



**OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO
EITHER GO MISSING FROM HOME OR GO
MISSING FROM CARE**

**As agreed by:
Durham Constabulary and
Durham County Council**

September 2016

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Contact Information for making a missing person report

Where a child or young person is considered to be “missing” in line with these procedures, this should be reported without delay to the police: for Emergencies use **999**, or for routine reporting **101 or 03000 267979**.

Contact should also be made with Children’s Services on the following telephone numbers:

Durham: 03000 267979 or out of hours via Emergency Duty Team (EDT)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 These procedures apply to all children and young people who go absent or missing without permission from their parents, carers, residential carers or foster carers.
- 1.2 For the period 2011 to 2013, 3,189 missing person reports were made to Durham Constabulary. Approximately 1,100 of these cases were formally investigated by the police. The remainder involve people who return home of their own accord or who are quickly traced by officers prior to the commencement of a formal investigation. Approximately 74% of all investigations involved children under the age of 18 years. A 2005 Children's Society survey estimated that around 100,000 young people under the age of 16 run away from home or care each year. Many stay with family or friends, but there are many who do not have access to these networks of support and end up in harmful situations.
- 1.3 These procedures recognise that there are links with children and young people who go missing from either home or care and the risk to them from sexual exploitation. There are also potential links to the risk from, trafficking, forced marriage and so called "honour issues" evident in some cultures.
- 1.4 A number of children in County Durham are reported missing on at least three occasions a year and some have dozens of missing episodes. These children account, between them, for a significant proportion of the Constabulary missing person investigations. Approximately 14% of the police investigations involve children in care; particularly those resident in children's care homes operated by the Local Authority or private care providers and children who are in foster care. These children are particularly vulnerable.
- 1.5 In January 2014 the Department of Education published "[Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care](#)" which means that Local Authorities MUST comply with this guidance. These operating procedures have been drafted in recognition of the guidance, definitions and practice.

Why children go missing

- 1.6 Research undertaken by the Children's Society has identified the following risk factors that can precede a missing incident:
 - Arguments and conflicts.
 - Conflict within a placement.
 - Poor family relationships.
 - Physical and emotional abuse.
 - Boundaries and control.
 - Step parent issues.

The immediate risks associated with going missing include:

- No means of support or legitimate income – potentially placing young people in a vulnerable position.
- Involvement in criminal activities.
- Victim of abuse.
- Grooming for sexual exploitation.
- Victim of crime, for example through sexual assault.
- Alcohol/substance misuse.
- Deterioration of physical and mental health.
- Missing out on schooling and education.
- Increased vulnerability.

Longer-term risks include:

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

- 1.7 Durham Constabulary and Durham County Council, supported by the Durham Local Safeguarding Children Board, recognise the significant issues faced by children who go missing and for the need to provide an effective response to reduce the incidence, improve the reporting and recording procedures and to locate the missing person quickly.

2. Definitions relevant to these procedures

ABSENT

“A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be.”

- 2.1 Clearly some children absent themselves for a short period and return. During their absence their whereabouts are known or they have made contact with someone. Sometimes children stay out longer than agreed, either on purpose or accidentally, and may be testing boundaries, but are not necessarily jeopardising their wellbeing. This boundary testing is within the range of normal teenage behavior and would not always be considered a risk.
- 2.2 Young people who are absent can be considered as being on a continuum, with there being little cause for concern at one extreme, and with significant cause for concern at the other. Young people who are a few minutes late would not normally give rise to concerns, they may be exhibiting normal adolescent behaviour, to establish the boundaries of acceptable behaviour, or to show their disagreement with aspects of their placement or family circumstances.

- 2.3 Irrespective of the reason for their absence, if there is no apparent risk for their immediate safety, or that of the public this may fall within the definition of absent. Here, the assessment of the carer/parent may initially be that the child is safe but is away from home or care without permission.
- 2.4 For Looked After children, the Department of Education statutory guidance includes definitions on “missing from care” and “away from placement without authority” (page 6 of DofE guidance). For the purposes of these operating procedures, incidents of this nature can be grouped under the category of Absent. It is essential that staff/ carers record these incidences as absences, **not missing person episodes**.

If a child’s whereabouts are known then they cannot be ‘missing’.

- 2.5 Examples of being absent would include young people who may be staying with a friend or family member, without prior agreement and may not be ‘at risk’. It would be inappropriate to regard this event as a missing from home or care incident or report it to the police.
- 2.6 In situations where a child is absent without permission, the first response should be that parents/carers or persons with parental responsibility (including the child’s social worker) should take all practical steps to establish the child’s location and to encourage that they return to their home address or placement without delay.
- 2.7 An absent child or young person should be classified as absent if **any** of the criteria below apply:
- They have deliberately left home or placement without permission.
 - Previous behavior indicates they are likely to return of their own accord or they are staying with others known to them.
 - The parent or carer has some idea where the child may be or who they may be with and the child is not considered to be at risk.
 - The young person is in contact with their parent/carer by phone and there are no obvious concerns.
- 2.8 The child's absence must be kept under review and if he/she has not returned within a **maximum period of 4 hours after becoming absent**, a decision must be made about reporting the child as missing to the police. This decision can be made in consultation with the police. Whilst the police will not investigate absent children, the details of children who are reported as “absent” will be recorded by the police, who will agree review times with the reporter and any on-going actions with the child’s family, carer or local authority.
- 2.9 The calculation of 4 hours and any decision to contact the police must recognise both the age of the child, their care plan and the assessment of the risk to their welfare. Therefore a common sense approach is required, rather than operate rigidly to this time frame. (See Risk Assessment at Section 6.)

- 2.10 The responsibility for risk assessing any absence lies with the parent/carer or persons with parental responsibility and in consultation with the child's social worker, for all looked after children.

MISSING

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

- 2.11 For the purposes of these procedures, a child/young person is classified as missing from either their placement or their home when their location or reason for absence is unknown **and/or** there is cause for concern for the child because of their vulnerability or there is a potential danger to the public.

- 2.12 A child or young person should be classified as “missing” if **one or more** of the criteria below apply:

- The care plan or risk assessment for a child contains information which identifies that a missing person report should be made if there was to be an absence.
- There is an identified or imminent risk of the child or young person being exposed to significant harm.
- The child or young person poses a risk of significant harm to others.
- The absence is out of character or unusual behavior.
- There are indications that the child has already come to harm.
- There are indications that the episode is not a deliberate act.
- There are indications that the child or young person:
 - Is not expected to return within reasonable time limits;
 - is not staying at homes of others known to them;
 - will not be easily located.

- 2.13 **A child or young person classified as missing must be reported to the police.**

ABSCONDER

- 2.14 An absconder is a child or young person who is absent from a children's home or a foster placement without the permission of the responsible person and who is subject to bail conditions or a legal order or requirement, following an appearance in a criminal court, or a secure order made in either civil or criminal proceedings.

- 2.15 A child or young person classified as an absconder must be reported to the Police as soon as possible and will be regarded by the police as a “wanted person”. The Police must be made aware of the particular order under which the child has been placed, given a copy where necessary and made aware of the expiry date of the order.

3 Legislation

- 3.1 The legal parameters under which missing person reports and investigations are conducted can be found in common law, international law and the provisions of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR). Some of the provisions of ECHR have been given legal effect within the United Kingdom by virtue of the Human Rights Act 1998.
- 3.2 Data Protection legislation places certain conditions on the 'processing' of information classed as personal data.
- 3.3 Data held for policing purposes should only be disclosed for such purposes. Adherence to this protocol will therefore ensure compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and Durham Constabulary Data Protection policies. Data Protection legislation does not prevent the police and local authority from working together to ensure the safe return of a missing young person. Both organisations are registered for the purpose of protecting people and therefore for disclosing information for that purpose.
- 3.4 Revised statutory guidance on children who go missing from home or care was issued by the Department of Education in 2014.
- 3.5 Local Authorities must act in accordance with this guidance. It replaces the Missing from Care and Home Guidance published by the Department of Health in 2002. The guidance serves to safeguard all "runaways" and to redress the imbalance that currently exists between services offered to runaways from the looked after population and those who run away from home.

4 Scope

- 4.1 The terms child, children or young person refers to any person under the age of 18 years.
- 4.2 These operating procedures relate to:
 - All children and young people living within the boundaries of County Durham including if they are placed here from another Local Authority.
 - Children looked after by Durham County Council (the Local Authority) and placed in County Council Children's homes or foster homes, either Local Authority or independent, within the Local Authority boundaries.
 - Children looked after by Durham County Council and placed in private establishments or with agency foster carers within the county or Local Authority boundaries, where compliance with the protocol is specified in the contract or placement agreement.

- Children looked after by Durham County Council who are staying in the parental home, but who are currently subject to a care order and are subject to Placement with Parents Regulations.

4.3 Within this context, “Children Looked After” refers to children accommodated under Sect 20 of the Children Act 1989, children subject to Care Orders including Interim Care Orders, Sect 31 and 38 Children Act 1989, children subject to Police Protection or Emergency Protection Order (Section 46 of the Children’s Act 1989), and children who are otherwise provided with accommodation by Sect 21 Children Act 1989. These include PACE transfers, children on remand and children subject to a supervision order with a residence requirement.

4.4 In addition, these procedures will apply to all young people placed within the County or Local Authority boundaries (including those aged over 18) for whom Durham County Council have continuing responsibilities under The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

5 Principles

5.1 These procedures must be followed where there are any concerns regarding a child/young person who is considered to fall under the classification of absent or missing from home or care. The procedures can not anticipate every situation and they outline the working practices that should be followed for children who are reported to be missing from their home, in the traditional sense, as well as children reported missing from residential care homes or foster care.

5.2 Children who go missing from home or care may place themselves and others at risk. The reasons for their absence are often varied and complex and cannot be viewed in isolation from their home circumstances and their experiences of care. Every “missing” episode should attract considered attention to ensure a consistent and coherent response to both the initial report and return of the missing person.

5.3 If the young person is looked after by a Local Authority, as a corporate parent the Local Authority has a duty of care for the safety and wellbeing of that young person and is expected to take such action that reasonable parents would take to safeguard their children.

5.4 When a child is reported missing, the objective is to locate the child and take them to a safe environment as soon as possible. Local Authorities and other public sector agencies have a statutory duty to local arrangements to improve the wellbeing of children in the area. They must also discharge their functions having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. (Sec 10 & 11 Children Act 2004)

5.5 This will be achieved by effective partnership working, information sharing and shared problem-solving.

5.6 Interventions are important in attempting to prevent repeat missing episodes. Interventions must be informed by and reflected in any care plan, as appropriate.

- 5.7 Interventions must also be informed by the completion of effective return interviews with returning children (see section 9). Young people's concerns must be taken seriously.

Interventions may be focused on the individual child, the care establishment or by targeting 'pull' factors in the community.

- 5.8 Durham Local Safeguarding Children Board and the police will monitor compliance with these procedures and monitor outcomes through reports presented to the Local Safeguarding Children Board, on a six monthly basis. This report will be provided by the "LSCB Missing and Exploited sub group" which is a strategic forum which monitors all missing children within County Durham (see Section 12).

6 Looked After Children and Young People - the Initial Risk Assessment Process

On Admission to care, foster care or residential placement

- 6.1 The child's social worker has the responsibility for ensuring an "Initial Assessment of Risk" is undertaken when a child is placed in a children's home or with foster carers. This should include an assessment of the level of risk of the child going missing also considering the geographical area in which the young person is to be placed, particularly where the placement is outside of the local area.
- 6.2 Where appropriate this can be completed by the children's home or fostering service staff on behalf of the Social Worker.
- 6.3 Every Looked After Child has a Care Plan, based on an assessment of the child's current and future needs, including potential risk to self or others. The Care Plan should take into account any risk that the child may go missing in the future and any factors which may increase the risk to the child should they go missing. Any assessment should be re-visited following any missing episode, as persistent behaviour, such as this, would suggest amendments may be required. Children's residential and fostering service staff should contribute to this assessment. All information should be included in the placement plan and in the child's care plan. As part of this assessment it may be appropriate for the relevant Local Authority to consult with the police to share information that may be of relevance.
- 6.4 The Care Plan is the responsibility of the relevant Local Authority. It is not a public document. It is not envisaged that the police will need to view the Care Plan at any time. However, there may well be circumstances when it is necessary to involve the police in aspects of the care planning process to safeguard the child.
- 6.5 The Local Authority will ensure that sufficient knowledge and information about the child is recorded to enable carers to complete a missing person report and risk assessment, should the child go missing in future. These arrangements are also relevant for those children, who are placed in County Durham by another Local Authority.

- 6.6 The Children's home or Manager/foster carer should consider the most appropriate method to meet the above requirements and whether it is necessary and appropriate to discuss 'running away' with the child.
- 6.7 It is recognised that in emergency or unplanned placements, that the placement plan, including the initial assessment of risk, is unlikely to have been completed within the first 72 hours. However, all available information should be given at the time of placement in order that there is some assessment of risk.
- 6.8 If there are grounds to suspect that the young person is likely to go missing from their new placement, a preventative strategy discussion or meeting should be held to reduce the risks. This should involve the Police and also relevant partner agencies.
- 6.9 These initial risk assessments should be reviewed as part of child-care reviewing processes and should be re-visited following any episode of missing.
- 6.10 This assessment may be completed as part of the Placement Plan by the Social Worker or by residential staff after the young person is admitted.
- 6.11 The Initial Risk Assessment should consider, for example:
- how likely is it that the young person will go absent:
 - a) Has the young person gone absent or missing before and if so what is the pattern of their previous behaviour?
 - b) What factors or potential incidents may act as a trigger incident and lead to the young person going absent or missing?
 - c) Are there are any other circumstances, behaviour or indicators that suggest the young person may go absent or missing in the future?
 - the risks the young person is likely to face whilst absent for example:

Is the young person:

 - a) likely to visit a known abuser?
 - b) at risk of child sexual exploitation?
 - c) likely to take alcohol or drugs?
 - d) sleeping rough?
 - Control measures to reduce the risks:

At the time of placement, the young person should be given clear information about:

- a) Times of going out and returning.
- b) Who to inform about where they are going.
- c) Appropriate telephone numbers to enable them to inform carers about their whereabouts.
- d) Any assurances that they can ring at any time and that staff will treat them positively and sensitively.
- e) Their contact arrangements with families and friends.
- f) How to seek help if they are unable to get back for the agreed time, whether this has happened accidentally or deliberately.

Consideration should be given on how to raise the young person's awareness of the risks such as.

- Be clear about any persons or addresses that the young person should not be having any direct contact with or visiting.
- Ensure the young person is aware of what action will be taken by the carers and the police if they go absent.

Any initial risk assessment should also consider what action ought to be taken if the young person goes absent or missing such as:

- Who should be contacted by telephone?
- Which addresses need to be visited?
- What places frequented should be checked

6.12 Photographs

Two recent photographs of the young person (face and full body length) should be retained by the carer for missing from care purposes. Copies of these photographs should also be held on the young person's electronic or paper record.

Digital photographs are preferable and they should be regularly updated.

If these are obtained post-placement, careful consideration should be given as to how these photos are taken so as not to stigmatise the child.

Unless it is in the best interests of the welfare of the young person, the photographs should not be used for any other purpose without the young person's consent.

7. Initial Action When a Child or Young Person may be Absent or Missing. Risk Assessment – Level of Vulnerability.

- 7.1 Young people must be given a certain level of freedom to interact with their environment if they are to develop and have an enjoyable, meaningful life. Parents and carers do not supervise young people 24 hours a day every day of the week. As they grow up, there will be many times when parents or carers are happy for the young person to be unsupervised even when their exact whereabouts are unknown.
- 7.2 It is also normal behaviour for young people to sometimes go absent without permission and sometimes fail to return home on time. Although every young person who deliberately or carelessly absents themselves will be exposed to some level of risk, the level of risk they will be exposed to whilst absent will vary significantly. Absent behaviour will not always give rise to immediate concern as most young people are able to safely interact with their environment for short periods of time. However factors such as age, level of understanding, health, disability, history of risk-taking behaviour etc. all create additional vulnerability and should always be considered.
- 7.3 Therefore where the circumstances suggest that the young person is absent rather than missing (see definitions) their parents or carers should consider how capable the young person is of safely interacting with their environment and their level of vulnerability. Unless there is an imminent risk to the young person, it will not be appropriate to immediately contact the police. Parents and carers should take responsibility for locating and returning the young person home.
- 7.4 For Looked after children, in making decisions about the significance of a child's absence and whether the child should be reported as missing, a risk assessment must be undertaken and documented. (See Appendix A.) It is important in compiling the risk assessment for the staff member to be aware of any remand to Local Authority conditions or Bail conditions imposed on the child/young person, as this can affect the risks presented by and to a young person. Furthermore, this can alter the powers and requirements placed on police officers investigating the missing episode.
- 7.5 Where a child is absent, relevant staff from the Local Authority and Police must consider the definitions identified at Section 2 and take into consideration any guidance already agreed upon and recorded in the child's care plan.
- 7.6 In assessing risk, the following factors should also be considered:
- The legal status of the child/young person in care, e.g. Emergency Protection Order, Full or Interim Care Order, remanded, curfew conditions, etc.
 - Previous behavior patterns e.g. a history of absence and quick return.
 - Is there a suspicion that the child is being exposed to sexual exploitation?

- The child's state of mind/perceived risk. Is the child likely to self-harm or attempt to commit suicide? Does the child see risks in a balanced way?
- If resident in a Children's Unit, group behavior at the time of the absence.
- Whether the young person is perceived as running to someone or running from a situation.
- Any physical, learning disabilities or special needs the child may have which increase the risk to them.
- Is the child vulnerable due to age or any other factor?
- Is the child suspected to be the victim of a significant crime in progress, e.g. abduction?
- Are there family /relationship problems or recent history of family conflict, including domestic abuse?
- Are they in the company of a person who may cause them harm?
- Do they require essential medication which is not likely to be available?
- Is there on-going bullying or harassment, e.g. racial, sexual, homophobic or local community concerns and/or cultural issues?
- Do they pose a threat of harm to others?
- The time of day of the missing episode.
- Are there drug or alcohol dependency or substance misuse concerns?
- Any other particular circumstances at the time of the incident influencing the risk assessment?

7.7 The assessment of risk is a dynamic process and should be challenged at every point during any absence. Circumstances can change quickly with the risk assessment needing to be reconsidered.

A child who is considered to be Absent

7.8 If the young person's whereabouts are known or suspected, Local Authority staff will decide whether to allow the young person to remain at that location, albeit temporarily, or to arrange for their return. If the decision is to arrange their return and there is reason to believe that there may be public order difficulties, the police may assist.

7.9 In circumstances where a child is late or runs away from a placement, it is not anticipated that the first response of a carer would be to report the child as missing to the police.

7.10 A clear judgement needs to be made in each individual case as to the length of time that elapses before a child, who is absent, is reported as missing. This time period is also dependent on any risk assessment or care plan for that child, which may contain information requiring an early report to the police and that this should be classified as a missing person episode.

7.11 The initial responsibility for this judgement must rest with the carer.

7.12 However, it will not be appropriate for any child whose whereabouts are not known and who cannot be contacted, to remain out overnight, without being formally reported as missing to the police.

- 7.13 It is the responsibility of the senior carer on duty to continually review the circumstances of a child who falls in the category of absent. When a maximum period of 4 hours has been reached and the child has not returned or located, it is the senior carer's responsibility to contact the police to conduct a further risk assessment and consider whether the child should be recorded as a missing person.
- 7.14 A period of 4 hours should normally be regarded as the maximum period for any child, whose whereabouts are not known and who cannot be contacted. At this stage they should decide whether the person remains as absent or is recorded as missing. This should involve a further risk assessment between the police and the person reporting. This assessment should remain under regular review with agreed timescales between the police and the person reporting to discuss in further detail.
- 7.15 However, if the child has been absent on 3 occasions within the previous 4 weeks then the local agreement for Durham is that the child should be recorded and dealt with as a MISSING person.

A child who is considered to be Missing

- 7.16 A missing child is where the child's location or reason for absence is unknown and, taking all the circumstances into account, there is cause for concern for the child or potential danger to the public.
- 7.17 **IF THERE ARE CONCERNS THAT THE CHILD IS A VICTIM OF CRIME OR AT IMMEDIATE DANGER THEN THE POLICE SHOULD BE CONTACTED IMMEDIATELY.**
- 7.18 Reporting a child missing involves recording detailed information to the police on the missing person report, including completion of the risk assessment (see Appendix A). It is important that the carer makes it clear to the police that they are reporting a child as missing and not as absent'. The carer should always ask for, and record a police incident log reference number.
- 7.19 When receiving a missing person report, the police will tailor their response to the circumstances and the level of risk identified. If information is available to suggest a possible location of the missing person, and this gives rise to concerns about the safety of the young person, the police response will be to immediately address those concerns, perhaps postponing the administrative recording duties for a short time in favour of safeguarding.

Risk classifications employed by the Police in Missing person investigations

- 7.20 While the decision to report a child as 'missing' ultimately lies with the carer, the decision about the risk level attributed to the missing report lies with the police. In making both decisions, dialogue between carers and police is paramount. The carer will provide information about risk factors for the subject on the missing person report and risk assessment. After considering this and other information, the police will decide the risk level to be assigned to the investigation.

HIGH

- The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the child or young person is in danger through their own vulnerability
- or may have been the victim of a serious crime

OR

- The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger.

MEDIUM

- The risk posed is likely to place the child or young person in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others.

LOW

- There is no apparent threat of danger to either the child or young person or the public.

7.21 **Premises Search:** For a child missing from a foster placement, a premises search will be undertaken by police officers. For a child reported missing from a Children's home, the police will ask the senior care manager responsible for the unit to verify that a thorough premises search has been conducted by care staff. This must include all areas/spaces where the person could conceal themselves, including outbuildings and vehicles. The police have the discretion to also conduct a premises search if deemed appropriate.

Responsibilities of the Local Authority and Foster carers when children in care are reported missing

7.22 Before reporting a child missing to the police it will normally fall to carers to:

- To be in a position to advise the police around any important 'leads' (i.e. mobile phones, diaries, letters, notes explaining absence, email and website activity etc), which may inform the investigation and/or assist in protecting or recovering the child.
- Speak with other residents in a Children's home to obtain relevant information about the missing child.
- Make all appropriate telephone enquiries to attempt to locate the child. This will involve trying to contact the child themselves, friends, family, associates, appropriate locations, local hospitals and the local police custody office.
- Where feasible and reasonable to do so, carers should visit possible locations to find the missing child if safe to do so.

7.23 **Foster carers and staff from children's homes, both Local Authority or private,** will be expected to complete a missing person report and risk assessment (Appendix A) which they will give to the first officers attending. The same level of response should be given for children who are placed in foster care by another Local Authority or Independent provider.

- 7.24 Even after reporting a child missing to the police, Children's Services remain responsible for the child in their care.
- 7.25 Carers and the child's social worker will be responsible for liaising with the police, taking an active interest in the investigation and passing on all information, which may help to inform the investigation and assist in protecting the child while absent.
- 7.26 Carers and the child's social worker should continue to make appropriate enquiries with other residents in a Children's home, or by telephone, with all persons who may be able to assist with the investigation, unless they are requested not to do so by the police. All information gleaned from these enquiries should be passed to the police and a written record maintained of all enquiries completed and the results.
- 7.27 In certain circumstances the police may need to revisit the responsibilities initially performed by care staff. When necessary, they will do so in liaison with appropriate children's services staff and will do so sensitively, causing as little disruption as possible to the establishment and residents.
- 7.28 In following these procedures, residential carers and social workers must keep a full record of all actions taken and messages received and given. Police will likewise keep a record of all aspects of their investigation.
- 7.29 **Media Strategy** In some cases, where a missing child is considered to be particularly vulnerable or has been missing for a long period, it may be necessary to publicise the case via the media. Such a decision is not routine, but is usually a response to very serious concerns for the child's safety. Either carers or the police may suggest such an approach. Normally, such decisions to publicise will be made jointly and, where appropriate, in consultation with parents and Children's Services. The decision to publicise a child/young person who is Looked After or known to Children's Services must be made by the Head of Service, based on a full briefing and in liaison with the police.
- 7.30 Where agreement over publicity cannot be reached between Police and the Local Authority, the ultimate decision on publicity is that of the Police. However, the Police must have cogent reasons to publicise against the wishes of the Local Authority and these reasons must be recorded.
- 7.31 Wherever possible there should be an appropriate time-scale to enable those with parental responsibility to be informed and forewarned so that the first they hear of the young person being missing is not through the media presentation.
- 7.32 Unless absolutely necessary the young person will not be identified as a young person in care.
- 7.33 The Police may also utilise other website opportunities such as the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (www.missingkids.co.uk) to publicise the absence of the child or young person.

Informing others

7.34 Whenever a child goes missing from a Children's home or foster care, irrespective of whether the child's placement is arranged through Durham Local Authority or by a private or independent provider on behalf of another Local Authority, the lead person on duty, or the foster carer, must ensure that the following are informed without delay:

- The parents/those who have parental responsibility (unless indicated otherwise on the care plan).
- The social worker or the accountable team manager.
- The Emergency Duty Team, if out of hours, and the social worker and accountable team manager the next working day.
- The County Durham Youth Offending Service if actively involved

7.35 If the child/young person remains missing for longer periods, then other managers must be informed as follows:

- For any absence over 24 hours, the Strategic Manager Looked after Children.
- For any absence of 3 days or more, the Head of Service.

8 Summary of key responsibilities during any missing person investigation:

8.1 **Responsibility of parents and carers – parents and those with parental responsibility** would be expected to undertake actions, identified below, to locate the missing child, **prior** to making a report of a missing person to the police:

- Search bedroom/accommodation/outbuildings/vehicles/grounds and immediate locality.
- Contact known friends and relatives where the child could be.
- Telephoning and sending an SMS (text) message to the young person's mobile phone and checking their Facebook page (and/or other social media sites) if this is accessible.
- Checking the places frequented by the young person (and the last place found if missing previously)
- attending at addresses frequented by the young person to see if they are there (and the last place found if missing previously)
- making enquiries with the young person's relatives
- making enquiries with the young person's friends
- making enquiries with the young person's school, college, providers of education or work placement, community groups or places of worship if appropriate.
- making enquiries with the other young people in the foster home or residential home.
- making enquiries with and obtaining further information from other carers and professionals involved with the young person.

- 8.2 **All agencies/members of the public** – if it comes to the notice of any agency that a child falls into the category of a missing person, they must advise the parent/carer to report this matter to the police and, if necessary, follow this up by contacting the police to verify that the child has been reported missing.
- 8.3 **The Police** – upon receiving a report of a child missing from home or care, the police will take the investigative lead, undertake their own risk assessment and carry out enquiries proportionate to the level of risk identified, at Section 7.7, to locate the child as soon as possible. These responsibilities will be discharged in accordance with the Durham Constabulary Missing person policy which outlines the tactical police responses and investigative lead. It may be the case that the lead responsibility for the missing person investigation rests with a Constabulary other than Durham Constabulary. This is likely to occur when it is more practical for another Constabulary to take the investigative lead, as the missing person is more likely to be located in that area. However, in these circumstances, Durham Constabulary will continue to maintain effective liaison with all parties.
- 8.4 If subsequent police enquiries were to identify wider safeguarding risk factors at the home or placement address, then LSCB child protection procedures will be implemented in the normal manner. If, on locating the child, the police decide it is not appropriate to return the child to the home address or placement, options should be discussed with Children and Young People's Services to identify suitable responsible adult(s) and/or accommodation.
- 8.5 **Recording** – a police incident log must be opened on all occasions when a child is reported as absent or missing, although the police may only monitor not investigate absent reports initially. The police incident log must remain open until the SLEUTH missing person report/log is opened or the child is located. The incident log must then be closed. Responsibility for completing a missing person report on SLEUTH lies with the officer deployed to take the initial missing person report.
- 8.6 **Sharing Missing Information** – the police will notify the First Contact Service, acting as a single point of contact, for all missing children recorded on SLEUTH. This will be done daily via an automated e-mail process. This information will be shared at the time the child is reported missing and simply provides a record that the police have commenced a missing person investigation. A further automated report to the First Contact Service will follow when the child has been found and the police have completed their safe and well check.
- 8.7 **Sharing Absent information** – the Police will notify the Local Authority of all reports of absent. This will be completed automatically when the incident log is closed. Communications Staff will also record the incident on SLEUTH intelligence using the following format for example:

“absent report – DHM-01012001-0001 refers”

8.8 When the First Contact is unavailable through out of hours, weekends or bank holidays, and the initial police investigation and supervisory oversight raises concerns that the threshold of “significant harm” has been met, then police contact should be made with the Emergency Duty Team to discuss the referral, rather than await the return of the First Contact. Under these circumstances the Emergency Duty team will undertake appropriate enquiries in accordance with normal practice. This will not extend to the Emergency Duty Team completing a return interview, the coordination for this will follow the guidance outlined in Section 9, on the return to duty of the First Contact.

8.9 **Police Safe and Well Checks** – once a missing child has been located, the police will carry out a Police Safe and Well check unless:

- The child has returned to their placement.
- A return interview strategy has been agreed beforehand with the Local Authority; AND
- A suitable individual has been identified to conduct this return interview on behalf of the Police.

A Safe and Well check will involve the police physically meeting with and talking to the child. The purpose of the check is to assess their immediate welfare, whether the child has suffered harm, where and with whom they have been, and to give them the opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them. Any criminality or offences disclosed will be investigated by the police appropriately. This Safe and Well Check is NOT a formal return interview which is the responsibility of Children’s Services (see section 9 below).

8.10 A safe and well check will not be conducted by the Police in relation to those who are classified as Absent throughout the reporting timeframe.

8.11 **Sharing Return Information** – the officer responsible for the safe and well check will ensure finalisation of the Sleuth missing person record even when the check may have been conducted on behalf of the Police by a suitable individual identified by a return interview strategy. The Sleuth record will provide details of where/when the child was found, information surrounding the reason for absence and other general circumstances behind the missing episode. The reporting officer will also identify any risks to the child during their absence, such as the potential for the child to have been a victim or perpetrator of a crime, as well as the risk of being sexually exploited, or, of being in contact with anyone who poses a risk to children. The level of detail in the Sleuth record will take cognisance of the criteria for undertaking a return interview, outlined at paragraph 9.7, which remains the responsibility of the Local Authority.

8.12 The completed Sleuth record will subsequently be examined by the dedicated Detective Sergeant for the Central Referral Unit in Durham Constabulary who will consider the referral against all the information retained on police systems for that child. Following this examination, the Detective Sergeant will assess whether the threshold of “significant harm” has been met and, if this was the case, existing LSCB child protection and safeguarding procedures will be followed. Given the links between missing children and sexual exploitation, the assessment of the Detective Sergeant will also consider whether the risk

indicators of sexual exploitation are evident and follow existing LSCB child protection procedures.

- 8.13 Where the missing child is placed in County Durham, but is the responsibility of a Local Authority outside of County Durham, the First Contact will ensure that the information is also passed to a relevant person in that authority by the most appropriate communication channel and make a request that a return interview is actioned by that authority.
- 8.14 **Cancellation of the Missing Person on SLEUTH** – once the missing child has been seen by the police, they will be cancelled by the Police as a missing person.
- 8.15 **Return Interviews (see also section 9 below)** – the Local Authority is responsible for deciding whether a return interview is necessary for each missing episode. Where a return interview uncovers the commission of criminal offences, previously unknown to the police, then Durham Constabulary should be contacted on 0345 6060365, to commence an appropriate and timely investigation.
- 8.16 Where a return interview identifies child protection concerns, then LSCB child protection procedures should be implemented in the normal way.

Return of the Missing Person

- 8.17 For Looked After Children, it is the responsibility of the Local Authority to arrange for the young person's return.
- 8.18 However, there will be circumstances when, in the interests of the safe and speedy return of the young person, the police may agree to requests from the relevant Local Authority to assist. The police should not unreasonably withhold assistance in cases involving local recovery and transport for vulnerable children.
- 8.19 It is the responsibility of the parent or carer to contact the police and to confirm that the missing child has returned. The police will undertake a Safe and Well check for all children who have returned (including those in care). Once the child has been physically seen by the police, this will lead to the police closing the missing person investigation. This Safe and Well check is not a formal Return Interview which is the responsibility of the Local Authority.
- 8.20 If it is apparent, upon the return of a young person, that they have been the victim of a crime whilst absent, or that they may be in danger or at risk from any person, arising out of circumstances that have occurred whilst they were absent, then the police must be called and asked to attend without delay. This is vital for the protection of the child and for the speedy recovery of evidence.
- 8.21 In such circumstances, the missing persons 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 sought from the police. If carers become aware of the location of the scene of any crime committed against the young person, or of the location of

any crucial evidence (e.g. a used condom) they must notify the police without delay. This will enable the police to take steps to secure and preserve evidence.

- 8.22 In cases where there are concerns regarding sexual assault, the police have access to specially trained officers, doctors and facilities designed to care for the victim and obtain evidence.
- 8.23 Where the circumstances of the missing person episode indicate that the child may have been subject to, or at risk of, significant harm, a safeguarding referral must be made under the Local Safeguarding Children Board Child Protection Procedures. These can be accessed on the LSCB website (www.durham-lscb.org.uk).
- 8.24 It should be noted that if any one agency or professional has increased or serious concerns for a child's well-being or safety, then they may call a multi-agency meeting at any time, regardless of the number of missing episodes and in accordance with the meeting structures identified at Section 12.
- 8.25 When a young person returns to the placement, it is the responsibility of the carers to notify any person of the return under Informing Others.

9 Return Interviews – Safety, assessment and information-gathering

- 9.1 **'Return Interview'** is the term applied to the actioning of a safety, needs and risk assessment of the child, in accordance with the Department for Education statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care 2014.
- 9.2 The return interview is important in safeguarding the child for the future. It must not be viewed as a routine or administrative task. The interview is an opportunity to uncover information that can help protect children from the risk of going missing again, from risks they have been exposed to while missing or from risk factors in their home.
- 9.3 A return interview record has been developed and should be used for this purpose (Appendix C). This record is also used to identify the follow up action taken following the interview, such as assessments required or the support required from other agencies. Where there is a SSID record for a child then follow up action should be recorded in the child's case notes. This is essential to inform future assessments for the child.
- 9.4 Generally the practice in Durham is that the return interview is conducted by a social worker. Whilst this is acceptable practice, Department for Education statutory guidance indicates that a child should be offered the opportunity for the interview to be undertaken by an independent person. This should be established before the interview commences and if an independent interview is requested then arrangements should be made to progress this.
- 9.5 In Durham the Barnardo's outreach worker for sexual exploitation can be contacted to undertake independent return interviews as well as NYAS.

- 9.6 It is acknowledged that a returning child may well share aspects of their experience with different people. Children and young people run away for a variety of reasons, but whatever the reason, running away is often a sign that something is wrong in the child's or young person's life. It is the responsibility of all agencies therefore, to attend to issues of immediate safety, future support and safeguarding needs, and information-sharing in a way which respects and safeguards children and young people.
- 9.7 Where children refuse to engage with the interviewer, parents and carers should be offered the opportunity to provide any relevant information and intelligence of which they may be aware.
- 9.8 The purpose of the interview is:
- 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” – either before they ran away or whilst missing.
 - Understand and try to address the reasons why the child ran away
 - Help the child feel safe and understand that they have options to prevent repeat instances of them running away
 - Provide them with information on how to stay safe if they choose to run away again, including helpline numbers
- 9.9 In some circumstances the child may make extremely sensitive disclosures that the interviewer feels may need particularly careful management. If so, the person conducting the interview may record that there are sensitive matters disclosed by the child, which are not being shared on the interview record. These disclosures should be the subject of a separate record retained by the placement. In such circumstances it will usually be appropriate for the interviewer to discuss such cases with the child's social worker and the relevant Police Safeguarding Unit Detective Sergeant for the area. Such records must be kept securely, yet accessible, in the event of a future missing episode, when they may become relevant to the investigation to recover and safeguard the child.
- 9.10 Criteria for undertaking a return interview - the Local Authority is responsible for deciding whether a return interview is conducted. Return interviews will be undertaken for every missing person incident, if any of the criteria below apply. These criteria reflect the Department for Education statutory guidance as well as additional Durham criteria:
- Been missing overnight or for over 24 hours
 - Been missing on two or more occasions.
 - Is frequently away from placement (or their home) without authorisation
 - Engaged or believed to be engaged in criminal activities during their absence.
 - Been hurt or harmed whilst they have been missing.
 - Known mental health issues.
 - Known risk of sexual exploitation or trafficking
 - Has contact with persons posing risk to children.
 - For every missing episode where a child is looked after or subject to child protection listing.

- 9.11 All police Sleuth records relating to the return of children missing from home and care, will be sent to the First Contact, in the first instance. The First Contact will progress the request for a return interview, in accordance with paragraphs 9.10 inclusive, within one working day.
- 9.12 **Cases open to a social worker** – in these circumstances, the First Contact will notify the relevant Team Manager and Social Worker, who will take responsibility for undertaking the return interview. The Team Manager will ensure that the return interview is carried out to a suitable standard. The interview must be conducted by a person independent of the care placement. This can be the child's social worker or, where appropriate, can be independent of Children's Services, for example through the service of NYAS or Barnardo's. Account should also be taken of any preference the young person has for the conducting of the return interview, as well as the gender of the young person.
- 9.13 When it is not practicable for a return interview to be conducted by the most suitable person, or an independent person, it is better that an interview is conducted by any care professional than no interview being conducted at all.
- 9.14 **Cases which are not open** – in these circumstances, where the child or young person is not an open case and meets the criteria for a return interview, the return interview will be completed by the Community Support Team or by the Young People's Service, if the child is no longer in statutory education. Following the return interview, if an initial assessment is required, the Community Support Team will advise the First Contact.
- 9.15 **Looked after children who are located in Durham following placements by another Local Authority** – in these circumstances the First Contact will be responsible for informing the placing (originating) Local Authority. The expectation will be that the placing authority will undertake the return interview, unless distance precludes this possibility. In these circumstances, the placing authority can negotiate with the First Contact for a Durham team to complete the return interview on their behalf. When this occurs the Durham Community Support Team will complete the interview. All appropriate paperwork will then be shared with the "originating" Local Authority.
- 9.16 In the event of a dispute with the placing authority in respect of the accountability to complete a return interview, the First Contact should refer the circumstances to the Strategic Manager for Looked After Children, who will make appropriate contact with the placing Local Authority to resolve the matter.
- 9.14 **Children who do not meet the criteria for a return interview** – in those circumstances where a child does not meet the criteria for a return interview then support, appropriate information and signposting to appropriate services will be offered to the family, by telephone contact, by the Community Support Team. The Community Support Team will cross reference with the single assessment framework process and liaise with the lead professional, where appropriate.

- 9.15 All return interviews will be conducted within a maximum of 3 working days after the receipt of the police Sleuth missing person report cancellation.
- 9.16 **Recording of return interviews and monitoring compliance** – where there is an existing SSID record, all return interviews undertaken will be recorded on SSID within “Appointments and visits,” under the relevant code “RTHI.”
- 9.17 The Community Support Team will monitor and manage the SSID database for the undertaking of return interviews and produce quarterly performance information for the attention of the Missing and Exploited sub group (see Section 12).
- 9.18 Accountability for ensuring that timely return interviews are undertaken rests with the relevant Team manager, from either the Community Support Team or Children’s Services, dependent upon whether the case is open or closed. The Team manager should sign off all return interviews in the appropriate section of the return interviews form. Team managers should also ensure that all records of return interviews are appropriately retained within that team or the child’s case file, for subsequent audit purposes. Team managers will be required to complete a monthly audit tool (Appendix D) of the return interviews undertaken. Once completed, this will be forwarded to the Community Support Team to provide performance updates to the Missing and Exploited sub group.
- 9.19 Where a return interview leads to a disclosure that needs specific action, for example to investigate a crime against the young person, or may require measures to safeguard the child, the matter should be referred as follows:
- In urgent cases to the police, via telephone on 101.
 - The child’s social worker should also be informed (if urgent and out of hours, EDT)
- 9.20 Whilst it remains the responsibility of the relevant social worker to ensure completion of the return interview record, there is an additional responsibility on the child’s placement to monitor that they are conducted within agreed timescales. In the event that the return interviews are not completed within 72 hours, then the placement should alert the relevant senior manager in Children’s Services.
- 9.21 Updating the police following the return interview – The social worker completing the interview is responsible for e-mailing copies of part 1 and 2 of the interview record to the Durham Constabulary Central Referral Unit using the address requestforchecks@durham.pnn.police.uk This is necessary as information from the interview may be useful to the police if there were to be further missing person reports. The police also require this information to make decisions on the risk classification and to progress future investigations.

10. Missing persons and out of area placements

- 10.1 These procedures recognise that children and young people, placed in County Durham from another Local Authority, also feature frequently in both the report of absences and missing episodes. These procedures are intended to ensure that “placing” Local Authorities recognise their responsibility to ensure the effective management of any placements.
- 10.2 All Local Authorities are required to formally notify Durham County Council of any Looked after child placed in County Durham, in accordance with the Arrangements for placement of children regulations 1991. Details of the placement plan, including a risk assessment, should be shared with Durham County Council at the time of placement. In those cases where a child has a history of being absent from any placement, this information should also be made available to Durham County Council.
- 10.3 It is the responsibility of the placing authority to manage and implement the care plan for any child placed within County Durham. This responsibility extends to missing person episodes, with the placing authority having responsibility for the coordination of care plan meetings to address missing person episodes. Durham Constabulary and the First Contact in Durham will be invited to attend these meetings.
- 10.4 Where any child or young person is located in Durham, following a placement by another Local Authority and is reported missing on repeated occasions, then this child will be subject to referral and discussion at the Missing and Exploited sub- group (see section 12). Any continued concerns regarding the welfare of that child/young person will involve the Strategic Manager for Looked After Children contacting the relevant Local Authority or, in the case of serious continued concerns, the relevant Local Safeguarding Children Board.

11 Finding young people who are not reported as missing

- 11.1 When young people are located in circumstances where identified risk factors are evident, but have not been reported missing to the police by their families or carers, further investigation might be warranted. It may be necessary to consider police protection and enquire into whether there are any continuing child protection concerns, or whether the young person and their family or carers should be offered family support services.

12 Looked after children who may have been trafficked from abroad

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

- 12.2 The assessment of need to inform the care plan will be particularly critical in these circumstances and should be done immediately as the window for intervention is very narrow. The assessment must seek to establish:
- relevant details about the child’s background before they came to the UK;
 - an understanding of the reasons why the child came to the UK;
 - and an analysis of the child’s vulnerability to remaining under the influence of traffickers.
- 12.3 In conducting this assessment, it will be necessary for the local authority to work in close co-operation with the UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC) and immigration staff familiar with patterns of trafficking into the UK. Immigration staff who specialise in trafficking issues should be able to advise on whether information about the individual child suggests that they fit the profile of a potentially trafficked child.
- 12.4 Provision may need to be made for the child to be in a safe place before any assessment takes place and for the possibility that they may not be able to disclose full information about their circumstances immediately. The location of the child should not be divulged to any enquirers until their identity and relationship with the child has been established, if necessary with the help of police and immigration services. In these situations the roles and responsibilities of care providers must be fully understood and recorded in the placement plan. Proportionate safety measures that keep the child safe and take into account their best interests should also be put in place to safeguard the child from going missing from care or from being re-trafficked.
- 12.5 It is essential that the local authority continues to share information with the police and immigration staff, concerning potential crimes against the child, the risk to other children, or other relevant immigration matters.
- 12.6 Department for Education guidance: ‘Safeguarding Children Who May Have Been Trafficked’ contains practical guidance for agencies.
- 12.7 Where it is suspected that a child has been trafficked, they should be referred by the local authority into the UK’s victim identification framework, the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). Potential child victims do not need consent to this referral. Any subsequent decisions during the NRM do not replace or supersede established child protection processes, which should continue in tandem. Referrals made in relation to children should be made on the child NRM referral form. The [referral form and guidance notes](#), include a list of potential indicators of children who may have been trafficked.
- 12.8 The NSPCC Child Trafficking Advice Centre provides specialist advice and information to professionals who have concerns that a child may have been trafficked. Phone 0808 800 5000 Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm; email help@nspcc.org.uk; or web www.nspcc.org.uk

13 Prevention opportunities to address repeat absences

- 13.1 Durham County Council and Durham Constabulary will monitor missing person reports of individual children, as well as the profile of missing person reports originating from residential establishments and foster care. Close monitoring will not only serve to identify what may be escalating safeguarding risks to children but will also address inefficiency for those services having to respond to repeat missing episodes.
- 13.2 Both local and more strategic meetings, described below, are intended to identify an escalating system of interventions, in an attempt to reduce missing person reports. However, practitioners who operate within these meeting structures should ensure that the business of the meeting is in line with the intended focus.
- 13.3 Strategy meeting – the term “strategy meeting” should only be used for those occasions where the threshold of risk, arising from a missing person incident(s) is considered to reach the level of “significant harm”. Where this is the case existing Section 47 LSCB child protection procedures take precedence and follow a process of referral, information sharing and the convening of a strategy meeting.
- 13.4 **Care Planning Meetings** - these meetings, previously referred to as the “intervention or trigger meetings” are convened to discuss repeat missing person reports for children who are in residential or foster care. A Care Planning meeting is convened when any of the following criteria occur:
- A child or young person is reported as missing on 3 occasions within a 3 month period.
 - There has been a significant change in runaway behaviour.
 - A serious concern has arisen following a single runaway event.
 - However, if the threshold of “significant harm” is reached then LSCB child protection procedures take precedence
- 13.5 A care planning meeting may also take place if any agency or professional expresses serious concern about the level of any child’s absconding behaviour. The ability to convene a care planning meeting is also available for children/young people who are open cases to Children’s services under Section 17 of the Children Act.
- 13.6 It is the responsibility of the social worker to coordinate a care plan meeting within 3 working days of a notification. A care plan meeting **MUST** take place regardless of whether a Looked after Review has already taken place, or any other meeting has been convened in relation to the child/young person.
- 13.7 Attendance at a care plan meeting should involve key partners who may have an interest in the missing child. Attendance, suggested below, is not intended to be prescriptive. However, it is considered that the following representation offers the nucleus of an effective meeting:
- Social worker.
 - Team manager.

- Foster carer/residential key worker.
 - Neighbourhood policing Inspector or delegate.
 - Young person (if appropriate).
 - The County Durham Youth Offending Service if actively involved
- 13.8 The social worker has the discretion to invite other representation, if it is considered appropriate.
- 13.9 Care plan meetings are specifically intended to consider those children/young people who frequently absent themselves from a placement without permission. The meeting would consider all relevant information in respect of the child/young person.
- 13.10 Links to Child Sexual Exploitation - Research has shown that there are links between missing person episodes and child sexual exploitation. Care planning meetings should consider this possibility and if this was the case then the Local Safeguarding Children Board child protection procedures on sexual exploitation should be followed.
- 13.11 If any one agency or professional considers that a care plan meeting should be called outside of these criteria, this request should be made to the relevant social worker.
- 13.12 In relation to the management of individual children's homes, it is good practice for the Registered manager to organise regular meetings with the police to maintain working relationships and address any issues in relation to young people or the community as appropriate. These meetings are not intended to replace the need for specifically arranged Care planning meetings.
- 13.13 Missing and Exploited Operational Group – this is an operational forum of multi-agency managers and practitioners and which meets monthly. The meeting operates to a County level. The functions of the group include:
- To assess the frequency of missing episodes for repeat runaways and ensure that safeguards are in place to address the child's behaviour.
 - To assess the frequency of missing episodes from local authority residential and foster care as well as the private sector, identify locations with high incidence and ensure that processes are in place to address this.
 - To assess new referrals for sexual exploitation over the preceding period and ensure that child protection procedures are being followed through prevention and disruption planning
 - To brief the strategic LSCB Missing and Exploited sub group and/or the Durham Constabulary peer review group on any matter concerning missing and exploited children where additional support from strategic managers is necessary.
- 13.14 **Missing and Exploited sub-group reporting to the Local Safeguarding Children Board** – this is a strategic forum of senior managers from relevant partners, who have been identified as the lead person for their agency for children missing from home or care. The sub group meets quarterly and is chaired by the strategic manager for Looked after children who is the senior

responsible manager in the Local Authority for missing and sexually exploited children. The meeting operates to a County level remit and has responsibility for monitoring the incidence of both missing children and child sexual exploitation. The functions of this sub group include:

- Consider compliance and practice issues relevant to these operating procedures.
- Consider performance management information captured for these procedures.
- Consider the profile of missing person episodes from both residential and foster care.
- Consider repeat missing person episodes for some children. In this regard, Durham Constabulary and Durham County Council routinely monitor repeat missing person reports and, where it is considered more strategic action is required, can discuss these children at this forum.
- Coordinate strategic partnership working to tackle child sexual exploitation in accordance with any LSCB action plan.
- To track and monitor cases of child sexual exploitation that come to the attention of any agency.
- Provide periodic updates to the LSCB around performance.

13.15 Attendance at this meeting involves senior agency representation as follows:

- Strategic Manager for Looked After Children (Chair).
- Strategic Manager for Child protection.
- Access and Inclusion.
- LSCB Development officer
- Designated Nurse Safeguarding Children.
- Countywide Manager County Durham Youth Offending Service.
- Service Manager for Residential Services.
- Police Head of Safeguarding and/or Police missing person's champion.
- Barnardo's
- Team Manager Community Support Team
- Nurse consultant contraception and sexual health
- Safer Communities Operations manager
- Named Nurse North tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation trust
- Secondary Heads Association
- Strategic manager Special Educational Needs
- Service manager for Fostering and Adoption
- County Durham Drug & Alcohol Services

DURHAM CONSTABULARY/DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

MISSING PERSON REPORT

1. Name/Address of reporting Organisation Tel/Fax Number

2. Details of Person Reporting

Name: Date/Time:.....
Job Title/Position: Telephone No.:

3. Missing Status

- Missing adult/child/Youth (under 18 years) A missing child is where their whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character, the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or others
- Absconded from hospital
- Absent (not likely to be at risk and their whereabouts may be known).

Note: if a person is **ABSENT**, the police should not be informed. If the child does not return, the Social Worker or Senior Residential Worker, (in consultation with the designated manager) must re-assess the situation and reach a decision as to whether the child is to be reported as missing. This decision should be made within 4 hours of the initial decision to categorise a child as absent.

4. Details of Person Missing

Name:

Date of Birth: Sex: M/F

Description (height, build, hair style/colour, marks/scars and clothing):

.....
.....
.....

Mobile Phone Number:

Last seen at (time & location):

Last seen by:.....

Name of Parent/Guardian:

Home Address:

.....
.....
.....

Photograph provided to police? YES/NO

Warning Signals (i.e. Drug user, suicidal, violent, etc):

.....
.....

Places Frequented (general areas and specific locations):

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Social Worker Name/Tel:

Is the person held under the Mental Health Act? YES/NO

If YES which section:

.....

Is the Person Arrestable? YES/NO

If YES under what legislation (See Appendix B):

.....

5. Record of previous occasions missing

Date	How long	Where found and circumstances

6. Steps taken by reporting agency to trace the missing person: Actions to consider, searches of home and surrounding area. Has the misper taken items from room eg. Bags, clothing, money? Known associates and family contacted. Previous locations misper found at, checked. Please document.

7.

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RISK ASSESSMENT

To be completed by the reporting agency and handed to the police officer attending to complete the formal missing person report

Consider all of the questions below in order to structure the enquiries and to assist in determining the level of risk. This form will be used to assist the police to establish the risk assessment appropriate for the missing person in accordance with national police guidelines.

RISK ASSESSMENT/DECISION MAKING GUIDE		
Investigative Consideration	Information	Person giving the information
Is the person vulnerable due to age or infirmity or any other similar factor?		
Behaviour that is out of character is often a strong indicator of risk; Are the circumstances of going missing different from normal behaviour patterns?		
Is the person suspected to be subject of a significant crime in progress e.g. abduction?		
Is there any indication that the person is likely to commit suicide?		
Is there a reason for the person to go missing?		
Is there any indication of risk from sexual exploitation?		
Are there any indications that preparations have been made for absence?		
What was the person intending to do when last seen? (e.g. going to the shops or catching a bus and did they fail to complete their intentions?		
Family/relationship problems or recent history of family conflict/abuse?		
Are they the victim or perpetrator of domestic violence?		
Does the missing person have any physical illness of mental health issue?		
Are they on the Child Protection Register? (check with Safeguarding Unit)		
Previously disappeared and suffered or was exposed to harm?		

RISK ASSESSMENT/DECISION MAKING GUIDE		
Investigative Consideration	Information	Person giving the information
Belief that the person may not have the physical ability to interact safely with others or an unknown environment?		
Do they need essential medication that is not likely to be available to them?		
Ongoing bullying or harassment e.g. racial, sexual, homophobic etc. or local community concerns or cultural issues?		
Were they involved in a violent and/or racist incident immediately prior to disappearance?		
School/college/university/employment or financial problems?		
Drug or alcohol dependency?		
Other factors which the officer or supervisor considers should influence risk assessment?		

In consideration of the above factors, their likelihood and seriousness, what level of risk do you consider to be adequate?

- High Risk Missing Person** (The risk posed is **immediate** and there are **substantial** grounds for believing that the subject is **in danger** through their own vulnerability or mental state or the risk posed is **immediate** and there are **substantial** grounds for believing that the public is in danger through the subject's mental state)
- Medium Risk Missing Person** (The risk posed is likely to place the subject in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others)
- Low Risk Missing Person** (There is no apparent threat of danger to either the subject or the public)

Give reasons to substantiate this level of risk:

.....

.....

.....

.....

PERSON COMPLETING:

Last name:..... Date:.....

Time:.....

Signed:.....

Position:.....

MENTAL HEALTH ACT 1983

Section of Act under which admitted or received into guardianship

- Section 2 - (Admitted for 28 days assessment)
- Section 3 - (Admitted for treatment – 6 months)
- Section 4 - (Admitted for 72 hours for emergency assessment)
- Section 5 - (Admitted for 72 hours whilst already patient in hospital)
- Section 7 - (Admitted under guardianship application (No time limit))
- Section 17 - (Granted leave of absence which has been revoked)
- Section 35 - (Remand to hospital for reports)
- Section 36 - (Remand to hospital for treatment)
- Section 37 - (Hospital order made by court – Restriction order may be attached by virtue of Section 41)
- Section 38 - (Interim hospital order made by court)
- Section 47 - (Transferred from prison institution)
- Section 48 - (Transferred from prison/remand centre. Persons not serving sentence of imprisonment e.g. remand centre, remanded in custody, persons detained under Immigration Act 1971)

The above are with and without restriction under Section 41 or 49 of the Act

Section 18 of the Mental Health Act 1983 provides that where patients who are liable to be detained in a hospital, absent themselves without permission, fail to return after leave, or absent themselves without permission from any place where they are required to reside in accordance with the conditions imposed on the grant of leave of absence under that section, they may be taken into custody and returned. **This is a preserved power under section 26 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.** It states:

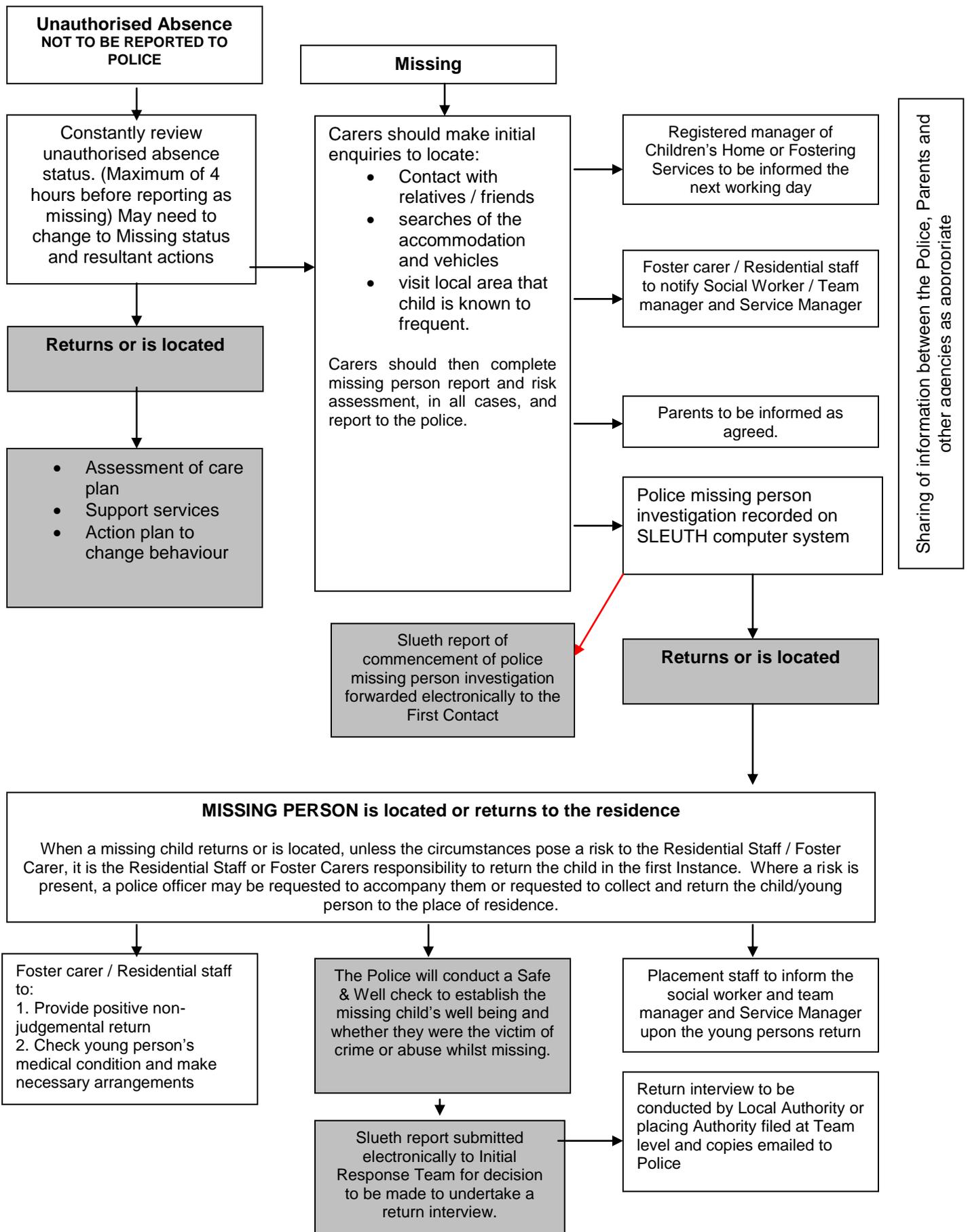
18(1) Where a **patient** who is for the time being liable to be detained under Part II (*which is compulsory admission to hospital or guardianship in sections 2 to 34*) of this Act in a **hospital**

- (a) absents himself from the hospital without leave granted under section 17 (**leave of absence from hospital**) above; or
- (b) fails to return to the hospital on any occasion on which, or at the expiration of any period for which, leave of absence was granted to him under that section, or upon being recalled under that section; or
- (c) absents himself without permission from any place where he is required to reside in accordance with conditions imposed on the grant of leave of absence under that section,

he may, subject to the provisions of this section, be taken into custody and returned to the hospital or place by any **approved social worker**, by any officer on the staff of the hospital, by any **constable**, or by any person authorised in writing by the **managers** of the hospital.

APPENDIX B

Children Missing from Residential and Foster care - FLOWCHART



Missing Children from Home or Care

Welfare Return Interview Record

Criteria for undertaking a return interview

The Local Authority is responsible for deciding whether a return interview is conducted. Interviews will be undertaken for every missing person incident, if **any** of the criteria below apply:

- Have been missing overnight or for over 24 hours.
- Have been missing on two or more occasions, or frequently away from placement or home without authorisation
- Are engaged or believed to be engaged in criminal activities during their absence.
- Have been hurt or harmed whilst they have been missing.
- Known to have mental health issues.
- Known to be at risk of sexual exploitation or trafficking or are in contact with persons posing a risk to children.
- The child is Looked After or subject to a Child Protection Plan.

Completion and Retention of the Welfare Return Interview Record

The return interview consists of Parts 1 and 2 and both should be fully completed. The completed form should be signed off by the appropriated team manager. Part 1 is specific to the child and should be filed with the child's case records. Part 2 should be detached and filed at Team level for future audit purposes.

Sharing information with the police

Parts 1 and 2 of the interview record should also be forwarded to Durham Constabulary using the email address requestsforchecks@durham.pnn.police.uk

Recording the completion of a Return Interview on SSID

Following the completion of a return interview, for a child/young person recorded on SSID, the fact that a return interview record exists will be entered in "Appointments/Visits" under the relevant code "RTHI".

Purpose of the interview is outlined below and should be discussed with the young person:

- Try to reach an understanding of the reasons why the young person went missing.
- Identify any harm that the young person may have suffered; including any harm that may not have been disclosed in the Police Safe and Well Interview.
- Discuss the young person's medical condition and any new need for medical assessment and/or treatment.
- Identify specifically whether there is any suspicion of sexual exploitation.
- Identify actions likely to prevent the young person going missing in the future.
- To provide data which informs patterns, trends and service needs for young people who runaway from home or care.

Consent and Process

A summary of the information shared in this interview will be recorded.

The interview record will be retained by the professional completing the interview and filed within the child's case file. A copy (Part 1 only) should be provided to the young person and where appropriate other professionals.

Children and young people should be offered the opportunity to be interviewed on their own. However, if appropriate, a support person or parent can be present.

Where a child or young person is missing from home, it is good practice to engage the parent in the process. Consent of the parent to undertake the interview should be sought, but is not required in all cases, and is dependent upon the age and understanding of the child or young person.

Missing from Care

In order to inform needs and care planning of young people in care the responsible Social Worker needs to understand the issue causing the child or young person to run away. Therefore agreement will be sought from the young person to send a copy of the interview record – Part 1 to the responsible Social Worker.

Missing from Home

In order to inform needs assessment, information obtained within this interview may need to be shared with others identified as able to offer a support service. Therefore agreement will be sought from the young person to share some or all of the information with their parent and or any relevant professional.

Child Protection

If agreement is not given by the young person, then the information will not be shared, unless there are concerns that the young person themselves or another child or young person will suffer, or be at risk of suffering, significant harm if the information is not shared or acted upon. In this case, the young person will be advised of the need to share the information and their views taken into account as to how the information can be shared to address any safeguarding issues, whilst maintaining as much confidentiality to the young person as possible.

Part 2

This form will be completed as anonymous data and filed within the Team for future audit purposes.

Welfare Return Interview – Part 1	
Missing from HOME <input type="checkbox"/>	Missing from CARE <input type="checkbox"/>
Date of Interview: / /	Venue of Interview:
Does the child request an interview by an independent person?	
Persons Present:	
Young Person's Details	
Name:	DOB: / /
Address:	
Duration of time missing:	Under 12 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 12-24 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 24-72 hours <input type="checkbox"/> Over 72 hours <input type="checkbox"/>
Was this young person reported missing to the Police?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
Part 1 – Interview Record	
Reasons identified by the young person for going missing or running away:	
<p>Talk about: Was this the first time the young person has run away or has this happened before? Did the young person run away alone or with others? What caused them to run away? Did they try to resolve any problem before it caused them to run away and if so why did this not work? In their view was there a trigger for them to run, e.g. were they were running away from something or running to something? Does this trigger still exist?</p>	
Events during missing episode:	
<p>Where did the young person stay? How did they get food, washed, clothing, etc.? Did they get help from anyone whilst they were missing? How long did they stay away for? What led them to return or be found?</p>	
Safeguarding:	
<p>Did the young person feel scared at any time for their own safety or the safety of others? Were they harmed in any way? Did they need any medical help at any time and if so did they get this and where from? Did they feel pressurised or bullied into doing things they were not happy about?</p>	

Analysis	
Do the things that caused the young person to run away still exist? What alternatives to running away might there be? What would the young person like to change which would prevent them from running away again?	
Person undertaking interview	Manager
Signed:	Signed:
Printed Name:	Printed Name:
Designation:	Designation:
Date: / /	Date: / /

Part 2 – Anonymous Data		
Date of Welfare Interview Part 1 undertaken: / /		
<u>Outcome of Interview Part 1 for Child/Young Person Missing from Home</u>		
Unwilling to engage in support services		<input type="checkbox"/>
Referral for CAF		<input type="checkbox"/>
Referral to a specific support agency, e.g. 4Real		<input type="checkbox"/>
Referral to IRT or case already open to IRT		<input type="checkbox"/>
Referral for s47 enquiry as a child at risk of significant harm		<input type="checkbox"/>
Open case to Durham Safeguarding & Specialist Services		<input type="checkbox"/>
Return interview undertaken on behalf of another Local Authority		<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Outcome of Interview Part 1 for Child/Young Person Missing from Care</u>		
Strategy discussion for child identified at risk of significant harm		<input type="checkbox"/>
Age of child/young person	Under 8 years 8-11 years 12-15 years 16-18 years	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Gender	Female Male	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Duration of time young person was missing:	Under 12 hours 12-24 hours 24-72 hours Over 72 hours	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Young person was located or returned through:	Self returned to placement/home Located by care provider Located by Police Located by parent or family member Located by other professional Located by friend	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Any specific area young person known to have gone during missing period, e.g.	Town Centre Name of Town Centre	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Bus/Train Station Name of Station	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Residential Area Post Code/Street Name:	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Specific home address (not within the young person's family network: Full Address:	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other area Name of other area:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Push Pull factors identified (tick one or more boxes)	To see friends or family	<input type="checkbox"/>
	To make contact with friends or family where this has not been agreed within the care plan	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Problems with peers in placement	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Problems with carer/staff in placement	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Problems at school	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Peer pressure from others in placement	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Peer pressure from friends outside of placement	<input type="checkbox"/>

Safeguarding Concerns	Sexual exploitation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is this young person thought to be at risk or involved in any of the following:	Trafficking	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Bullying	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Contact with a person posing a risk to children	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Mental health concerns	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Victim of crime	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Perpetrator of crime	<input type="checkbox"/>
Who did the young person identify they received support from during missing period?	Family	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Friends	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Professional - Voluntary Sector	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Professional - Statutory Sector	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Durham Runaway Service	<input type="checkbox"/>
	National Missing Persons Bureau	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other Local Authority	<input type="checkbox"/>

APPENDIX D

Team Managers Monthly Audit Tool for Missing from Home and Care

Team: _____

Month: _____ Year: _____

The information below can be collated from Part 2 of the return interview records which should have been filed at Team level.

Part 1

Total numbers of return interviews completed during the month for both missing from home and missing from care			
Numbers Missing Under 12 Hours		Numbers Missing 12-24 Hours	
Numbers Missing 24-72 Hours		Numbers Missing over 72 Hours	

Part 2

Numbers unwilling to engage in support services		Numbers referred for CAF	
Numbers referred to a specific support agency, e.g. 4Real		Numbers referred to IRT or case already open to IRT	
Numbers referred for s47 enquiry as a child at risk of significant harm		Numbers of open cases to Durham Safeguarding & Specialist Services	
Numbers of Return interviews undertaken on behalf of another Local Authority		Numbers where SEC 47 Strategy held	
Child Under 8 years		Child 8-11 years	
Child 12-15 years		Child 16-18 years	
Numbers who are Male		Numbers who are Female	
Numbers who Self returned to placement/home		Numbers who were Located by care provider	
Numbers Located by Police		Numbers Located by parent or family member	
Numbers Located by other professional		Numbers Located by friend	

Safeguarding – Numbers Thought to be at risk or involved in:

Sexual exploitation		Trafficking	
Bullying		Contact with a person posing a risk to children	
Mental health concerns		Victim of crime	
Perpetrator of crime			