return the child to the place of residence only if it is safe to do so.

The police should be informed immediately following the voluntary return of a child who has been reported missing or absent. Parents and responsible social workers and all others informed of the missing should be advised of the child's return without delay. They should be informed of any information gathered on their return.

The police will conduct an interview known as a 'safe and well check' to establish the child's wellbeing and safety, and whether they were the victim of abuse or a crime whilst missing. Enquires will be made into:

- Individual circumstances, including family circumstances in which the child has gone missing
- Their motivation for running
- Their possible destination
- Their recent patterns of absences (if any)
- If the parent/s appear unable, or unwilling, to work to support and meet the needs of children

### **Child placed in Knowsley**

If the child is placed in Knowsley, Merseyside Police ensure that their missing persons database automatically notifies Knowsley of all children being reported as found who are placed in Knowsley each following working day. The responsible authority is also automatically notified and it is the responsibility of the responsible social worker to screen all found reports and take appropriate action.

Knowsley MASH/Shield will read all found reports and will make contact with the responsible social worker if:

4. If there any safeguarding concerns apparent,
5. If 3 missing episodes in 30 days or 9 missing episodes in 90 days, and/or
6. If the responsible authority commissions Knowsley for their return interviews.

If the found details do not hit the above criteria then the found notification will be closed down in Knowsley.

### **3 missing episodes in 30 days**

If a child has been missing from care on more than **3 occasions within a 30 day period**, there should be consideration if there are any safeguarding concerns. If safeguarding concerns are identified a multi-agency Strategy Meeting under sec 47 should be convened. Where the police or other agencies assess that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm a referral to Knowsley Children's Services must be made immediately through: [Knowslemash@knowsley.gov.uk](mailto:Knowslemash@knowsley.gov.uk)

If no immediate safeguarding concerns present then the responsible social worker should organise a multi-agency meeting to respond to the emerging pattern of missing episodes.

### **9 missing episodes in 90 days (9 in 90)**

If the child has been reported missing on **9 occasions in 90 day period**, then the responsible authority should organise a multi-agency meeting to respond to the emerging pattern of missing episodes. Please see Knowsley 9 missing in 90 days meeting template in Appendix B.

The Missing From Home (MFH) Coordinator should be invited to the 3 in 30 and 9 in 90 meetings, however there needs to be a confidential section at the start of the meeting for police and other agencies to share confidential information that cannot be disclosed in front of the child and their parent/carers attendance. A Shield worker will attend 9 in 90 meetings to provide their expertise in harm outside of the home and missing.

Knowsley Quality Assurance Unit will also notify the responsible Quality Assurance Unit that their child has had 9 missing episodes in 90 days and ask for confirmation that the care plan is suitable to the child's needs and responding to the escalation of missing episodes. If no return interviews have been sent to Knowsley, then this will also be included in this escalation letter.

### **4.8 Return Interviews**

**Regardless of how long a child has been missing, upon their return an independent return interview should be offered to all children who have been missing from home.** The return interview should be carried out within 72 hours of the child being located or returning from the missing episode.

The purpose of the return interview is to:

- Identify factors which led to the missing episode.
- Prevent further missing episodes.
- Inform any subsequent missing person investigation.
- Share intelligence and information

If safeguarding concerns are raised during the return interview a safeguarding referral should be made to Knowsley MASH and the responsible social care team. Particular attention should be paid if a child is suspected of being involved in or at risk of trafficking or exploitation as they may be fearful of giving information.

Prior to any interview conducted with a child the interviewer should inform them who this information will be shared with, when and why and gain consent before sharing. If consent is not given to disclose but in the interests of safeguarding the child or other children it is necessary to share the information, then it should be disclosed.

If the responsible authority commissions Knowsley to organise their return interviews then the following will take place:

- a level 4 social worker will make contact with the child's responsible social worker;
- a face-to-face return interview will be completed by the commissioned service, we will aim for this to take place within 72 hours;
- two attempts will be made to make contact.
- placement and yourself will be provided with a copy of the completed return interview form and any concerns will be discussed;
- continued on-going communication from the Shield Team (Harm Outside the Home and Missing Service) should there be further missing person reports.

Case responsibility remains with the other responsible local authority e.g. addressing the reasons for the child's missing episode.

If the responsible local authority plans to make alternative arrangements for the return interview to be completed then a copy of the return must be sent via secure email to [Shield@knowsley.gov.uk](mailto:Shield@knowsley.gov.uk) in line with the DfE Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care. The information contained in the return will be used in our analysis of risks in the area.

## **Section 5 – Strategic Arrangements**

### **5.1 Governance Arrangements**

Knowsley Contextual Safeguarding: Child Exploitation and Missing Performance Group will receive quarterly reports regarding compliance with this procedure, including statistical analysis of local needs arising and any identified gaps in service delivery.

Exception reports, including any issues pertaining to joint commissioning, will be reported to the KSCP.

A quarterly Shield Multi Agency Operational Meeting is held to review operational matters including individual children who are identified through the implementation of this procedure. The meeting is chaired by the Shield Team Manager. This meeting will monitor the completion of return interviews with children and the analysis of any themes or patterns that can be identified. A monthly analysis from Catch 22 return interviews is considered at the meeting.

The Shield Operational meeting will report/ escalate to the Knowsley Contextual Safeguarding: Child Exploitation and Missing Performance Group on a quarterly basis. Relevant information from this meeting will also be shared with the PAN Merseyside Missing Forum.

## **5.2 Strategic Review**

The Knowsley Contextual Safeguarding: Child Exploitation and Missing Performance Group Child Exploitation and Missing Performance Board will consider the quarterly reports received and provide annual reports to KSCP.

## **5.3 Training and Induction**

The contents of this strategy should be shared with all key members of staff within each agency. The protocol should be part of the induction of residential staff, foster carers, operational social workers, MASH and foster carer support staff. It should be part of the induction of staff within the police force, supervisors within force control and local policing unit commanders.

## **5.4 Complaints Procedure**

If a complaint is made against a specific worker, then the agency complaints procedure should be followed. If a complaint is made regarding the Missing process, the Safeguarding Boards complaints procedures should be applied.

## **Appendix A: Things to consider in a missing strategy meeting**

- Chronology of missing
- Missing Risk Assessment
- What has been done to establish the whereabouts of the child
- Latest information
- Have all possible steps been taken to locate and recover the child including undertaking corporate parenting duties such as visiting addresses where children are suspected to be?
- Have the child's details been circulated via the Service Manager to other local authorities in areas where they may be?
- Is the child at risk of sexual exploitation or criminal exploitation?  
If Yes, has a CE assessment been completed and sent to Shield?
- Is the child at risk of being trafficked?  
If Yes, has a National Referral Mechanism referral been made to the National Crime Agency?  
Who is going to complete the NRM?
- Is there a likelihood that the child may have travelled abroad?
- Is it safe for the child to return to the placement / home?
- Should a medical be undertaken?
- Do police wish to make further enquiries before the child returns to placement / home?
- What steps will be taken to prevent the child going missing in the future?
- Has a press strategy been considered including the involvement of parents / carers? Is there a suitable photograph for press release ?
- Recovery Order S50 Children Act 1989: Order to Produce Child on Request and Remove Child
- Consider appropriateness of Child Abduction Warning Notices (Harbourers Warnings), Child Exploitation Warning Notices.

### **Complex Missing Episodes (County Lines)**

- Ensure the MFH Coordinator from home and location believed to be missing in are invited
- Consult Shield / CCSET Police to look at disruption and investigations
- Consider a safe retrieval plan
- Do the police need to explore an OSARA or investigation plan
- Who is responsible for cross border communication?
- Consider trigger plans for airports if likelihood travelled abroad
- Is a trigger plan required?

Please see Appendix B for things to consider in a CE strategy meeting on Knowsley Child Exploitation Policy & Procedure 2024.

**Appendix B: 9 missing episodes in 90 days (9 in 90) meeting**

Child Details:

Date of Birth:

Venue:

Date of meeting:

Present:

Apologies:

**1. Purpose of meeting**

This is a 9 in 90 meeting convened under Knowsley MBC’s safeguarding protocols and in line with Statutory Guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care – January 2015. The meeting is to focus on understanding the missing behaviour and strategies to manage the missing behaviour and associated risk.

**2. Confidential Police Information – Police Pre meeting report**

**3. Dates of previous missing strategy meetings/ 3 missing episodes in 30 days (3 in 30) meetings held. Recommendations shared and actions noted**

**4. Chronology of the 9 missing episodes**

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  |  |
|--|--|

5. Any other children missing/thought to be linked to missing child?
6. Analysis of information from the return interviews – Catch 22 pre meeting report
7. Social Worker’s Analysis of the missing episodes (any trends or patterns and what are the pull and push factors contributing to the missing episodes) – Social Worker pre meeting report.
8. Any additional multi-agency’s analysis of the missing episodes
9. Views of Child
10. Views of Parents/Carer
11. Key factors influencing the missing episodes

|      |
|------|
| Plan |
|------|

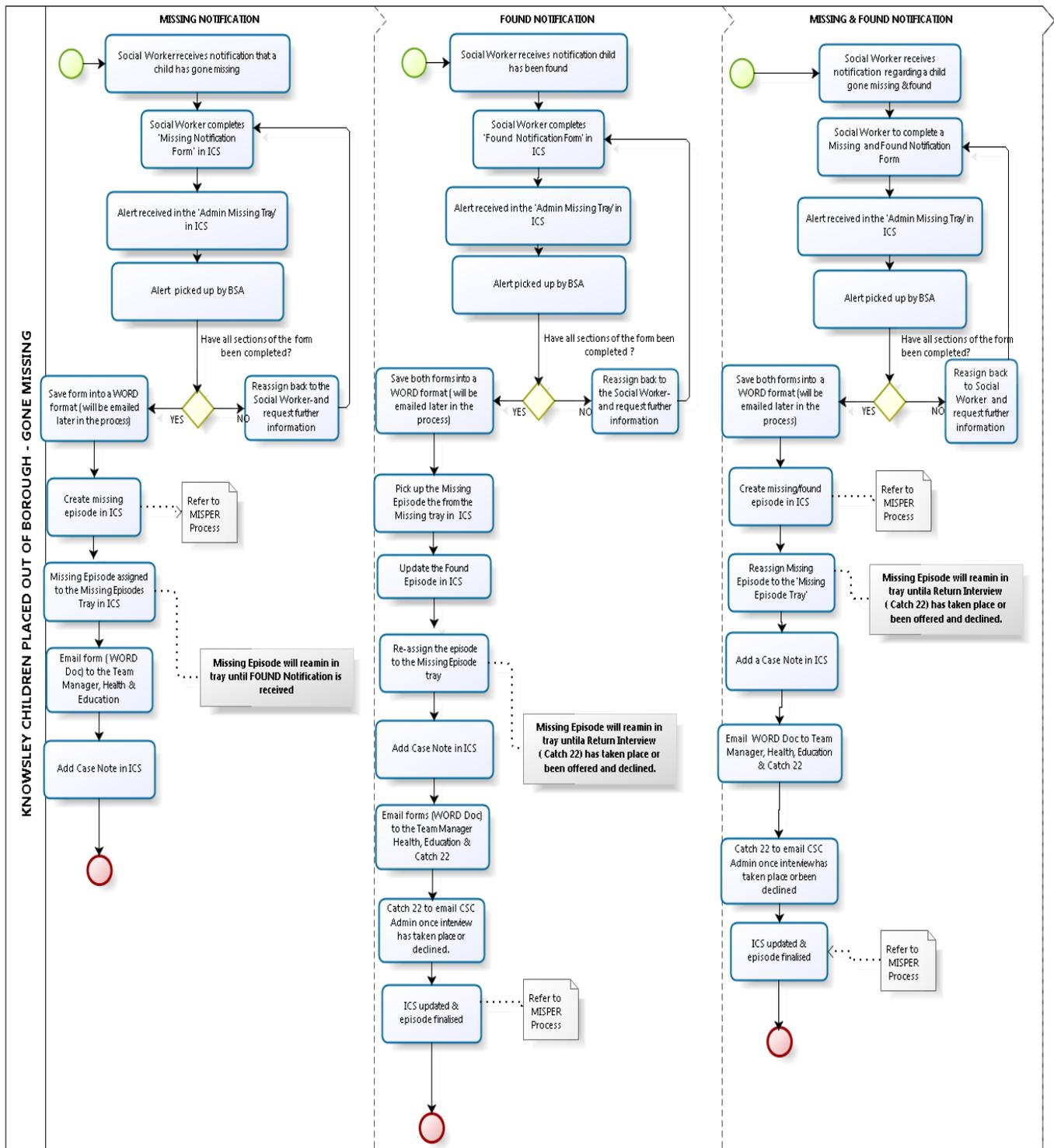
| Pull factors influencing the missing episodes | What we are going to do | Who is responsible |
|---|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 1.  |                         |                    |
| 2.  |                         |                    |
| 3.  |                         |                    |
| Push factors influencing the missing episodes |                         |                    |
| 1.  |                         |                    |
| 2.  |                         |                    |
| 3.  |                         |                    |

| Other Considerations                                       |  |
|--|--|
| Is the child at risk of sexual or criminal exploitation?   |  |
| If Yes, has a CE Assessment been completed on ICS and sent |  |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| to MACE?   |  |
| Is the child at risk of being trafficked?  |  |
| If Yes has contact been made with the trafficking team at Merseyside Police?                   |  |
| Are there other specific risks to the child while they are missing?                            |  |
| Is there a Police Missing Action Plan in place?  |  |
| Is the child status in CSC appropriate?  |  |
| Is the placement suitable?   |  |
| Should a legal planning meeting be requested?  |  |
| Is there a likelihood that the child may have travelled abroad?                                |  |
| Should a medical be undertaken?  |  |
| Child Abduction Warning Notices (Harbourers Warnings) or National Referral Mechanism required? |  |

**12. Date, time and venue of next meeting:**

**Appendix C : Knowsley missing and found notification process OOB**



Name of child:

D.O.B:

Date of return interview:

Member of staff and role completing the return interview:

Date and time of missing:

Was the return offered in 72 hours? Yes no

If it wasn't offered in 72 hours, what was the reason why not?:

---

---

Method of interview:

1. Details of the missing episode

2. Analysis

(what could have done to prevent this missing, what can be done to prevent future missing, what made you go away, risk taking behaviours, push and pull factors, safeguarding, protective factors, did they feel safe, associates)

3. Child/Parent Voice

(Hopes and dreams)

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

4. Actions taken in response to the return interview information

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

| Intelligence  |  |
|---|--|
| Is the child known by any nicknames?  |  |
| Names / Nicknames / approximate ages of other <b>CHILDREN</b> the child has associated with                             |  |
| Names / Nicknames / approximate ages of other <b>ADULTS</b> the child has associated with                               |  |
| Are they thought to be linked to any gang / OCG / USG – if yes please state the gang and what the nature of the link is |  |
| When missing did the child travel?  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- By bus</li> <li>- By taxi – what firm? / colour/ make/ model of car / registration</li> <li>- By train – which train company?</li> <li>- By car - colour / make / model / registration</li> <li>- By Bike – where did the bike come from? / colour / model</li> <li>- Other?</li> </ul> |
| Who paid for travel arrangements? Were they pre-paid?   |  |
| Locations visited whilst missing (tick box)   | Family Home<br>Friends House<br>Hostel<br>Pub or Club – Name<br>Park – Name  |

|   |  |
|---|--|
|   | Shopping Centre – Name<br>Partners House<br>Town or City Centre – Name<br>Refused to Say<br>Out of area (linked to County Lines) -<br>Other<br>Takeaway – Name<br>Mobile phone shop – Name<br>Corner shop – Name |
| Use of social media   | Snapchat - username<br>Facebook - username<br>Instagram - username<br>Whatsapp - username<br>Any other information known about social media used.  |
| Mobile phone numbers linked to the child  |  |
| If there is information / intelligence which suggests immediate safeguarding concerns or threat / harm / risk to the child and/or their family then immediate measures should be taken. |  |

## **Appendix E: Missing Persons Interview Agreement**

### **Agreement to commission Knowsley Borough Council to organise and undertake Missing Persons Return Interviews and any charges in regards to supportive action.**

|                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Childs name:                    |  |
| Placement Address:              |  |
| Social Workers name :           |  |
| Social Workers contact details: |  |

#### **Agreement**

We the undersigned Local Authority, hereby form a General Partnership, and agree to Knowsley Borough Council undertaking Missing Person Return Interviews regarding the above child unless directed otherwise

The Partnership shall begin upon receipt of this confirmation, and shall continue until directed otherwise.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of the Partnership shall be to complete Missing Person Return Interviews for the child as stated in this agreement and report back to that Local Authority with the relevant information to enable that Local Authority to complete its statutory responsibilities.

#### **Visits**

We the undersigned Local Authority agree that Missing Persons Return Interviews will be conducted and agree to the charge of £150.00 per interview and the charge of £50 if the child declines the interview.

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| Signed:      |  |
| Print Name:  |  |
| Date signed: |  |
| Position:    |  |

#### **Financial Arrangement**

KMBC will invoice the placing authority to the end of each quarter for Missing Return Interviews completed for child/children undertaken as agreed.

Please complete **all** the following sections of this form. The information provided will be used when claiming payment for services that have received.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Purchase Order No:<br>(financial year 20__/20__) |  |
| Local Authority:                                 |  |
| Department:                                      |  |
| Full address (including post code)               |  |
| Contact Name                                     |  |
| Contact telephone number:                        |  |
| Email address                                    |  |

**Please return completed form to**  
**cscadmin@knowsley.gov.uk**

or

Children Social Care Business Support Team  
2nd Floor Nutgrove Villa  
F.A.O Hayley Shiers  
Knowsley MBC  
Huyton Municipal Building  
Archway Road  
Huyton  
L36 9YU

**Appendix F: Missing Person Report Crib Sheet**

Prior to making the call to Police you should make the following enquiries :-

1. Search home address
2. Try to contact child
3. Make enquiries with other family members and friends to see if they know where the child is
4. Visit/share places that you know child hangs around/frequents.
5. Check social media
6. Call local hospitals (Merseyside hospitals with accident and emergency facility: (switchboard - ask for A&E)
  - Aintree - 0151 525 5980
  - Alder Hey (children only) - 0151 252 5044 (a&e direct line)
  - Arrowe Park - 0151 678 5111
  - Royal Liverpool - 0151 706 2000
  - Southport and Formby general - 01704 547471
  - Whiston - 0151 426 1600

**Non-Emergency line – call 101**

Information you will need to provide

Full Name and Date of Birth

---

---

Full Physical Description

---

---

Description of clothing

---

---

Full details of when last seen and the circumstances (date, time & exact location)

---

---

GP Details and Medical history including any specific diagnosis or medication taken

---

---

Bank Account Details

---

---

Mobile Telephone details (number, telephone provider, IMEI)

---

Social Media details (facebook,Instagram, snapchat)

---

---

List of friends and family (full names and addresses)

---