



LSCB

Bath & North East Somerset
Local Safeguarding Children Board

Children Missing from Home and Care Protocol

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| Author | Original Author: Julie Downey Review Authors: Sally Churchyard, Leigh Zywek |
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| Detail of review amendments | Replacement of 2016 protocol to comply with statutory guidance. It states clear objectives, updates the definition of 'missing' and removal of the section about children missing from education as there is a separate policy for this. |

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Local Safeguarding Children Board regards all children who go missing from home or Care as a priority group who may be at risk of significant harm. Going missing is a safeguarding issue. Children may be at particular risk of sexual exploitation but could also be running away from or into situations where they could be trafficked, forced into marriage, suffer female genital mutilation, become radicalised or be drawn into other dangerous and/or criminal activity. They may also have difficulties with accommodation or placements or with family relationships or schooling and/or face significant health and safety issues.

1.2 Our local objectives are to reduce the number of children who go missing by promoting prompt reporting to the Police when they do go missing in order that they can quickly be found and returned to a safe place, and by working in partnership to reduce repeat incidences and keep children safe. Where there is a criminal element to children going missing, for example, grooming for exploitation, our aim is to disrupt this activity and support Police in bringing offenders to justice.

1.3 This protocol has been reviewed by the Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing sub-group of the Local Safeguarding Children Board. It complies with statutory guidance¹, introduces local objectives and clarifies the definition of 'missing' but no longer includes children with school attendance issues which are addressed in the [Children Missing from Education Protocol](#) .

1.4 Strong and effective leadership in all agencies, clear procedures, effective multi-agency information sharing and joint working underpin our ability to keep this group

¹ Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care, Department for Education, January 2014

of children safe. The Local Authority Safeguarding Service Manager is the lead manager responsible for monitoring policies and performance relating to children who go missing from home or Care.

2. Definitions

Child: anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. 'Children' and 'young people' are used throughout this protocol to refer to anyone under the age of 18;

Looked After Child: a child who is looked after by a Local Authority under a Care Order, a remand to Local Authority Care, or section 20 of the Children Act 1989;

Care leaver: an eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989. Care leavers include young people aged 16-24;

Missing child: a child reported as missing to the Police by their parents/carers because their whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be a victim of crime and/or there is a risk of harm to themselves or someone else;

Abscorder: a child who has gone missing from a placement or other Local Authority Care, including as a result of criminal Court proceedings;

3. Key Principles

- a. We regard children going missing as a safeguarding issue and young people's safety and well-being is paramount;
- b. Locating and returning the child to a safe place is the main objective and timely information sharing is key to quickly finding them and planning to keep them safe. There is no data protection issue in sharing missing person's reports in order to achieve this. All partners will follow the local LSCB Information Sharing Protocol;
- c. Child protection procedures will be initiated whenever there are concerns that a child who is missing or has been missing may be at risk of significant harm;
- d. We will actively support the 'reintegration' of young people who have been missing to reduce the risk of reoccurrence and promote their achievement of positive outcomes.

4. Preventing Children from Going Missing

4.1 One of our local objectives is to reduce the number of children who go missing. All agencies working with children should understand the risks and be able to recognise when children are vulnerable.² Looked After Children and those within the youth justice system may be at particular risk of going missing. Agencies should be aware that not all children who go missing are reported to the Police. As they remain a partially hidden group, staff should be able to recognise risk factors and be curious about children's lifestyles where there are concerns. They should work proactively with parents to encourage them to take action to keep their children safe and to report to the Police when they do go missing.

² Appendix C

4.2 All agencies will take steps to know which children known to them have previously gone missing in order to minimise the risk of a reoccurrence. This will include talking to children and their parents about the issue and actively involving them in planning the support they need. Children should know they have other options than to go missing and be able to access support in making safer choices.

4.3 All agencies will ensure their staff have suitable training in relation to their role. Staff need to have a clear understanding of the links between children going missing and other forms of harm and criminality. Training also needs to support confidence in information sharing, an ability to analyse concerns and plan to address the risk in relation to individual children and to make effective interventions.

Information sharing

4.4 Going missing is a safeguarding issue and the safety and welfare of the child is the first consideration when making decisions about sharing information. Agencies who have specific concerns about a child who may go missing or who is missing, will follow the Local Safeguarding Children's Board [Information Sharing Protocol](#) and Guidance (hyper-link) to ensure that all relevant information is used to agree integrated approaches to help keep children safe. It is lawful to disclose confidential information if it appears necessary to do so to safeguard a child in the public interest (i.e. the public interest in safeguarding children may override the public interest in maintaining confidentiality). Key risks in our response to missing children include slow recognition of the seriousness, failing to share information and not working together.

4.5 Children who live with a number of recognised risk factors are regularly reviewed at a multi-agency level via the Local Safeguarding Children Board sub-group. The information included is their pattern of going missing, level of school attendance, accommodation status and risk of sexual exploitation. This is to promote a better understanding of the significance of known information and to monitor integrated planning and intervention by the agencies involved. Patterns identified with individuals or groups of young people are also used strategically to support local services to respond appropriately to reduce instances of these children going missing again.

5. When a Child goes Missing

5.1 Our aim is to reduce the harm to children who go missing by finding them quickly and planning for their return.

Reporting

5.2 Parents and carers are responsible for reporting to the Police when a child goes missing. Reports of missing children should include as much identifying information as possible and full details of the circumstances. All agencies will ensure parents understand their responsibilities for reporting if their children go missing.

5.3 Other agencies will additionally report children missing if they have reason to believe there would otherwise be a delay in the matter being brought to Police attention. Where young people leave school during the school day and the school is unable to establish their whereabouts and there is an existing welfare concern,

schools are encouraged to report young people as missing to the Police in addition to notifying their parents/carers.

5.4 When a child is reported to them as missing, the Police Missing Persons Coordinator will immediately notify the Local Authority. If a child goes missing 'out of hours,' then Police will notify the Emergency Duty Team. The Social Work Duty team will confirm that the child has an address within Bath and North East Somerset and will check to see whether the child is known to any other agencies, including the Children Missing Education Service.

Safeguarding

5.5. Child protection procedures must be initiated whenever there are concerns that a child who is missing may be suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm. Social Care will treat the notification as a referral and decide whether an immediate Strategy meeting is warranted. If not held immediately, the need for a Strategy meeting will be kept under review, as the risk of significant harm increases over time.

5.6 A multi-agency risk assessment and risk management plan will be made for all children who go missing. These will be shared with all agencies known to the child including their school and their GP/health service, and unless it is not in the child's interest, with their parents.

Investigation

5.7 Avon and Somerset Constabulary is the lead agency for investigating and finding missing children. They will risk assess the notification they have received. A high risk category is used in situations where the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the child is in danger through their own vulnerability or that they may have been the victim of a serious crime or there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger. It requires the immediate deployment of Police resources and a member of the senior management team must be involved in the examination of initial enquiry lines and approval of appropriate staffing levels. There should be a media strategy and / or close contact with outside agencies. Family support should be put in place. Police will notify the UK Missing Persons Bureau and the National Crime Agency.

5.8 A medium risk category is used where the risk posed is likely to place the subject in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others. This category requires an active and measured response by Police and other agencies in order to trace the missing person and support the person reporting. This will involve a proactive investigation and search in accordance with the circumstances to locate the missing child as soon as possible. Other cases will be categorised as low risk.

5.9 All agencies will fully and proactively co-operate with the Police investigation. Healthcare professionals have a key role in identifying and reporting children who may be missing. Missing children may access a range of health services including Accident and Emergency Departments or Community Sexual Health Services and staff should be alert to the circumstances of young people presenting for treatment or advice. If the child is not quickly located, there will be a review of the need for a/another Strategy meeting.

Planning for Return

5.10 From the moment a child is reported as missing, their parents/carers, Social Worker and Police will also start planning for when they are found. This is particularly important for children who repeatedly go missing as it may help to prevent future instances. This may also include beginning to plan the return home interview.

5.11 If there is concern that the child may be at risk if returned home, the child will be referred for a Children's Social Care assessment of their needs and appropriate arrangements for their accommodation will be made. Contingency planning may include identifying and risk assessing suitable alternative short-term accommodation. Bed and breakfast accommodation is not an appropriate placement for any child or young person under the age of 18.

6. When a Child has been Found

6.1 Our aim is to ensure that the child's immediate needs are met and that arrangements are put in place to minimise the risk of them going missing again

Notification

6.2 Whoever locates a missing child should notify the Police immediately. Police in turn must ensure that everyone else involved, including the parents and the Local Authority Duty Team or Emergency Duty Team are made aware. The Duty Team must promptly share this information other agencies involved.

Prevention Interviews

6.3 Police will undertake a face-to-face Prevention Interview as soon as possible after the young person has returned. 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 against them. They must also record contact details for the young person, including their mobile 'phone number.

6.4 If there is a particular concern that the child has been the victim or perpetrator of a crime, then consideration must be given to securing evidence, including forensic examination. Where an allegation of physical or sexual abuse is made, then safeguarding procedures will be followed.

6.5 Police will give consideration as to whether the child needs medical attention. If a medical examination is required, appropriate consent needs to be obtained.

6.6 The Police will also assess whether a child might run away again, based on what they say about what has happened, the circumstances in which they were found and individual characteristics and risk factors such as whether a child has learning difficulties, mental health issues, depression or other vulnerabilities.

6.7 The Police will notify the Social Care Duty Team and the Youth Offending Service simultaneously by secure email when a missing young person has been found. They will also forward information from the Prevention Interview, including land and mobile 'phone numbers for the young person and their parents/carers.

Independent Return Home Interviews

6.8 The Compass Team Manager will allocate the case for an independent Return Home Interview. Wherever possible, this interview will take place in a neutral setting, within 72 hours of the young person returning home. Where a young person expresses a preference, the interview can take place at their home or school. The young person will be seen on their own unless they specifically ask to have someone with them.

6.9 When it is difficult to make contact with a young person, the Compass key worker will agree with the Team Manager how many attempts to make. If it is not possible to undertake an interview, or exceptionally, it is agreed with the Team Manager that an interview will not be offered, then they will ensure that a brief explanation is added to the LiquidLogic record.

6.10 All interviews will be recorded using a standard checklist and will identify and follow up on any harm the young person has suffered either before they ran away or whilst missing. This may include making a safeguarding or early help service referral. Interviews will inform an understanding of why the young person ran away and help them understand what alternatives they have and what they and others can do to keep them safe (including giving them a card with helpline numbers).

6.11 Parents/carers will be informed that the interview is taking place. Where appropriate, parents/carers' views of the circumstances will also be sought. Relevant information should also be offered to the parents/carers.

6.12 For young people aged 11 and over, a sexual exploitation screening tool ([SERAF](#)) will be commenced unless the Team Manager agrees and records that the circumstances do not require it. Where the young person has an allocated Social Worker, only information that comes to light during the interview need be included, as the Social Worker will be responsible for completing this. All completed SERAFs are reviewed by the Willow Coordinator to determine whether the young person meets the criteria for receiving a service to address the risk of sexual exploitation. Exceptionally, a SERAF may be completed on a younger child if concerning information is disclosed during the Return Home Interview.

5.13 Completed records will be forwarded to the Social Care Duty Administrator to include on the relevant database, together with a summary of contact. A copy will also be forwarded to Police Missing Persons Coordinator. Unless they are offering an early help service, then Compass staff will have no further involvement after the interview has taken place. If the child goes missing again, the Team Manager will endeavour to allocate the Return Home Interview to the same key worker.

Follow-up

6.14 Social Care, Police and other agencies involved will work together to make a safety plan including any support the child (and their parents/carers) require upon returning home. This will include a comprehensive picture of why they went missing and the likelihood of them going missing again, taking account of previous triggers and patterns. It will provide a shared understanding of what happened whilst they were missing and what risks they may face if they go missing again. Agencies should also consider whether any similar risks are present for siblings.

6.15 Agencies will also consider the need for any control measures to reduce risk and whether there is a need for any Police disruption activity if there is concern the young person is the subject of grooming. They will also agree what information and guidance is to be provided to the young person and their parents/carers.

6.16 If a young person has gone missing on three or more occasions or for one episode lasting more than twenty-four hours or there are missing episodes over a very long period of time with no sustained reduction, then the Duty Team Manager will hold a risk management meeting, including a fuller review of actions following earlier incidents and consider alternative strategies for reducing the risk of reoccurrence. This may be followed by a Single Assessment.

6.17 The child will be given an opportunity to provide feedback on their experience of how agencies have worked together to help them. Their views will be collated and used to inform improvements in the services provided.

7. When Looked After Children Go Missing

7.1 Everything in Sections 1-5 above also applies to Looked After Children. In addition, there are some specific steps that will be taken for this group.

7.2 Local Authorities have a duty to place a Looked After Child in the most appropriate placement to safeguard them and minimise the risk of them absconding or going missing. In all planning, the young person will be given advice about independent advocacy and have their views taken into account. They will also be given clear information about accessing support.

7.3 The following steps will support this:

- a. The Care Plan should include strategies to keep the young person safe and avoid unauthorised absences and/or a child going missing. It should also include strategies to reduce the duration and risks associated if the child does have unauthorised absences or go missing. Where a child already has an established pattern of running away, the Care Plan should include a strategy to keep the child safe and minimise the likelihood of the child running away in the future. This should be discussed and agreed as far as possible with the child and with the child's carers and should include detailed information about the responsibilities of all services, the child's parents and other adults involved in the family network. A notification process for missing/absent episodes should be agreed between B&NES and the host Authority for each child placed.
- b. The Placement Plan should include strategies for preventing the child from taking unauthorised absences and from going missing; A notification process for missing/ absent episodes should be agreed between responsible and host Local Authorities as a part of the Care Plan and the Placement Plan.
- c. A pre-incident risk assessment should be completed for all children for whom there is concern that they may run away. Distance from home, family and friends should be considered as a risk factor. This risk assessment should be updated after each missing incident and should be regularly reviewed.
- d. At the time of placement, two recent photographs of the child (face and full body length) should be retained by the carer for possible missing from Care purposes. Copies of these photographs should also be held on the child's electronic or

paper record. Digital photographs are preferable and they should be regularly updated.

- e. Statutory reviews should consider any absences and revise strategies to prevent repeat absences and/or missing incidents and the Care Plan should be revised accordingly. Independent Reviewing Officers should be informed about missing and unauthorised absence episodes;
- f. Information sharing - designated health professionals for Looked After Children should be informed of children missing from Care who are deemed to be 'high risk'. They should be included in any multiagency strategy meetings or activity to manage the child's retrieval and any subsequent health needs. Designated education professionals should be informed and included in the review process.
- g. Out of Area Placements - young people should feel safe in their accommodation and the areas where it is located. When a child is placed outside Bath and North East Somerset, the Social Worker must make sure that the child has access to the services they need in advance of the placement. Notification of the placement must be made to the host Authority.
- h. Care Leavers - Local Authorities must ensure that Care Leavers live in "suitable accommodation" as defined in Section 23B (10) of the Children Act 1989 and Regulations 9(2) of the Care Leavers Regulations, The Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010.

7.4 Health service providers should ensure a comprehensive service for Looked After Children. The Designated Nurse and Doctor for Looked After Children should share relevant information and intelligence relating to high risk individuals or emerging themes and patterns indicative of organised and targeted abuse.

Unauthorised absences

7.5 If a Looked After Child is away from their placement without authorisation, the carer or Social Worker should take reasonable steps to ascertain their wellbeing including, when appropriate, visiting the location. If there is a concern they may be at significant risk of harm, then Police will be notified in order that necessary safeguarding measures can be followed; this is not the same as reporting a child missing.

When a Looked After Child goes missing

7.6 When the whereabouts of a Looked After Child is not known, the carer or manager in the children's home will carry out preliminary checks to see if the child can be located. If these checks are unsuccessful, then Police, Bath and North East Somerset Children's Social Care (or out-of-hours, the Emergency Duty Team) and the Independent Reviewing Officer will all be notified. Parents will also be told unless it is not considered to be in the child's interest.

7.7 The carer/s will continue to take all reasonable steps which a good parent would take to secure the safe and prompt return of the child, in consultation with the Social Worker and Police. The Independent Reviewing Officer will also try to make contact.

7.8 Within one working day, a missing from Care meeting/ telephone discussion will take place, including the Police, the child's Social Worker and the provider. Any pre-incident risk assessment should be reviewed and updated.

7.9 If a child placed outside Bath and North East Somerset goes missing, local procedures should be followed in addition to this protocol.

7.10 The Divisional Director should be notified within three working days of the child going missing. They will notify the Lead Member and the Corporate Parenting Board within seven working days of the child going missing

Cross-border arrangements

7.11 Agencies in Bath and North East Somerset will co-operate with efforts to locate locally placed children from other areas who go missing, following the principles in this Protocol.

7.12 The B&NES allocated Social Worker will work proactively with the Authority within which a missing child is placed to support efforts to locate them, in accordance with that Authority's Protocol. Police will work closely with relevant forces to ensure that children who go missing and are located in other areas are protected and returned to a safe place with due care and consideration for their welfare.

Care Leavers

7.13 The Local Authority's response to a missing Care Leaver age 16 or 17 years old should be the same as for younger children. Care Leavers, particularly 16 and 17 year olds, are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and may go missing from their home or accommodation. Support should also be made available to families to help them understand why the child has run away and how they can be supported on their return.

Other Children known to Children's Social Care

7.14 Where a child is living at home, and is known to Social Care as the subject of a Child Protection Plan, or a s47 enquiry, or is a Child in Need, a member of the senior management team will be involved in the examination of initial enquiry lines and approval of appropriate staffing levels. The unexplained, continuous absence of a child subject to a Child Protection Plan must be treated as the highest priority and the social Worker will ensure that a Strategy meeting is arranged as soon as possible. Representatives from the Police should attend the meeting along with members of the Core group and consideration should be given to convening a Review Conference in order to reassess the risk and update the Child Protection Plan.

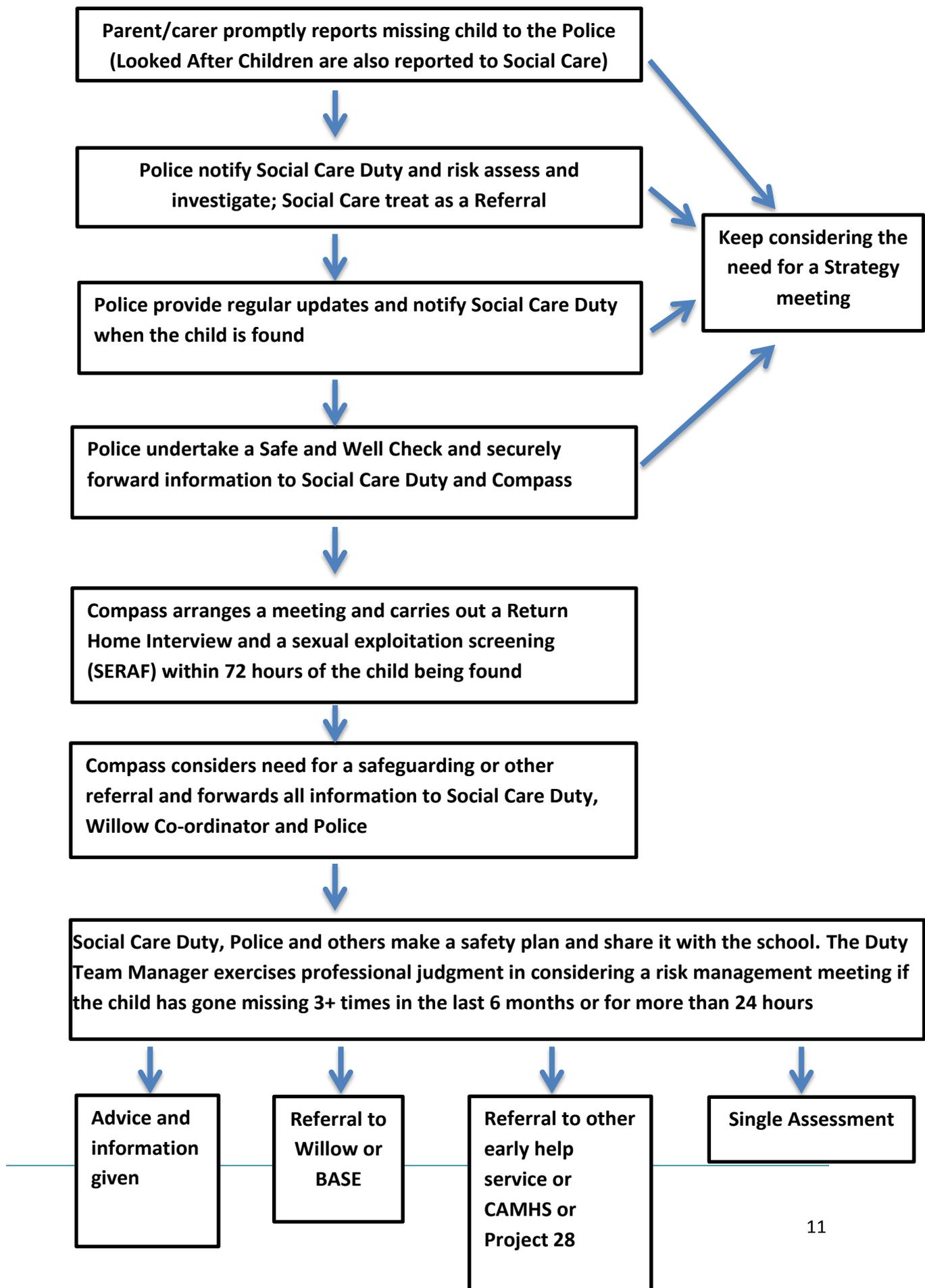
8. When Foreign National Children Go Missing

8.1 If a local child who is 'subject to restriction'³ goes missing (including if it is considered their parents may have hidden them), then Bath and North East Somerset will notify the Home Office Evidence and Enquiry Unit. The Police central point of contact is the Police National Computer Team in Liverpool. They are responsible for investigating all children reported missing to or by the Home Office and for circulating missing child alerts.

8.2 When a missing foreign national child is found, all parties will be told immediately. The Home Office contact is CommandandControlUnit@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk. In consultation with Police, children's Social Care will decide where the child is to be taken if they are not to remain at the address where they have been found.

³ Appendix B

Appendix A: Flowchart for child who goes missing



Appendix B: Legislation, Powers and Statutory Guidance

1. This guidance complements:

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015 and related statutory guidance

Children Act 1989 - guidance and regulation volumes in respect of Care planning and review

Children Act 2004 S.11 - Section 13 of the Children Act 2004 requires local authorities and other named statutory partners to make arrangements to ensure that their functions are discharged with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children

DfE Statutory Guidance on 'Children who run away or go missing from home or Care,' January 2014

[The Education Act 1996](#)

[The Education Act 2002](#)

[The Education \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2006](#)

[The Education \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2013](#)

[Education Act 2002 S.175](#)

[Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities: Children Missing Education, January 2015\)](#)

The National Minimum Standards (Standard 5.5) specifies that staff should actively search for children and work with the Police where appropriate.

2. Powers to recover children:

a) Use of Reasonable Force or Physical Restraint

If a Constable has reasonable cause to believe that a child would otherwise be likely to suffer significant harm, they can remove the child to a place of safety and keep the child there (S46 Children Act 1989). The Children Act legislation implies the power to use reasonable force in appropriate circumstance to take a child into Police protection or to keep the child at a place of safety (Home Office Circular 44/2003).

Local Authority staff can use physical intervention to prevent a young person running from their care is allowed. This action will need to be justified by an assessment of the risks that the young person might face if they run. However, physical intervention does not offer a long-term risk management strategy (Department of Health: Children Missing from Care and from Home – a guide to good practice 2002).

b) Power of Entry to Recover Child/ Young Person

Under S17 (1) (e) Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, a Constable can use reasonable force, but in some circumstances, a recovery order would be required to enter premises. The welfare of the child/ young person is paramount and where there are grounds to believe a vulnerable missing child/ young person is on premises

and access is being refused, there should be no hesitation in gaining entry under this provision.

Under S17 (1) (b) Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, a Constable can use reasonable force to enter premises to arrest someone for an indictable offence. Therefore where there is another person on the premises who is preventing access, consideration should be given to entering to arrest that individual for abduction of a child contrary to S2 Abduction Act 1984 or S49 Children Act 1989.

c) Breach of the Peace:

Under Common Law, Police have power of entry to prevent a breach of the peace.

d) Recovery Order:

The Local Authority may apply to the Court for a Recovery Order under Section 50 of the Children Act 1989. A Recovery Order can only be sought when the child is subject to an Interim or Full Care Order and it is clear that the child is in no immediate danger of significant harm. Children's Social Care may need to obtain an Emergency Protection Order under Section 44 of the Children Act 1989, before expiration of the Police Protection.

e) Emergency Protection Order:

Under S48 (3) an emergency protection order may authorise the applicant to enter premises specified by the order and search for the child with respect to whom the order is made.

f) Warrant:

Under S48(9) Children Act 1989, a warrant can be obtained authorising a Constable to use reasonable force to enter and search premises if a person trying to exercise powers under an emergency protection order is being prevented from doing so by being refused entry to those premises.

3. Subject to restriction

Children who are 'subject to restriction' are those who have either:

- a. Proceeded through immigration control without obtaining leave to enter;
- b. Left the border control area Border Force accommodation without permission;
- c. Been granted temporary admission, temporary release, release on a restriction order or Bail;
- d. Served with a 'notice of liability to deport' or is the dependent of a foreign national offender whose status in the UK is under consideration by criminal casework – these dependents could be British Citizens or have extant leave

Appendix C: Risk Factors

Children and young people go missing for many reasons. Some may go missing following a single upsetting encounter with someone or some bad news; others may experience a combination of 'push' and 'pull' factors over a period of time.

One or more of the following 'push' factors can precede a missing incident; any one factor may be a trigger for a child actually going missing:

- Not feeling accepted or safe in the environment where children should be safe and happy;
- Family breakdown and young people being drawn into parents'/carers' conflicts;
- Domestic abuse;
- Poor family relationships including step parent issues;
- Physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse or neglect;
- Issues over appropriate boundaries;
- Bullying (including e-safety sexting etc.);
- School engagement and attendance issues;
- Teenage pregnancy (or fear that they may be pregnant);
- Fear of forced marriage or female genital mutilation.

'Pull' factors can include:

- Staying out with peers, boyfriends or girlfriends;
- Wanting to be with someone they can only be with by running away;
- For someone in Care, running to be near friends and family;
- Wanting freedom and independence;
- Caught up in risky behaviours such as substance misuse or crime;
- Grooming and/or coercion by a peer or an older person;
- Fear of repercussion for self or family if they don't go.

The immediate risks associated with going missing include:

- Child sexual exploitation;
- No means of support or legitimate income – leading to high risk activities;
- Involvement in criminal activities;
- Victim of abuse;
- Victim of crime, for example through sexual assault and exploitation;
- Alcohol/substance misuse;
- Deterioration of physical and mental health;
- Missing schooling and education;
- Vulnerable to trafficking;
- Increased vulnerability;
- Loss of contact with family and friends.

Longer-term risks include:

- Long-term drug dependency / alcohol dependency;
- Crime;
- Homelessness;
- Disengagement from education, training and employment;
- Poor physical and/or mental health.