



Missing Children Protocol

Where a child/young person under 16 (or 18 if disabled) stays with a person (other than a person with parental responsibility or a close relative), for 28 days or more, the person caring for them is acting as a 'private foster carer' within the meaning of s66 of the Children Act 1989 and therefore they must notify the local authority that they are privately fostering the child/young person. Failure to notify the Local Authority may be an offence

Anyone who has care of a child without parental responsibility may do what is reasonable in all the circumstances to safeguard and promote the child's welfare (Children Act 1989 s3 (5)). It is likely to be 'reasonable' to inform the police, or Children's Social Care, and, if appropriate, their parents, of the child/ young person's safety and whereabouts.

Anyone who 'takes or detains' a runaway under 16 without lawful authority may be prosecuted under s2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984. The enforcement of this provision might be problematic, however, if the young person has chosen to stay with an adult of his or her own free will.

If a child, whether living at home or away from home, informs the carer or parent where she or he is going before leaving home and if his or her whereabouts are known and if the child does not return home at the stated time, a telephone call should be made by the carer or parent to ascertain whether the child is at the given address. If the child is there and she or he states that she or he is not returning to the home, this may not be desirable, but it is not a matter for the police unless the carer or parent has reasonable cause to believe the child would otherwise be likely to suffer significant harm. If the carer or parent is in doubt they should contact the duty manager or the emergency duty social work team for guidance.

Any child who is 12 years old or younger should automatically be considered at higher risk and classed as missing or absconded. They must be reported to the police immediately.

For children who are 13 years old or above, there should be a consideration as to the category of absence and a risk assessment should be completed

Any agency working with a child should complete a pre-incident risk assessment if there are reasons to believe that a child or young person may be at risk of going missing or absent without leave (Appendix 5)

A more comprehensive risk assessment should be completed if the child or young person is missing to assist in the recovery of the child or young person and the planning thereafter.

Definition of Missing and Absent

A person is defined by the police as 'Missing' if they are:

Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.

'Absent' is defined by the police as meaning 'A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be'.

Multi Agency Missing Child Arrangements, Strategy Meetings & Social Care Notifications for all children missing from home or care

Escalating on going absences of over 24 hours and those over 48 hours to Senior Management

Whilst the majority of children who go missing return within reasonable timescales and do not go missing regularly, there are a minority of children for whom their episodes of going missing cause great concern for those practitioners working with them. This may be because they have gone missing for an extended period, they have gone missing on a number of occasions or there are particular risks associated with their periods missing from home (for example sexual exploitation; criminal activities; substance use; self harm, etc).

The policy of holding strategy or multi agency planning meetings and keeping senior management updated on the progress of the case should be followed as detailed within this protocol.

Police and Social Care will work together in efforts to locate the child. The responsible Team Manager must notify the Head of Service and Divisional Director when a child remains missing for more than 24 hours.

The Head of Service, Quality Assurance and Service Improvement, and Corporate Director of Children and Families will be informed if the child is missing for more than 48 hours. This is completed on a Need to Know form. Consideration must always be given to convening a Missing Child Strategy Meeting, to include Police, and must be convened if the young person is missing for more than 48 hours or 72 hours over the weekend.

The EDT will telephone the responsible EDT Service Manager, at weekends and Bank Holidays if the absence lasts more than 24 hours during these periods.

Missing Child Strategy Meetings

All absences of all children and young people, whether they are looked after or living in the community with their families, lasting 48 hours or longer must trigger a Missing Child Strategy Meeting within 7 days.

- This must be chaired by a Team Manager or higher-grade Children's Services manager and attended by a Police officer from the Police Public Protection Unit. A Child Protection Officer may also chair.
- Strategy and multi agency meetings in relation to children who are missing should include an appropriate level of seniority, for example the Social Care Team Manager or Head of Service, Designated Nurse / Safeguarding Lead, Designated Teacher, Public Protection Desk/ Missing Person's Unit and Education lead for Children Missing from Education and any other appropriate professionals who have an involvement with the child.

Missing Child Strategy Meetings should consider:

- Making further attempts to contact the child/young person's known relatives, friends, regular places of visit etc. Consideration should be given to writing to relatives and friends regarding the Department's concerns and the expectation that the relatives/friends will inform the Department should they obtain any relevant information.
- The use of a mobile and social networking technology to engage the child/young person
- Writing to other local authorities and local agencies with the information about the missing child/young person. Partner agencies should receive information from each other on the basis of their need to know and in order to take action to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child.
- Use of publicity. This will require the appropriate agreement of the relevant Divisional Director who will consult with the Corporate Director, Children and Families. In assessing the individual case circumstances. The Council's press office and the police's Missing Person Unit will also need to be consulted with. The child's parents must be informed prior to a press release being made and consent should be received from them and/or those with parental responsibility. Legal Services should also be consulted.
- Social workers should be aware that it is an offence for a person to publish material which is intended to, or is likely to identify a child as being involved in court proceedings under the Children Act 1989. However, the court can give leave for this restriction to be waived if the child/young person's welfare requires it.
- Seeking a Recovery Order and deciding how the order should be exercised ie should there be a joint visit with police and Social Care staff. (See 12.2 for further details).
- Notifying national authorities and agencies, such as Department for Work and Pensions and Child Benefit agencies
- Appropriate legal interventions if there is any suspicion that the child may have been removed from UK jurisdiction.
- Whether a further strategy meeting should be called if the child/ young person continues to be missing for 7 days.
- A record of the meeting must be circulated to all attending, and must be held securely within their agency.

Whilst any child or young person remains missing the case must remain open on the Frameworki (Fwi) client information system. An alerting report identifying those absent for 6 months must be established to highlight the case for review.

The Divisional Director, Targeted Services must review the cases of all children or young people missing for 6 months to ensure that all appropriate and necessary steps are being taken to recover the child/young person.

All Police 'missing persons' files will remain open until the child/young person is traced or until the Crime Manager is satisfied that all avenues of enquiry have been exhausted.

Strategy Meetings for children who are frequently absent without leave

As with children who go missing, absence without leave can often be a sign that something is wrong. Children who are absent without leave may be at similar levels of risk and may also go on to be missing.

Strategy meetings should be considered for those children whereby a pattern of being absent without leave is identified. For children who are not actively receiving a service, the 3rd Merlin should trigger a strategy meeting.

Notifications of children who are missing

Children's Social Care teams will notify the Social Care Business Support Team by email of children who have gone missing so that alerts/ notifications can be sent to other Local Authorities and partner agencies as well as to advise the Children Missing from Education officer, and collect data to inform service monitoring and planning. The email address is: Missing.missing@harrow.gov.uk

Reporting

All contact with Emergency Duty Team is reported to managers on a daily basis and to follow up on any children reported missing. A weekly report is produced on all children who were reported missing for over 48 hours. The Director and senior management team are notified of actions taken as well as those who remain missing

Notification of Missing/Absent Child/Young Person Episode on Frameworki

Once a child is reported missing (location is unknown) or an unauthorised absence (location is known) Social Workers will open a 'Notification of Child/Young Person Missing/Absent' on FWi. The episode is used to track action taken both to find the young person and once they are found, as well as for reporting purposes.

A new episode will be open for each incident of a young person reported as missing or an unauthorised absence.

Initial Notification Pack for Reporting Missing Children and Young People ‘Grab Packs’

The ‘Grab Pack’ is an initial notification pack (it contains a form) which is to be completed by the allocated worker on a young person who has gone missing/absent from placement/home. The worker will give this pack to the Police when a young person is reported as missing/absent. Once completed, a copy of the pack should be retained by the referring organisation. Children Services will upload their retained packs under Documents on Fwi. Packs are amended for every new missing/absent episode.

Police Safe & Well Check and Return Interviews

This will be carried out as soon as possible after the young person has returned home. The purpose is to check for any indications that the young person has suffered harm, where and with whom they have been, and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them.

Return Interviews and Missing Person’s Coordinator

This interview should take place within 72 hours of the young person being located or returning from absence and will be especially important if any risk factors are identified for the child, in particular:

- Missing for over 24 hours
- Missing on two or more occasions
- Engaged (or is believed to have engaged) in criminal activities during their absence
- Been hurt or harmed whilst they have been missing (or believed to have been the case)
- Has known mental health issues
- At known risk of sexual exploitation; and/or
- Has contact with persons posing risk to children.

This is a more in-depth interview and the guidance states that it is usually best carried out by an independent person who is trained to carry out these interviews and is able to follow-up any actions that emerge. Many young people who run away or go missing need to build up trust with somebody before they will discuss in depth the reasons why they decided to run away. The interview and actions that follow from it should:

- Identify and deal with any harm the child has suffered – including harm that might not have already been disclosed as part of the Safe and Well Check (his/her medical condition should be discussed and any need for medical attention assessed)
- Understand and try to address the reasons why the child or young person ran away.
- Consider preventive measures regarding further running away.

The primary responsibility of the Missing Person’s Coordinator is to undertake the return interviews within the designated time frame and implement the appropriate support actions. This may entail implementing certain interventions, or additional collaborative work with the CSE/Gang prevention workers respectively. It is also the duty of the post holder to work closely with the missing police unit. This will include coordinating strategy meetings and sharing key information

with relevant professionals. It is imperative to record all missing episodes accurately, ensuring a synchronicity with police data. Thus allowing the local authority to observe any persistent patterns on any individual case, which will ensure the correct allocation of resources in order to safeguard that child. The role also includes providing advice to support individuals, families or institutions.

Dwayne Phillips, Missing Person's Coordinator – dwayne.phillips@harrow.gov.uk / 0208 736 6488

Informing Parents

Parents and any persons with parental responsibility must be informed as soon as possible that their child is missing unless there are good reasons connected with the child's welfare for this to be inappropriate. Normally this will be in relation to children who are living away from home. Agreement must be reached about who will be responsible for informing the parents – this will normally be the child's social worker. A record must be made as to when parents have been informed and what information has been given to them.

Children Who Go Missing From Home

Some children go missing for short periods and there may be good reason to believe that they are not at risk/ have not run away. They may return home quite quickly

In some circumstances it will be appropriate to regard a child as missing even though their whereabouts are known.

Missing from home should be seen as an indicator of underlying problems which may need further intervention by agencies supporting children and families.

In most cases a parent/ carer will report a child missing from home. However, there may be instances whereby a missing child comes to the attention of an agency or member of the community who has not been reported to the Police. In these cases the Police should be contacted for assistance.

In these cases, Children Services should undertake an assessment which may result in services under s17 or action under s47 of the Children Act.

Harrow Social Services Emergency Duty Team

Where Police have immediate concerns about the circumstances of a child who has been reported missing from home and who may be at risk if returned home out of hours, they will contact Emergency Duty to assess their needs and make appropriate arrangements.

Emergency Duty should inform Children's Social Care team for the child's area, or allocated social worker, for action as soon as office hours resume.

The Performance Management team will on a daily basis circulate a list of children and young people who have come to the attention of EDT the previous evening/night

Social Care teams will send an alert to Emergency Duty where a child with whom they are working has gone missing from home, with specific plans for when the child is found.

Notifications of children who are missing

Children's Social Care teams will notify the Social Care Business Support Team by email of children who have gone missing this will ensure that alerts/notifications can be sent to other Local Authorities and partner agencies. It will also advise the Children Missing from Education officer, and collect data to inform service monitoring and planning. The email address is: Missing.missing@harrow.gov.uk

Police Safe & Well Check and Return Interviews

This will be carried out as soon as possible after the young person has returned home.

Children Who Have Not Been Found

Police and Social Care will monitor the progress of efforts to locate children who have gone missing. If a child has not been found within 48 hours or 72 if at the weekend of receipt of referral and earlier depending on the age and circumstances of the child, a Need to Know form, should be completed, informing, amongst others, the Director of Children and Families and other significant partners, describing the steps taken to locate and safeguard the child.

Children Who Repeatedly Go Missing From Home

For those young people who repeatedly go missing and place themselves at risk of serious harm consideration must be given to conducting enquiries under s47 Children Act 1989 with a Strategy Discussion to consider holding an Initial Child Protection Conference, and in some cases where the young person is placing themselves at a high level of risk convening a legal planning meeting.

Chronologies should be kept up to date by Local Authority for children who repeatedly go missing to assist in identifying patterns of absence.

Children Who Go Missing From Care

Harrow has the same duty of care towards all children who are Looked After, whether accommodated under s20 of the Children Act 1989, or subject of Care and Interim Care Orders.

Unauthorised Absence

Some children go missing for short periods, staying out longer than agreed.

Young people may be accidentally or deliberately return late home to their placement. Their whereabouts are known and their safety or wellbeing is not necessarily jeopardised.

The placement, whether residential or Foster Care, should consult with the Social Worker or Emergency Duty to consider whether the incident should be reported as missing or approached as unauthorised absence.

While the child remains absent the circumstances should be regularly reviewed and the absence upgraded to 'missing' depending on a review of risk which would include last known contact and time factors.

Before reporting a child as missing the placement/foster carers should take all steps a responsible parent would take, to locate the child.

Where the child's location or reason for absence is unknown and due to the circumstances, there is cause for significant concern for the child, the child must be reported missing to the police, and Harrow Emergency Duty

Detailed information should be provided to the police, in particular the risk assessment for the child (Appendix 6) including any reason to suspect that the child is at risk of significant harm in terms of abuse, self harming behaviour, drugs, sexual exploitation or criminal behaviour and previous missing episodes.

Planning For the Return

Where a child goes missing from their care placement, plans must be made to respond promptly once the child is located. If the child is located but the professionals involved are unable to establish meaningful contact with the child, perhaps because they are under duress or being harboured, then Children's Social Care will consider whether a crime should be recorded and/or an application for a recovery order is required.

Children's Social Care will consider whether the child should be returned to their placement.

Care staff or foster parents will need to continue to offer warm and consistent care when they return.

An early LAC Review may be convened to address issues for the child and placement.

Risk Management Meetings

Reviewed June 2016 – version 3

The care provider must convene a multi-agency risk management meeting when young people run away persistently or engage in risky behaviour such as leaving the placement to meet with unfamiliar or inappropriate adults. These meetings will be particularly important when groups of young people run away together. The purpose of this is to develop a strategy with all relevant agencies for managing the risks which should be recorded in the care plan.

Return Interview

This interview will take place within 72 hours of the looked after young person being located or returning from absence to the care placement – whether this is in Harrow or the child is placed in another Local Authority (Appendix 7).

The child must receive the interview with the independent person within 72 hours of being located or returning from absence:

- For Looked After Children, it is the responsibility of the residential unit Manager/Supervising Social Worker and placing Authority to ensure that this happens. However when a child is placed in the borough of Harrow or neighbouring boroughs, the Social worker will make a referral to HAD (Harrow Association for Disabled People) to complete the return interview.
- For children living in the community, the Police and Children's Social Services have responsibility for ensuring that opportunity for an independent interview is provided

The independent person could be a social worker other than the child's social worker, if they have one, or a teacher, school nurse, Youth or YOT Worker, a voluntary sector practitioner or a police officer whom the child knows and trusts. The independent interview should be with someone the child trusts and who is separate from the police and children's social services interview. The child should be asked who they wish to speak to.

Children Who Go Missing From Care who are Placed by Harrow in another Local Authority Area

Children Services will ensure that the child's Placement Plan and risk of missing assessment is as detailed as possible, including specific behaviour management strategies, the provider's role in meeting the child's health, education needs and particular requirements for supporting contact with the child's family and info on any restrictions.

The relevant care provider – residential or fostering service – will be responsible for following the local Runaway and Missing from Home and Care Procedures and contact the child's Social Worker/ Social Care Manager in Harrow who will consider the need for a Missing Child Strategy Discussion to include local police and ensure that a return interview is conducted within 72 hours. An early LAC Review may be convened to address issues for the child and placement.

Communication & Further Action

The child's parents/carers and all agencies informed of the absence should be advised of the child's return without delay.

Involved agencies should decide whether a Strategy discussion is required or should be requested (See the London Child Protection Procedures).

Individual Children Services Cases

Chronologies will be kept up to date for children who repeatedly go missing to assist in identifying patterns of absence or concerns about care arrangements.

Care Planning for Children who go missing from Care

Statutory Reviews will provide the opportunity to ensure that the care plan is amended to address reasons why the child was absent and the Independent Reviewing Officers will ensure that this includes a strategy to prevent re-occurrence. Where there is evidence that a child is vulnerable to sexual exploitation consideration must be given to convening a review to consider whether the placement is able to put in place a strategy to minimise risk to the child or whether an alternative placement needs to be sought to keep the child safe.