



# Children Missing from Home and Care

## Joint Protocol

**BETWEEN STAFFORDSHIRE & STOKE-ON-TRENT LOCAL AUTHORITIES  
& STAFFORDSHIRE POLICE**

**Amended January 2022**

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 It is estimated that around 100,000 children under the age of 16 run away from home or care each year across the UK. Many stay with family or friends, but there are some who do not have access to these support systems, or who are forced to stay in environments that are harmful to their safety and wellbeing. This can mean that they end up engaging in activities that may put them at risk. This is detailed within the DfE Statutory guidance: [Children who run away or go missing from home or care - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk) (2014).
- 1.2 The majority of children, who go missing, go missing from their family home. However, children who are in the care of a Local Authority, are much more likely to run away, with over 50% of this group having run away at some point. In many cases, a pattern of running away may have been established at an early age and may have been a factor in the child's admission to care.
- 1.3 While the individual circumstance of each episode needs to be considered, children who run away are at a heightened risk of being victims of crime, being involved in crime, being involved in substance misuse, or being exploited. 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.

## 2. Legislation and Context

- 2.1 In January 2014, the Department for Education (DfE) published the 'Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care'. The guidance states that agencies must "work together to risk assess cases of children missing from home or care, and to analyse data for patterns that indicate particular concerns and risks".
- 2.2 This protocol has been jointly developed by Staffordshire & Stoke on Trent Local Authorities and Staffordshire Police in accordance with that guidance.

## 3. Scope

- 3.1 This protocol relates to:
  - Children that go missing from their home address or other non-care related address.
  - Children in the care of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent local authorities; Children in foster care within Staffordshire or Stoke-on-Trent; Children in the care of Independent Fostering Agencies; children's homes; supported lodgings and other supported accommodation.
  - Children in the care of other Local Authorities and living with care providers within Staffordshire or Stoke-on-Trent.
- 3.2 For the purposes of this protocol, a child is defined as anyone who is under 18 years of age.
- 3.3 Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Local Authorities retain responsibility for children in their legal care who are placed outside their boundaries, and will comply with the Missing Children protocol of the Local Authority where the child is placed.
- 3.4 Other Local Authorities who have legal care of children residing within Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent will be expected to comply with Staffordshire/Stoke on Trent's Missing Protocol.

## 4. Guiding Principles

4.1 The purpose of the protocol is to assist partner agencies and practitioners to develop robust responses to children who go missing. The following safeguarding principles should be applied:

- The safety and welfare of the child is paramount.
- Locating and returning the child to a safe environment is the main objective.
- The views of the child and parent/carer should always be taken into consideration.
- Understanding the circumstances of the child going missing and seeking to reduce the risk of further missing episodes is key.

## 5. Definitions of missing

### Missing person:

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

### Missing Child:

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

### Missing from Care:

A child in the care of the Local Authority who is not at their placement, or the place they are expected to be (e.g. school) and their whereabouts are *unknown*.

## 6. Police Risk Categories:

6.1 When an individual is missing, they should be reported into the police. All reports of missing episodes are then graded within a continuum of risk as follows;

**High Risk** - The risk of serious harm to the missing person (misper) 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. A member of the senior management team must be involved in the examination of initial lines of enquiry and approval of appropriate staffing levels. Such cases should lead to the appointment of an investigating officer (IO) and possibly an SIO, and a police search adviser (PoSA). There should be a press/media strategy and/or close contact with outside agencies. Family support should be put in place where appropriate. The MPB should be notified of the case without undue delay. **Children's services must also be notified immediately if the person is under 18.**

**Medium Risk** - The risk of harm to the misper or the public is assessed as likely but not serious. This category requires an active and measured response by the police and other agencies in order to trace the missing person and support the person reporting.

**Low Risk** - The risk of harm to the misper 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. **This category is not to be used for initial reports, risk assessment or prior to the commencement of the missing person investigation.**



## 7. Responsible Officers in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent:

- 7.1 Within Staffordshire Police, the Detective Superintendent, within safeguarding, is the designated lead officer with primary strategic responsibility for children missing from care and home.
- 7.2 Staffordshire County Council has designated Strategic Manager as their lead officer with primary strategic responsibility for children missing from care and home.
- 7.3 Stoke-on-Trent City Council has designated the Strategic Manager Targeted Services, who has primary strategic responsibility for children missing from care and home.

## 8. Role and Responsibilities of Parents and Carers:

- 8.1 This includes children living at home with parents or carers and children living away from home, such as those in residential care, in supported lodgings and supported accommodation. It also applies to those children and young people who go missing on an external activity.
- 8.2 If the parent/carer assesses that the child is missing and at risk, the child should be reported missing without delay and the anticipated risk communicated to the police.
- 8.3 Unless there is an immediate risk identified, parents/carers should undertake the following basic measures before reporting a missing child (If child is residing in a Residential care home setting, carers should implement the Philomena Protocol).
  - Search bedroom/house/grounds/outbuildings/vehicles;
  - Ascertain if any clothing, cash, mobile phones and/or medication etc. are missing;
  - Speak to any other people at the house who may know where they are;
  - Contact known friends and relatives where the child may be;
  - Check social media sites
  - Visit locations that the child is known to go, if safe to do so; and will not take too long before the child is reported missing.
- 8.4 In Staffordshire - When all reasonable steps have been exhausted, parents/carers and anyone who has legal care of a child should inform the police and if appropriate, children's social care services through front door on Staffordshire Children's Advice and Support Service (SCASS) on 0300 111 8007.
- 8.5 In Stoke-on-Trent - When all reasonable steps have been exhausted, parents/carers and anyone who has care of a child should inform the police and if appropriate, children's social care services through the Safeguarding Referral Team in the MASH on 01782 235100.
- 8.6 The police will need to know:

- The child's name and date of birth
- Where, when, and with whom the child went missing
- A description of the child and what they were wearing
- Their medical history
- The time and location they were last seen
- The circumstances of going missing
- Details of any friends or associates
- If they are pregnant
- If there are any vulnerabilities, disabilities, or major health issues
- Their sexual orientation
- Their religion

8.7 Whenever a report is made to the police about a child who is missing, a risk assessment is completed by a police control room operator. The duty police inspector working within the control room then endorses or amends this assessment accordingly. This risk assessment helps to identify the level of risk that is posed to, or by the child and to determine the most appropriate police response. It is therefore important that as much information as possible is obtained during that first contact.

NB: The [Child Exploitation & Online Protection Centre](#) (CEOP) has a tool for reporting online abuse or inappropriate behaviour towards children. The charity '[Missing People](#)' provides 24 hour, free and confidential, support and advice to missing children, adults and their families. The helpline also enables those who are missing to reconnect with their families, or to gain the assistance of the police. The helpline number is 116 000.

The following relate to children in the care of the Local Authority only.

8.8 If the carer is not concerned for the child, but they are away from home without permission, they should record these episodes in the child's record and start a dated/timed record of their contacts, risk assessment and decisions throughout the episode. If the child's whereabouts are unknown, then carers should implement the Philomena Protocol

8.9 If the child's whereabouts are known, the carers will decide whether to allow the child to remain at that location, or to arrange for their return in consultation with MASH/Social care as appropriate.

## 9. Missing persons Notification Process

9.1 When a child goes missing from Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire Police missing person database will automatically notifies both Local Authorities.

9.2 In Staffordshire, once a missing child returns or is found, the **Missing Missing Process Officer**, provides a centralised co-ordination function between the police, children's services and the responsible commissioned service conducting the independent return interviews.

9.3 The Missing Process Officer also raises alerts and provides key intelligence including information about continuing missing episodes and patterns or trends in missing episodes across the area to allocated individuals within the Local Authority such as Social Worker or Family Practitioner and will liaise with the Futures Matters Team as appropriate.

9.4 In Stoke-on-Trent, Childrens Advice and Duty service (CHAD) receives all missing and found notifications and independent return interviews.

9.5 A daily alert of missing children is sent to Team coordinators, managers, and the CE social worker.

## 10. Roles and responsibilities for Social Workers and/or any lead professional for the

## child.

- 10.1 This includes but is not exclusive to; Social workers, Family Practitioners, Youth offending practitioners, personal advisors, where a child is open to Children's Social Care and/or Early Help Teams.
- 10.2 Once the notification comes through for a missing episode, The Practitioner is required to take the lead. This may include liaison with the police, Residential home, family, the child, where there are wider risk and concerns evident within the episode.
- 10.3 It is the responsibility of the practitioners above to escalate concerns in relation to each child's missing episode as necessary and to ensure that any risk is referenced within the child's care plan, including any necessary actions to mitigate the risk and support the child and family.
- 10.4 To give consideration to the NRM (National Referral mechanism) and contact relevant support agencies where appropriate: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-trafficking-victims-referral-and-assessment-forms>  
  
In Staffordshire, further advice on this can be sought from the Child Exploitation Coordinators within Future Matters via [CSEinbox@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:CSEinbox@staffordshire.gov.uk). Where an NRM is being completed due to the belief a child has been trafficked, a S47 Strategy discussion should be requested through the MASH.
- 10.5 When a practitioner is aware that a child has been found, this intelligence should be passed onto the police using number; 101.

## 11. Role and Responsibilities of Schools/Education Providers:

- 11.1 Schools and other education providers have a responsibility to understand the links between truanting and missing episodes and the impact this has on the child's education. They also have a key role in sharing information with the police and with the child's lead practitioner when a child/ truant or goes missing and for providing (if required) an appropriate environment for a return interview.
- 11.2 Daily calls to the parents/carers of children not attending without a reason are important. Schools should endeavor to deal with the issue of a child missing from education by taking action to trace children whose whereabouts are not known. Children who have tranted either at the start or part way through a school day, need to be accounted for.
- 11.3 Schools and other education providers should make enquiries with Staffordshire or Stoke-on-Trent Local Authority when children are regularly truanting to ascertain the child's circumstances. If the child is open to social Care or the Youth Offending Service the school should form part of the missing intervention as appropriate.
- 11.4 If a child is not known to the local authorities or other agencies but there are remaining safeguarding concerns, education professionals should ensure that any concerns are reported via referral to EHT/CHAD/SCASS.

## 12. Role and Responsibilities of the Police:

- 12.1 Staffordshire Police will respond to all reports of a missing person. Every report will be subject to regular review in accordance with College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice (APP) to determine the appropriate level of risk and to ensure the investigation is being adequately progressed.
- 12.2 Whenever a report is made to the police regarding a missing child, the child's social worker must be contacted who should provide information to the police as part of their ongoing risk assessment.

### Initial Report and Risk Assessment

- 12.3 The missing person report is then brought to the attention of the duty police inspector based within the control room and/or the control room manager (CRM) so they can either endorse or amend the decision relating to the level of risk and, in turn, determine the urgency of the enquiries to be made.
- 12.4 An initial risk assessment is undertaken by the police call-taker to determine the appropriate level of response.
- 12.5 The following set of questions, informed by the National Decision-Making Model (NDMM) are used to define the status of the missing episode:
- a. What is the specific concern in this instance?
  - b. What has been done so far to trace the person?
  - c. Is this significantly out of character?
  - d. Are there any specific medical needs?
  - e. Are they likely to be subjected to crime?
  - f. Are they likely to be the victim of abuse?
  - g. Are they currently at risk of sexual exploitation?
  - h. Are they likely to attempt suicide?
  - i. Do they pose a danger to other people?
  - j. Is there any other information?
- 12.6 Children who have gone missing may come to the attention of the police in a variety of ways. Where the police locate a child who they believe may be missing, enquiries based on the child's presenting circumstances, will be made. These should include checks of police database systems i.e. PNC (Police National Computer)/COMPACT (Missing Persons Case Management System) Storm (Command and Control System) and Niche (Record Management System) and enquiries at the child's home address.
- 12.7 Staffordshire Police will regularly review the risk assessment of any person reported as missing but if any dispute arises over the level of risk posed to a child, the matter will first be referred to the police Missing Person Investigation Team Leader who will review the report, the current circumstances and the most recent risk assessment.
- 12.8 The second line of escalation will be the police inspector based within the control room.
- 12.9 If a missing child has not been reported by parents/carers, this will trigger further enquiries and an assessment by the police and other relevant agencies, in accordance with local safeguarding procedures.
- 12.10 The relevant local authority will be notified, and information and intelligence gathered from the Prevention Interviews (Safe & Well Checks) and debrief will be recorded onto COMPACT (Missing Persons' Database).
- 12.11 **Early Intervention and prevention** – The role of the missing person problem solvers is important for ensuring that there is an effective force response to the challenges of dealing with missing people. The role should be focused on problem solving, prevention and a multi-agency approach. The Missing duties/responsibilities of the Police will be overseen by their designated Missing Person Co-ordinator.

### 13. When a child is found:

- 13.1 When a practitioner is aware that a child has been found, this intelligence should be passed onto the **Missing Person Investigation Team (Monday – Saturday between 07:00 – 23:00hrs and Sundays 07:00 – 16:00) on 01785 232960 or using the Police non-emergency number; 101** as soon as possible.
- 13.2 When the whereabouts of a child is suspected, or becomes known, it is the responsibility of the parent/carer to arrange for the child's return where possible. In exceptional circumstances, the police, in conjunction with children's services, may assist in the return of the child where necessitated by

specific concerns.

- 13.3 Consideration should be given to whether a strategy meeting (Children Act 1989) is required with partner agencies/professionals, for example if a pattern of going missing is developing. Any partner agency can request a strategy meeting following consultation with their manager, if it appears that there is significant risk to a child, or if there are child protection concerns. This should be done via referral to CHAD/SCASS who can then liaise with Police colleagues within the MASH.

### **Found Debriefs (Safe & Well Checks)**

- 13.4 When a child is located or has returned home of their own accord, a quality 'Found Debrief' (safe & well check) will be undertaken by the police or in some exceptions, another professional where appropriate, as soon as possible. The purpose of the check is to establish whether the child has suffered any harm, to confirm where they have been and who with and to provide the child with an opportunity to disclose any offences committed by them, or against them. As much information as possible should be gathered to help prevent further missing episodes, and to safeguard the child where necessary.

### **Independent Return Interviews**

- 13.5 Statutory guidance on children who go missing (2014) states that when a child goes missing, they should be offered an independent return interview.
- 13.6 In Staffordshire/Stoke-on-Trent, the completion of return interviews is delivered by Catch22 (Commissioned provider). Catch 22 conducts all return interviews for children up to 18 years old living in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire County.
- 13.7 Where children are placed out of County, but where the child is under the care of Stoke City or Staffordshire County LA's, the allocated social worker is responsible for ensuring return home interviews are completed, alternatively an agency in the local area may be commissioned to do these.
- 13.8 The purpose of the return interview is to:
- Identify factors which led to the missing episode
  - Prevent further missing episodes and risk behaviours or needs escalating
  - Inform any subsequent missing person investigation
  - Share intelligence and information
  - Provide independent, non-judgmental, confidential and child- centered return home support for all vulnerable children who go missing, in spaces where they feel safe and able to talk.
  - Develop prevention and risk reduction strategies alongside children who regularly go missing including safety planning and addressing wider risk factors such as exploitation, drug and alcohol misuse and domestic abuse.
  - Support and sign-post young people to access specialist support services in their areas that can help address their specific needs.
  - Provide high quality engagement and follow up intervention with children.
- 13.9 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. The return interview should be carried out **within 72 hours** of the child being located or returning from the missing episode. This is particularly important if they have been missing before and/or if there are risk indicators suggesting potential exploitation, involvement in crime or if the child has been harmed.
- 13.10 In Staffordshire, the Missing Process Officer will save a copy of the completed Return Home Interview Proforma on social care systems. This should be sent to: [missingchildren@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:missingchildren@staffordshire.gov.uk)
- 13.11 If the child is not known to Social care in Staffordshire, the Missing Process Officer will share this proforma with the Family Practitioner Lead via the district inbox, It is then the role of the Family Practitioner Lead to establish and wider safeguarding concerns or support needs of the child and/or family before deciding whether to close the missing involvement or make further contact with the family.

13.12 In Stoke-on-Trent, the completed return interview pro forma should be sent to at [ChAD.referrals@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:ChAD.referrals@stoke.gov.uk) where if the child is open, it can be forwarded to the team coordinator and social worker where it is saved to the child's record.

### **Consent**

13.13 Prior to any interview conducted with a child, the interviewer should inform the child who this information will be shared with, when and why and gain consent before sharing. If they are unwilling to speak to anyone for fear of confidentiality issues, arrangement may be made for the child to speak to an independent advocate or suitable voluntary agency. For example, in Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent, referrals can be made to [Change, Grow, Live \(CGL\) SSCRS@cgl.org.uk](mailto:Change, Grow, Live (CGL) SSCRS@cgl.org.uk) who provide advocacy services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities; looked after children and children subject to a child protection plan and children and children with mental health and behavioral issues, all of which may include children missing from home/care.

13.14 It is crucial that any information gained through this interview, is fed back to the police and the Local Authority to ensure any findings for intervention meetings so that a picture is built up and any issues can be dealt with. This should only be done if consent is given and if the information is critical to safeguard the child.

For further information see-

[http://www.missingpeople.org.uk/files/Policy\\_briefings/ECRCRHIGoodPracticeBriefing.pdf](http://www.missingpeople.org.uk/files/Policy_briefings/ECRCRHIGoodPracticeBriefing.pdf)

### **Missing Intervention Meetings (MIM's)**

13.15 In Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, missing intervention meetings should be held for any children that meet the trigger points of 3,5 and 9 criteria (the 3, 5 and 9 is explained in this guidance).

13.16 All relevant professionals must together during missing intervention meetings to reduce the likelihood of a child repeatedly going missing and to support the child.

13.17 Intervention meetings should take place in the event of repeat episodes of children going missing from care and home and should be held **within five working days**. The meetings should be chaired by the most appropriate person from the local authority as detailed below. It is the responsibility of the appropriate person within the Local Authority to also arrange these meetings.

13.18 After **three episodes within a 90-day period**

- Stoke – The meeting will be chaired by the Team Manager. where open and the Early Help plan is working and parents are engaging with the Early help Plan the Missing Intervention meeting could be chaired by the Early Help Manager. The CHAD manager will chair the 3/90 and the 5/90 where not open and could be supported by a manager from the locality assessment team where it is agreed that there are no additional safeguarding concerns, where a child goes missing more often than this a referral should be made to CHAD for a social work assessment.
- Staffordshire - The meeting will be chaired by the allocated Social Worker. If the child is not open to a Social Worker or Family Practitioner, the Missing Intervention Meeting will be offered to the family via the Family Practitioner Lead for that District.

13.19 **After five episodes within a 90-day period**

- Stoke - the Service Manager
- Staffordshire – the Team Manager where open to social work team or the Family Practitioner Lead if open under Early Help.

This level of intervention meeting is the crucial stage in avoiding serious escalation and must, therefore, be given high priority by all concerned.

### 13.20 After nine episodes within a 90-day period

- Stoke – Strategic Manager
- Staffordshire – District Operational Lead

13.21 For the MIM's the following attendees should be present:

The child, their parent(s), the child's social worker (if open to a social worker), The team manager (chair), Police staff/officer who has the best knowledge of the child, residential worker/foster carer/fostering social worker, education, health the person who conducted the return interview and any other person relevant, should all meet and agree a plan of action.

13.22 The meeting should try to identify any 'push' or 'pull' factors, and in the missing person's welfare and circumstances. In the case of 'pull' factors it may be necessary to target those in the community who are felt to harbor the missing person or exploit them through crime, exploitation or drugs. The police should consider all disruption tools available to them in this situation e.g., CAWNs, SROs, etc.

13.23 Other reasons to launch or escalate interventions to a Missing Intervention Meeting could include:

- Children where the risks involved in even a single future-missing episode is very high
- Children where it has been identified that immediate action is necessary to ensure the well-being of the person
- A quick succession of missing episodes eradicating the need for 90 days to elapse
- Children where there is an extended duration of missing episode(s) – these meetings need to be considered from the third day of an active missing episode when the child is missing

**NB: Please use this email address to invite and send a copy of the minutes from the meeting to the Police to attend any missing intervention meeting.**

meetings: - [missingpersons@staffordshire.pnn.police.uk](mailto:missingpersons@staffordshire.pnn.police.uk)

**These should also be recorded in the social care systems as below:**

**Stoke-** Liquid logic- form; missing intervention meeting form  
**Staffordshire;** form should be launched in Care Director- Missing intervention meeting

13.24 For every Child open to Social Care and/or Youth offending Service who is missing, this should be referenced within the child's care plan and should be based on a comprehensive assessment of their needs and considering their wishes, feelings and aspirations.

13.25 Any review of the child's plan should consider the adequacy of the plan in addressing why a child has gone missing and should ensure adequate strategies are in place to address any future potential episodes. The review should also consider push/pull factors e.g. exploitation, running away to spend contact time with family.

13.26 In addition, for children in the care of the Local Authority, a placement plan should be completed between the responsible local authority and the placement provider which should identify how the child needs will be met.

## 14. Longer Missing episodes

14.1 When a child is open to children social care and has been missing for a period of 24 hours, the child's

social worker should inform their line manager. If there are any significant concerns, the relevant senior manager should be alerted immediately.

In Stoke on Trent when a Child has been missing for 24 hours the Strategic Manager should be informed. After 72 Hours the Assistant Director should be updated and after 5 days the DCS should be updated. The responsibility for notifying the more senior manager lies with the manager below.

In Staffordshire, when a child has been missing over 24 hours the District Operational Lead should be informed. After 72 Hours the Assistant Director should be updated and after 5 days the DCS should be updated. The responsibility for notifying the more senior manager lies with the manager below.

14.2 Throughout the enquiry, carers and the police will continually review the missing episode. After the child has been missing for 3 days, or earlier, if appropriate, the police and child's social worker will hold an urgent care review meeting involving the police, the child's social worker, foster carer, and any other care professional(s) with prominent day to day involvement with the child.

14.3 The meeting will review:

- What action has been taken so far by the police and care professionals;
- What action needs to be taken by the police and care professionals;
- Whether the child should return to that placement when located;
- Date of further meeting to be agreed by all parties should the missing episode continue;
- If procedures should be invoked under section 47 (Children Act 1989).

14.4 Minutes of the review should be provided to the children's social care lead and the child's Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) where there is one.

14.5 All police missing person's files will remain live until the person is traced.

## 15. Weekly Operational Missing Meeting

15.1 The Weekly Missing Subgroup will be attended by a representative from Staffordshire Police (Currently the Missing Person Problem Solver), Commissioned missing service (Catch22), the missing Data Officer and CE Coordinators from the Local Authority and a representative from Education.

15.2 The Weekly Missing Subgroup will review the missing episodes of children from the previous week. This is to ensure there are appropriate interventions in place, allow information sharing between key agencies and also, to address any wider safeguarding concerns and/or escalation issues which can be addressed in real time, ensuring better outcomes for children who are reported missing. This allows efficient problem solving and will report to the Operational Missing Meeting when it meets bi-monthly to feed into themes and trends and to highlight areas of further development.

15.3 The attendees of the meeting may seek further information or support from wider partnerships in order to gather appropriate information for the meeting prior to and after it is held. These will include a range of partners including but not limited to Staffordshire Police Harm Reduction Hub, Health Representatives (Named Nurse), Schools Representatives as required, District Council Safeguarding Lead, Domestic Violence services and the Intensive Prevention Service.

15.4 As identified as relevant to individual cases individual cases or to allow oversight and feedback where appropriate, for example, Accommodation providers, Probation, MAPPA Representative, Sexual Health Service Providers, Young Carers Hub, Children Missing Education Officer, Representatives for out of county looked after children placed in Staffordshire, Stoke-On-Trent CSE Social Worker.

15.5 Given the nature of the subgroup it is acknowledged that this agenda may be fluid however a general agenda has been detailed below.

- Each Child's missing episodes (inclusive of the context around the missing, frequency etc)
- Review of the previous week's actions

- Involvement with each individual agency
- Current interventions
- Issues for wider action
- Themes and trends across the County and within individual Districts
- Escalation issues

15.6 Further information about the Weekly Operational Meeting can be found in the below Terms of Reference in the appendix.

## 16. Children missing when in the care of the Local Authority

16.1 Before a child comes into the care of the Local Authority, the child's social worker will 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 as far as dos feasibly appropriate and it should be related to the child's individual's needs, their previous history and their views. Missing episodes prior to the child being in the care of the Local Authority must also be considered.

16.2 The placement plan is an opportunity for the social worker and care provider to discuss with the child issues around going missing and to explain the roles and responsibilities of all involved. The placement plan should detail:

- Trigger points for missing episodes,
- Risks to themselves, the public and/or the carer before, during, or after a missing episode.
- 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 and 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 e.g. 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 return interviews.
- Agreements around rules for staying overnight at friend's houses or going on trips. NB: This is frequently raised as a major issue by young people and Local Authority Circular (2004) 4, 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.

### 16.3 Philomena Protocol – Missing from care protocol

- All Care providers are expected to complete Part 1 of the Philomena Protocol for all children living in Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent. Profiles of the children that have a missing and/or exploitation risk should then be shared with the allocated PCSO Single Point of Contact (SPOC).
- Any known associates, addresses and hotspots for the child should added to Part 2 and be risk assessed by all agencies in order for care providers to complete checks when a child is believed to be missing.
- When a child's whereabouts is not known, and there are no immediate risks or concerns, care staff are expected to complete necessary checks. Part 3 of the protocol should be completed along with checks with known associates, addresses and hotspots included on part 2. If child is not located by care staff, then care staff should contact 101 to report the child missing and send part 2 and 3 into the Police.

## 17. Out of County/City placements

17.1 Children 'in the care of Staffordshire /Stoke-on-Trent but placed out of the local area should be subject

to equal rigour of care planning as those placed within Staffordshire/Stoke-on-Trent's borders. They should be subject to missing intervention meetings, reporting requirements and return interviews as specified in these procedures.

- 17.2 The Placement Plan and Care Plan should clearly detail a child's needs in relation to missing episodes. The Placement Plan should detail the expectation that all missing episodes are reported by the placement provider to the case-holding social worker.
- 17.3 Standards for return interviews and missing intervention meetings should be maintained for children placed outside the local authority's borders.
- 17.4 In order to maintain a full overview of children missing from care, the allocated IRO is required to report the number of missing episodes and the adequacy of responses to these episodes following each statutory review of a child living out of area. The IRO should inform the relevant team manager of any missing intervention meetings/return interviews for children placed out of county have not been managed in accordance with these procedures.

## **18. Other Local Authority placements**

- 18.1 All independent providers providing residential care within the local authority should comply with this guidance and be informed of the relevant Safeguarding Children's Board training. Providers have a responsibility to comply with any processes specified in the placing authority's missing from home and care procedures.
- 18.2 Other local authorities placing children within Staffordshire/ Stoke-on-Trent are required to inform the host local authority of their placement. Upon receipt of this notification, a record of the child will be recorded within the appropriate case management system.
- 18.3 All missing episodes reported to the police are recorded and shared with children's social care for strategic monitoring and planning purposes.
- 18.4 Upon receipt of a missing notification from the police, regarding a child residing in Staffordshire/Stoke-on-Trent by another authority, the local authority will send the police missing and found compact reports via email. The commissioned provider (catch 22) will then send a copy of the RHI to the front door of the LA.
- 18.5 Where a child placed in Staffordshire or Stoke-on-Trent by another local authority is identified to be suffering, or at risk of suffering significant harm, relevant child protection procedures will be followed.

## **19. Child Protection Concerns**

- 19.1 If, upon the return of a child, it is established that they have been the victim of a crime, or that they may be in danger or at risk from any person arising out of circumstances that have occurred while they were missing, then the police must be informed. This is vital for the protection of the child and for the speedy recovery of evidence. A parallel referral is also required under section 47 (CA 1989) <http://www.staffsscb.org.uk/professionals/procedures/Stoke-on-TrentSafeguardingChildrenBoard/procedures>
- 19.2 Where missing children from one local authority present themselves in another local authority, it is important that the host authority works with the responsible local authority to ensure they get access to the help and support services they need.
- 19.3 Responsibility for making child protection enquiries rests with the host authority, who may negotiate with the responsible local authority to continue with S47 enquiries.
- 19.4 The missing person's clothing, mobile phone and trace evidence from their body, fingernails or hair may be crucial. In cases of sexual abuse, the child should be discouraged from washing and

immediate advice should be sought from the police. If parent and/carers become aware of the location of the scene of any crime committed against the child, or of the location of any crucial evidence (i.e. a used condom) they must notify the police without delay. This will enable the police to take steps to secure and preserve evidence.

- 19.5 In cases where there is suspicion of sexual abuse the police have access to specially trained officers, doctors and facilities designed to care for the victim and obtain evidence. Additionally, in matters of child exploitation, or any other situation which indicates that the child may have been subject to, or at risk of, significant harm, a referral must be made in accordance with Safeguarding Children Board's Inter-Agency Policies and Procedures. <http://www.staffsscb.org.uk/professionals/procedures/>

## 20. Referral to Children's Social Care

### 20.1 Staffordshire

- 20.2 Where the police or other agencies assess that a child is suffering, or likely to suffer significant harm, a referral is made to the **Staffordshire Children's Advice and Support Service (SCASS)** situated within the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) on **0300 111 8007** or to the out of hours Emergency Duty Service (EDS) on **0845 604 2886**.

### 20.3 Stoke-on-Trent

Where the police or other agencies assess that a child is suffering, or likely to suffer significant harm, a referral is made to the **Children's Advice and Duty team (CHAD)** situated within the Staffordshire and **Stoke-on-Trent Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)** on **01782 235100** or to the **out of hours Emergency Duty Team (EDT) on 01782 234234 out of hours**.

- 20.4 Upon receipt of a referral concerning a child missing from home, the relevant LA front door within MASH will assess whether a referral meets the thresholds for a child in need (section 17) or a child in need of protection (section 47).
- 20.5 Where no onward referral to the MASH is made, the police are still obliged to notify the missing episode to the relevant Local Authority. In Staffordshire, the police notify the Missing Officer who will inform the child's social worker (if an open case) or to the Local Support Team. In Stoke-on-Trent, when a missing notification is received, CHAD determine if this meets criteria for a referral to children's social care and further assessment and if not then record contact on the information system (Liquid logic) as missing notification. If a child is not open and has been missing for longer than 24 hours they should be open for an assessment to ensure they are safe and found.

## 21. National Alerts

- 21.1 In some circumstances, practitioners may feel it is appropriate to alert other local authorities or request a national alert. This alert is not intended for all children/young people who go missing, but may be beneficial for those that have been missing for several days or weeks and are:

High risk with notable vulnerabilities such as being at risk of or involved in Child exploitation, concerns of trafficking, deteriorating Mental Health concerns or physical health condition or as an Unaccompanied asylum seeking child.

- 21.2 The missing alert is to notify all local authorities so that a flag should be placed on the other local authority's data system, to advise that there is a child missing from Staffordshire and if found, to contact the Local Authority.

- 21.3 Practitioners should use the below emails to provide details of, or to request a national missing alert:

- Staffordshire: [safeguardingHQ@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:safeguardingHQ@staffordshire.gov.uk)
- Stoke: [ChAD.referrals@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:ChAD.referrals@stoke.gov.uk)

## 22. Disruption tools

- 21.1 Anyone who is in the company of a child without parental, or carer, knowledge or agreement should do what is reasonable to safeguard and promote the child's welfare. They should inform the police, children's services and the parents/ or carers of the child of their whereabouts and safety. If this is not complied with, and the child is under 16 or under 18 if subject of a Care Order, the police could consider advice or warning under the Child Abduction Act 1984 (Child Abduction Warning Notice). It may then be considered that they have been harboring a missing child.
- 21.2 A Child Abduction Warning Notice is a valuable safeguarding measure to prevent young people from coming to harm, when at risk of exploitation or missing from home or care. If a Child Abduction Warning Notice is served by the police, the Local Authority should be informed.

In addition, other disruption tools can be used. For more information-

<http://paceuk.info/for-parents/advice-centre/disruption-tools-available-police/>

Link to Disruption Toolkit-

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-exploitation-disruption-toolkit>

## 23. Trafficking / Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC)

- 23.1 Children who go missing may be trafficked. This can happen on a very local basis, for example, from house to house, hotel to hotel, vehicle to vehicle. Children and young people can also be trafficked from between towns and cities within the UK and between the UK and other countries. The trafficking of children can be for the purpose of a multitude of reasons such as child exploitation or county lines, as well as several other reasons. Anyone who works with children should be aware of the warning signs and associated risks of various types of grooming and exploitation.
- 23.2 Significant numbers of children who are categorised as UASC have also been trafficked. Some of these children go missing before they are properly identified as victims of trafficking. Such situations should be urgently reported to the police. Local authorities should consider the risk that a trafficked child is likely to go missing, and take all appropriate measures to prevent and reduce this risk. The local authorities should complete the 'Migrant CYP Welfare Check' document before placing an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child, this should be shared Police. The Modern-Day Slavery Act 2015 requires the Local Authority to refer any child who they believe is being trafficked or has been trafficked to the National Referral Mechanism.
- 23.3 If the child goes missing, the following should be completed immediately: Comply with the requirements in this policy and local procedures in their entirety.
- Report to the police – identifying where the child is suspected to be a victim of trafficking and request a Strategy discussion under S47 Child Protection Procedures.
  - Notify the human trafficking centre, missing persons unit by following the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) framework for identifying victims of human trafficking or modern slavery.
  - Long term missing UASC require 6 monthly review meetings until the child is located or turns 18. These meetings will be chaired by the head of services (Staffordshire) and require representation from the IRO service, police (CID), the home office, health and education.

## 24. Governance Arrangements:

- 24.1 This protocol has been approved by Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Board.
- 24.2 The Joint Strategic Missing Children Group will consider the reports received and contribute to the annual safeguarding reports to the safeguarding board's and can also provide reports to Corporate Parenting Panels.

- 24.3 In Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, operational meetings, and reviews with Staffordshire Police, Catch22, commissioners and managers take place.
- 24.4 The contents of this protocol will be shared with all key members of staff within each agency. It should also be part of the induction of residential staff, foster carers, and team coordinators, foster care support staff, ChAD, CSC/EH and YOS
- 24.5 Inter-agency/multi-agency training to support effective implementation of this procedure will be provided by the two Safeguarding Children Boards.