



Interim* Joint protocol for children who go missing from home or care

Blackburn with Darwen,
Blackpool and Lancashire

Publication Date:
February 2023

Children's
Safeguarding Assurance
Partnership
Blackburn with Darwen - Blackpool - Lancashire

** This interim protocol is reflective of local procedures as at the date of publication. It will be reviewed following a period of 6-12 months to take account of any changes to national guidance and legislation, with a view to becoming a final document.*

Contents

1.	Introduction.....	3
2.	Definitions.....	4
3.	Contact Information	6
4.	Principles	7
5.	Procedures for a missing child.....	7
6.	Return interviews: safety, assessment and information gathering ...	17
7.	Assurance Arrangements.....	19
8.	Appendix A – Definitions	20
9.	Appendix B – Trigger Plan.....	22

1. Introduction

This protocol is important for the safeguarding of children and families across pan-Lancashire, or those using services in the area. It should be read and must be implemented by all practitioners and managers working with children who are at risk of going missing or who are already doing so. It is intended that this protocol will assist in developing robust responses to missing. It should be used to engage partner agencies in developing preventative services for children who are at risk of going missing.

It has been written jointly by the three local authorities in Lancashire, Lancashire Constabulary, and representatives of Health services, on behalf of the Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool and Lancashire Children's Safeguarding Assurance Partnership (CSAP). All agencies responsible for implementing the procedures in this protocol will regularly review and audit its implementation and the CSAP will monitor the effectiveness of the arrangements¹.

The CSAP expects all agencies and care practitioners working with children who are missing to implement this protocol and ensure that all relevant staff are aware of it and how to use it. It should be used for all children.

Scope

The protocol is designed for all practitioners from all agencies and their appointed care representatives that work with children within Lancashire.

The protocol will apply to all children placed within the county or Local Authority boundaries for whom Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, Blackpool Council or Lancashire County Council have continuing responsibilities.

The Local Authority retains responsibility for all children in their care, wherever they are placed. In these cases, the Local Authority will require the placement provider to comply with all Lancashire protocols, as well as established business protocols for that area. It is the requirement that other Local Authorities placing children within Lancashire boundary will adhere to the joint protocol.

Within this context, "children in our care" 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, and children who are otherwise provided with accommodation by Sect 21 Children Act 1989. These include Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) transfers, children on remand and children subject to a supervision order with a residence requirement.

Background

In Lancashire, children go missing for a range of reasons. These children are not always open to services at the point they go missing. For many children, the [push and pull factors](#) are many and varied, and a main push factor appears to be conflict within their carers.

All evidence for children who go missing suggests that the risks for those children further increase. This is by the way of involvement in criminal activities, victims of abuse or victims of crime in respect of modern slavery and trafficking. This for example may include victims of sexual assault and

¹ Lancashire Constabulary will continue to look at Right Care, Right Person as an operating model alongside this protocol.

criminal and sexual exploitation. This therefore increases the risk of children becoming dependent upon and misusing alcohol or substances. It can result in a deterioration of their physical and mental health and results in them not engaging in education or training. This can result in an overall increased vulnerability in respect of their day-to-day functioning.'

2. Definitions

The following definitions apply to this protocol and relate to children who go, or have gone, missing.

A full list of relevant definitions can be found at appendix A.

- Child: Anyone who has not reached their eighteenth birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people'.
- Missing person: *"Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another."* (Association of Chief Police Officers, 2006)

Missing Children Risk Categories

Classification of risk and response

The definition of each relevant category (High and Medium) and what each category means in terms of police operational response is detailed below:

- High risk
The risk of serious harm to the subject or the public is assessed as very likely.
- Medium risk
The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as likely but not serious.

Absent

Following a review of the absent category in October 2020, Lancashire Police and pan-Lancashire Authorities no longer use this terminology for children that are missing. This term should not be used to describe any child missing from any setting.

Children's Advice & Duty Service (CADS) Blackburn with Darwen

The Children's Advice & Duty Service (CADS) has been operational since November 2019. CADS incorporates our well-established Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

CADS is the initial point of contact for contacts / referrals in relation to a child welfare or child protection concern.

CADS provides a robust, social work led approach to identifying vulnerable children and ensuring they are provided with the correct level of support.

Social workers within CADS are responsible for screening all contacts / referrals in order to provide a response, jointly with our partners where appropriate. CADS ensures effective communication

between key agencies where it facilitates appropriate information sharing and immediate and secure access to records and data. CADS determine whether the contact / referral requires further assessment by a Children's Social Care assessment team. CADS also identifies vulnerable children who do not meet the statutory thresholds for social care support and facilitates the signposting to other services and implementation of support via Common Assessment Framework (CAF) where appropriate.

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (Lancashire)

The introduction of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) has provided a more robust approach to identifying vulnerable children and ensuring they are provided with the correct level of support. The MASH has also been successful in identifying vulnerable people who do not meet the statutory thresholds for social care support and facilitates the signposting to other services. This includes the Child and Family Wellbeing Service and other early help partners; Early Intervention Teams, Community Safety Teams, Neighbourhood Policing Teams and Voluntary Organisations.

The MASH is the initial point of contact for a safeguarding alert (sharing of a concern) and is responsible for screening the alerts in order to provide a multi-agency response to determine whether or not the alert requires further investigation by the specialist safeguarding team.

The MASH has led to more effective communication between key agencies as it facilitates appropriate information sharing and immediate and secure access to records and data.

Request for Support Hub (Blackpool)

The 'Blackpool Families Rock' Request for Support Hub has been renamed to reflect the rebalancing of the front door in relation to safeguarding with a focus on Early Support through Targeted Intervention services, and community support. The Request for Support Hub (RfSH) accommodates the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) that sits within the service to ensure multi-agency collaboration and information sharing when there are safeguarding concerns.

RfSH takes referrals from members of the public and professionals requesting a service for a child or family OR raising concerns about risk and/or unmet need. Referrals can be made through an online referral form (or by telephone if there are immediate or significant safeguarding concerns for the welfare of a child).

Concerns about risk or unmet needs lead to enquiries by a social worker ("screening"). Information sharing and discussion within RfSH and with other agencies and the family by telephone. A decision is made about the level of risk/need, whether statutory Children's Social Care assessment is required and what services need to be implemented (if any).

The RfSH is a Children's Services and Early Help Hub that brings together agencies from services that have contact with children at risk to make the best possible use of their combined knowledge to keep them safe from harm. The RfSH is our "one front door" to Children's Social Care and is designed to ensure that referrals are signposted to the appropriate service targeted to meet the needs of children and their families Whilst we have changed the name to reflect how we work with families in Blackpool the Hub still accommodates the MASH that sits within the service to ensure that there is a multi-agency approach to gathering and sharing information where there may be safeguarding concerns to ensure the right response is provided to protect children from further risk of harm.

The RfSH provides a faster, more co-ordinated approach and better-informed decision making to ensure that vulnerable children and families are protected, and those children and families in need of support are responded to timely as agencies work more effectively, efficiently and consistently. It enables those agencies in the RfSH to lawfully and securely share relevant and appropriate information with others so that a true and balanced risk assessment can be made, and appropriate intervention agreed.

3. Contact Information

If you believe that a child is at critical risk or there is a critical concern, this should be reported without delay to the Police service; for emergencies use 999, or for urgent/immediate reporting 101 as well as making contact with Children's Services.

Reporting a child missing from care

All Local Authority Care Homes and care settings acting on behalf of the various Local Authorities will contact the police as follows.

1. In circumstances that are deemed as being High risk. That being defined as 'The risk of serious harm to the subject or the public is assessed as very likely. Then a call on 999 should be made.
2. For all other levels of risk then contact with the police will be made using the 101-telephone system.

Both the 999 and the 101 system will route a call into the Force Control Room. The police will respond as per this protocol and the classification of risk that is applied to the incident.

Notifying Local Authority Children's Services:

- Blackburn with Darwen Council: 01254 666400 (if out of hours: 01254 587547)
- Blackpool Council: 01253 477638 or by emailing missingchildren@blackpool.gov.uk (if out of hours: 01253 477600, or by emailing: outofhours@blackpool.gov.uk)
- Lancashire County Council: 0300 123 6720 (if out of hours: 0300 123 6722)

Notifying relevant Health professionals

Blackpool Teaching Hospitals (Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre)

- For all children: bfwh.contextualteam@nhs.net / 01253 951265

HCRG Care Group (Lancashire)

- The missing child is 'looked after': Vcl.019.lookedafterteam@nhs.net
- The missing child is not 'looked after': Vcl.019.safeguardingteam@nhs.net

- Safeguarding and Children Looked After teams: CFHS.CFHS@lscft.nhs.uk

4. Principles

4.1 This protocol reflects statutory guidance but cannot anticipate every situation. Anyone working with children in a professional capacity MUST show 'professional curiosity' and should be looking at risk and the levels of risk involved for each individual child. Risk not process will always drive what actions need to be taken and deemed necessary to protect and safeguard the child.

4.2 Our joint aim is to prevent the incidence of a child going missing and to ensure their safety at the earliest opportunity. Each missing episode is potentially serious and routed in different and complex issues and every "missing" episode cannot be viewed in isolation from the circumstances of previous lived experience of the child. Any response should be one that is appropriate to the level of risk and also takes account of the needs of the child.

Every "missing" episode should have a robust multi-agency response, reflective of the current lived experience and risks of the child.

Interventions are important in attempting to address repeat missing episodes for all. Interventions for those that are in care must be informed by and reflected in the placement information record and in the care plan. Interventions must also be informed by effective police or care setting safe and well checks, as well as return interviews. All views and concerns of the child will be recorded and reflected in future plans and interventions.

It is vital that we understand 'WHY' they went missing, in order to support them and meet their present and future safeguarding needs, and to seek to prevent further missing episodes. We do this through listening to the child; partnership working (Working Together); information sharing; problem-solving; and performance management.

4.3 Our joint aim is to locate the child and return them to a place safety as soon as possible and prevent them from suffering harm.

4.4 Trauma Informed. ALL the agencies involved in this protocol are working towards being more trauma informed in all policies and practice. This policy has been written up to be a trauma informed protocol.

5. Procedures for a missing child

5.1 Responsibilities of parents/carers

5.1.1 Parents and carers or anyone else caring for the child are required to take reasonable steps to locate the child and ascertain their safety. The Police are entitled to expect that parents and carers undertake the following basic measures to try and locate the missing child prior to contacting the police.

If the child is believed to be at significant risk of harm, then the police should be contacted immediately and continue to follow this protocol. If there are risks related to any of the measures below, this risk should be discussed with the police to identify an appropriate response.

- Have you searched the home address?
- Have you attempted to contact the missing child?

- Have you contacted family and associates?
- Have you checked known addresses and places frequented?
- Have you checked social network sites?
- Have you contacted local hospitals?
- Have checked whether the child has turned up at an education provision if appropriate?

Once initial checks have been completed and the child is known to be 'missing', the police should be informed without delay.

If the child is known to have a Trigger Plan (see section 5.5), this should be passed to the police on report of the missing child. This will enable Lancashire Constabulary to make a quick risk evaluation on each case and make a decision based upon that as to the classification of the investigation and appropriate operational deployment.

Once the deployment has been made and further information obtained from the source of the call then a full Risk Assessment can be made and the appropriate investigation commenced.

Where a child has an allocated Social Worker, the reporting person should then inform Children's Social Care by contacting the allocated Social Worker, if known, or Emergency Duty Teams (EDT) if the missing episode occurs outside of 9-5 working hours.

Whilst a missing person's report to the police is always appropriate when there is an assessed high risk of harm to a child or others; carers and professionals involved with children looked after should always fully consider the circumstances of a child not being where they are expected to be, and the need to make a missing person's report to the police.

5.1.2 Anyone who is in the company of a child without parental knowledge or agreement should also do what is reasonable to safeguard and promote the child's welfare. If it is appropriate the Police will consider advice or issuing a child's abduction warning notice. Section 2 notices apply when an adult allows a child (under 16 years) to be in their company and their actions may be perceived as facilitating that child to be away from the person with parental responsibility without authority. If the child is under local authority care, then a section 49 notice can be issued for those children under the age of 18 years. The issuing of either notice will place a marker on the Police National Computer (PNC) that a child abduction warning notice has been issued and give officer guidance if the child is found in the company of that named adult.

5.1.3 Anyone who 'takes or detains' a child without lawful authority and/or parental consent may be prosecuted under Section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984. The Police may formally warn a person under the abduction legislation prior to prosecution and a subsequent marker may be placed against them on their PNC record.

5.1.4 Children under the age of 16 years old are not legally considered as being able to live independently. For a child over the age of 16 years old, consideration should be given to their legal status, physical and emotional needs when making a judgment as to whether they can live independently. Although a child may have the chronological age of 16/17 years, professionals need to be mindful that emotionally a child may be more immature than their age suggests, especially when they have been subject to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) such as trauma; abuse; children in care or bereavement.

5.2 All agencies / members of the public

5.2.1 If it comes to the attention of any agency that a child's whereabouts is unknown, they must advise the parent/carer/home of their need to carry out the parent/carer enquires as set out at 5.1.1 in this document.

5.2.2 The consent of a person with parental responsibility will be sought for a photograph to be used in any subsequent missing person investigation and at that time, if deemed appropriate then consent for the use of the media in the investigation should be sought.

When a child is known to be at risk of going missing and is open to social care, a trigger plan should be completed to assist the police in locating the child at the earliest opportunity. The 'trigger plan' will be completed on the document as per this protocol, as detailed at section 5.5. The details that are required in the trigger plan are all equally important. The most up to date picture of the child is key. If there are material changes in appearance such as changes in hair style etc then a new picture has to be taken and sent to the police.

The police will store all missing 'trigger plans' in the CONNECT Investigation system against the child's nominal record on that system.

5.2.3 It is important to state that if a child is 'missing' from a family home, foster home or Care Home (Local Authority or Private), the reporting procedures and methodology of investigation remains constant. The initial police risk assessment is the same for all people irrespective of age, care status and the level of parental responsibility, and expectation by the police for those actions outlined above to take place prior to formal reporting, remains constant. This is a Joint Protocol for all children and their safeguarding needs remains the focus for this document.

5.3 Role of the Police

5.3.1 Upon receiving a report from a parent/carer, with responsibility for that child that the location of the child is unknown to them, the police will work with the carer to agree what action needs to be taken both by the carer and/or by the police if appropriate. It may be that, based on information obtained, the police may not record the details as a missing incident at this time, however other policing responses may be identified. The rationale for that decision will be recorded and next steps relayed to the parent/carer.

The Police will at all times work with the parent/carer and assess information presented by the parent/carer and known to the police against its definition of what is a Missing Person. This is done so an accurate risk assessment can be established, and that assessment will then drive the most appropriate response.

Once a child is recorded on the CONNECT police systems as a missing person, Children Social Care will be advised, via the automated system, that the child is officially recorded as missing. A copy of the risk assessment will also be forwarded.

5.3.2 Risk Assessment

Every assessment should reflect the unique characteristics of the child within their family and community context in which they live.

A Risk Assessment is carried out for each missing person episode. This assessment is subject to continuous review whilst under investigation. Key to this is a continuous and open dialogue with all those key elements that form part of the investigation.

The definition of each category (High or Medium) and what each category means in terms of police operational response is detailed above at section 2. No missing child will be classified as "Standard risk".

5.3.3 Child Rescue Alerts (CRA) is a partnership between the police, the media and the public that seeks the assistance of the public where it is feared that there is a real, immediate risk to the life of a child. The aim is to quickly engage an entire community via the media (including social media channels) in the search for a child, an offender or any specified vehicle through reports of relevant information to the police. The CRA is flexible and can be used in a targeted way in one or more specific geographic locations or can be launched immediately on a regional or national level or grown organically as information is received or the level of media response dictates. It is a dynamic tool for consideration by the Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) in the highest risk cases. By the use of the CRA brand, the effectiveness of publicity will be greater and hold more public attention than other high risk media appeals." European countries do have their own individual alert systems but if the UK requested such an alert the request would need to go through INTERPOL so would be classed as INTERPOL enquiry. The NCA will also support enquiries outside the UK in Europe and the wider world.

5.3.4 Wanted or Missing

There will be occasions when a child may be reported as missing who may also be wanted in relation to:

- their suspected involvement in a criminal investigation
- an outstanding warrant or other matter issued by a court
- having absconded from lawful custody/care
- having entered the country without appropriate authority (see immigration cases)

The Police will, working with the reporting lead, evaluate each case on an individual basis and respond appropriately, according to the priority that should be given in those circumstances. For example, if a person is wanted for a minor matter but the missing person risk assessment indicates a high risk, then it may be appropriate to deal with the case as a missing persons enquiry. Conversely a low / medium risk missing person wanted for serious criminal matter it may be more appropriately dealt with as a wanted person and the correct investigative approach applied. The guiding principle is to adopt an approach that will bring both matters to the safest, most efficient conclusion.

The supervisory officer working with the investigating officer will need to consider and decide which response and investigative approach to take based on a risk assessment of the circumstances and should be guided by the national decision model. This decision will be clearly documented.

When completing this risk assessment, police decision makers should consider both the prevailing risk to, and vulnerability of, the missing child and public, as well as the requirement to pursue the individual, detain them, and ensure that they are subject to criminal justice processes. The views of the reporting person should be taken into consideration and the rationale for deciding on whether to treat the person as 'missing' should be discussed with them. Officers making decisions should be particularly mindful of the risks associated with children.

It is important for decision makers to decide how they wish to involve the person reporting the missing person in the investigation. The reporting person may be a source of information to assist in tracing the missing person, they may, however, be acting with dishonest motives. The investigating officers must decide on the most appropriate approach, balancing the needs and risks of the investigation with the duty to keep people with a valid interest in the missing person updated on progress.

If a decision is taken to treat an individual as 'wanted' a missing report will still need to be recorded in order to accurately reflect the appropriate level of investigation for that missing person. A missing person report may be closed or marked as 'inactive' while a 'wanted' investigation continues.

5.4 Role of Health

If the child is in the care of the Local Authority, the relevant LA business support to inform the Children Looked After (CLA) Nurse Team via email to the relevant duty email. The CLA Nurse Duty Practitioner will subsequently liaise with the carers at the placement and offer a visit or call-in order to support the child and assess for any unidentified/unmet health needs, as required. If the child is outstanding their statutory Review Health Assessment, this will also be offered to the child for completion by the most appropriate health Practitioner.

Liaison with other professionals who may be involved with the child's care will take place if appropriate.

If the child is not looked after, (CPP/CIN/Universal) then email the relevant duty email and the allocated health practitioner for that child will be notified. The health practitioner will subsequently liaise with the carers at the placement and offer a visit or call in order to support the child and assess for any unidentified/unmet health needs, as required.

5.5 Considerations for a child who is looked after

5.5.1 On admission to the home

A home/placement planning meeting should be held as soon as practicable, but always within five working days of a child coming into local authority care. A care plan and a home/placement plan based on a full assessment of the child's current and future needs, including potential risk to self or others will be discussed within this. The care plan will therefore take account of any risk that the child may go missing in future and any factors which may increase the risk to the child should they go missing and should include views of child, parents and carers. Where missing is identified as a risk factor for the child, then a trigger plan will be completed using information from the child, parent, carer and all relevant professionals (refer to section 5.5 regarding the Trigger Plan). All information should be included in the placement plan and in the child's care plan.

5.5.2 Children Looked after who are away from their home without authorisation

Sometimes a child in care may be away from their home without authorisation, this is known as unauthorised absence – this is not a missing incident as whereabouts are known. In the event of unauthorised absence, carers should undertake checks in the first instance before informing the allocated social worker or EDT. If authorised absence is not given, the care setting should make every effort to collect the child and return them home. If there is a risk of significant harm to the child, the Police should be contacted for further discussion regarding additional support that may be required.

5.5.3 Review of continued missing episodes

In the event a child has had three missing episodes in 90 days a Missing from Home Risk Management Meeting needs to be convened by the social worker and include: missing person coordinators; parent/carer and child; and other relevant multi-agency professionals involved in the support plan. In the event concerns are raised before this time, a meeting can be held subject to professional judgement upon the level of risk associated with that child. This risk management meeting should address the following:

- Push/ Pull factors of the missing from home episodes;
- Any safeguarding concerns and interventions required;
- Any hotspots of concern;
- Information from return interviews and what we can do to prevent that child going missing again;
- The child's voice and their wishes and feelings;
- Creation/updating of trigger plan;
- When the plan needs to be reviewed.

Through a multi-agency forum, a decision should be made at this meeting, when a review meeting of this plan should be reviewed and the timescale for this. In the event that there is an escalation of concerns prior to this meeting (give examples) this meeting can be brought forward.

The Missing from Home risk management meetings can be incorporated within another multi-agency meeting and do not have to be held separately away from these.

Ensuring the child's participation in these risk management meetings are key and therefore children should be invited where possible however in the event they do not wish to or its not appropriate for them to attend, creative solutions on seeking the child's voice should be considered by the chair of the meeting. Professionals should ensure that sensitive information and intelligence is not discussed in the presence of the child or parent/carer.

Social Workers to chair Missing from Home risk management meetings and where concerns continue or the safety of a child during missing episodes increase, then the Team Manager or the Senior/Service Manager should be invited to attend the next risk management meeting for management oversight.

A Strategy discussion should only be requested if there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm. This might take the form of a multi-agency meeting or phone calls and more than one discussion may be necessary. The purpose of the Strategy Discussion must be for the Local Authority responsible for that child to determine the child's welfare and plan rapid future action.

Strategy meetings for missing children should be held after a period of 48 hours. In the event there are immediate concerns before this then a strategy meeting can be arranged prior to 48 hours dependent on the level of risk associated with that child. In the event professionals do not feel a strategy discussion is required for a missing child after 48 hours, the matter will require Team Manager oversight as to why this decision has been made. Follow up strategy discussions and the timescale for this should be decided within the initial strategy and be decided by the key professionals involved with that child and the level of risk involved with the child's missing episode.

When a strategy meeting is arranged for a child that is missing, the strategy request should be sent to the relevant BCU Referral Manager.

5.5.5 Out of area placements

This applies to children placed within the pan Lancashire area by other authorities. The expectation is that notification by the relevant authority is completed by the placing authority and any relevant documents including the trigger plan, home plan and care plan is shared.

In the event that a child from another local authority is found within the pan Lancashire area and notification has not been received, follow up enquiries will be made to request relevant information from the placing authority.

Care settings should inform the local BCU Missing Person Coordinator of any children placed by another local authority within the pan-Lancs area and share any Trigger Plans that are in place.

When a child is placed outside the pan Lancashire authority areas, the relevant authority will be notified and any relevant documents including the trigger plan, placement plan and care plan is shared.

5.5 Trigger Plan

The purpose for a Trigger Plan (attached at appendix B) is to assist in locating and safeguarding children who go missing from home regularly. The Trigger Plan will articulate what prevention work is being carried out and, on return of the child, what prevention work will be done moving forward. This will help to shape and develop not only future Trigger Plans, but also other plans used within a care setting.

A trigger plan should be completed for a child following three MFH episodes in 90 days, however if there are areas of significant concern such as poor mental health, physical health needs, disabilities or identified push and pull factors which suggests the child may go missing again, a trigger plan should be completed.

A trigger plan is produced by the allocated worker but is supported by all partner agencies who have input or knowledge on the child. This includes their needs, risks and vulnerabilities and will include their basic health information, mental health, information around their peer networks, social media use, key associations and locations where they spend time. Further to this the trigger plan can advise Police on the particular response required for the child when they are located.

The Trigger Plan includes an up-to-date image of the child and needs to be updated as per any new information regarding the child or any significant event. This trigger plan should be reviewed monthly by the allocated worker. However, if there is new information relevant to a child's missing episodes, the trigger plan should be updated as frequently as required. The trigger plan needs to be shared following each update with all partner agencies including foster carers and home setting.

Police can then ensure that the trigger plan is available on their systems for any occasions when the child is missing to ensure a prompt and coordinated response is implemented to locate the child. A copy of the trigger plan should also be added to the systems of the Local Authority.

Meetings to discuss the risk management of a child's missing episodes will be completed in line with the protocol for each pan Lancashire authority.

5.6 Sharing information

It is incumbent upon all parties that work in the area of Missing Children, to pro-actively share information and highlight to all relevant parties working with the child and family, the details of missing person episodes and the associated risks. This includes agencies statutory and voluntary agencies and private businesses with responsibility for care settings. Open lines of communication

are vital in order to maximise the provision of Safeguarding to the individual. The guidance as per [Working Together 2018](#) should be adhered to.

Information sharing protocols are in place and on most occasions, these will be sufficient to ensure that the information needed in order to keep a child safe is known to the correct parties.

5.7 Return of the child

5.7.1 It is the responsibility of the parent or carer to contact the Police and the Local Authority to confirm that the missing child has returned.

5.7.2 If the whereabouts of the 'missing child' become known, it is the responsibility of the parents or carers to arrange for the child's return. The police will inform the parent/carer/care setting of the location where the missing child can be collected.

If the police physically locate the child as part of their investigation or other duties then they will return the child to the parent/carer/care setting. If it becomes known to the parent/carer/care setting that a child is at, for example, a friend's house or other location then it is not unreasonable to expect the parent/carer/care setting to make arrangements to collect the child and return them to their care.

There will be circumstances where parent/carer/care setting collection is not appropriate, and as such an appropriate conversation will take place with the Police to identify the most suitable action.

5.7.3 Police 'safe and well' check

The purpose of the 'Safe and Well Check' is for police and partners to start to understand the reason / causes of why the child went missing and what has happened to that child.

The Police will also be looking to establish if:

1. The child is safe and well and has not suffered any harm;
2. The child has been a victim of crime;
3. The child has been involved in any criminality;
4. If there are any ongoing risk or factors which may contribute to the child going missing again. (Push and Pull factors);
5. If there is any information that may indicate harm suffered by the child and by whom.

'Safe and Well Checks' should therefore be carried out in all cases.

The Police should be in the first instance the professionals that carry out a 'Safe and Well' (SaW) check. However, research and experience tell us that missing persons, especially children, may be unwilling to engage in this process and especially with a police officer.

If it is apparent, on the return of a child, that they have been the victim of a crime whilst missing, or that they may be in danger or at risk from any person arising out of circumstances that have occurred whilst they were missing then the Police must complete the SaW and start an investigation in conjunction with partner agencies.

If a child is not open to Children's Social Care, then it should be the police that will carry out the Safe and Well check (SaW). This should only be carried out by another if the police have assessed that the risk is low and it is safe to do so. The OIC will be responsible for ensuring that the SaW is

recorded and inputted onto the police system. This should be documented in the CONNECT investigation.

A SaW should be carried out by police however it is recognised that in certain circumstances that another care professional may be better placed to carry out this task. If this is the case, then the decisions rationale is recorded on both CONNECT and, on the systems used in the care setting. The circumstances to consider would include:

1. The overall risk level, given all the circumstances of the incident and understanding the risks and intelligence surrounding the child is assessed as LOW and this is agreed by both the police and the responsible carer;
2. There are no known or suspected circumstances that the child has either been involved as a victim or a suspect of criminality whilst missing;
3. The rationale is recorded within CONNECT and within care setting records.
4. The SaW check, if NOT carried out by police, will be done by another suitably experienced and named care professional. The key being that some degree of independence is preferred, in a 'family' setting it may be best if this was not carried out by a parent;
5. A child will always be seen by police if the previous SaW check was carried out by another professional.

On the rare occasions that it is agreed between a carer and the Police that a 'Safe and Well Check' can be carried out by somebody other than the Police it is important that they record the following points:

1. How the child present including their demeanour, physical state, clothing and any other factors that may be relevant to any future investigation.
2. What care and safeguarding plans have been put in place in order to prevent further incidents.

All information should then be passed to the police to the BCU Missing Person Co-ordinator for inclusion in the investigation. If at any time the carer suspects that criminality has occurred, then they should end the process and call the police to attend and take over.

If there is information that the investigating officer completing the SaW feels is pertinent and is not covered by the 'Safe and Well Check', then a Police Safeguarding Referral (PSR) will be submitted, for example matters of sexual or criminal exploitation or trafficking/modern slavery.

5.7.4 Return Interview

As per DfE statutory guidance for children who run away or go missing from home or care, a return interview will be offered to any child. This is to provide an opportunity for the child to speak with an independent person about their missing episode, their experience and any harm that may have occurred. Following the interview any immediate safeguarding concerns can be addressed promptly and further recommendations can be given on reducing the risk of a child going missing

from home again. These recommendations should be based upon the push/pull factors which have been identified within the interview.

For further information on return interviews please see the following link that explains the process and purpose of the return interview.: [Children who run away or go missing from home or care - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk/government/topics/children-who-run-away-or-go-missing-from-home-or-care).

Once the return interview has been completed, a copy will be shared with Police, Health and any other services deemed appropriate for the child, subject to consent and confidentiality. Placement providers will not receive a copy of the return home interview but will be informed of any relevant safeguarding matters and will be provided with confirmation that the interview has taken place by the allocated Social Worker.

The information gathered from the interview helps professionals to understand the reasons why the person went missing and to take action to prevent future missing episodes.

The interviews are completed as follows:

- If the child is looked after by and has gone missing within Blackpool Local Authority, the Awaken child exploitation team would complete the return interview.
- If the child is looked after by and has gone missing within Blackburn with Darwen Local Authority the Engage team would complete the return interview
- If the child is looked after by and has gone missing within Lancashire Local Authority, the Missing from Home service would complete the return interviews.
- If a child has gone missing within Blackpool, Blackburn with Darwen or Lancashire, but is looked after by another local authority, then it is the *responsibility of the placing authority to complete the return interview*. In such instances, the police will notify the local authority in which the child is living of the missing incident, and that local authority will inform the placing authority to allow them to arrange for the return interview to take place.

The interview should be carried out within 72 hours after the missing episode, keeping in mind the needs of the child and by selecting the right person to carry it out. This information obtained must be securely emailed without delay to the Basic Command Unit (BCU) Missing Person Co-ordinator and the Local Authority lead for the areas that the individual went missing from. As part of the Operation Encompass process, all schools will be notified of the missing episode.

See section 6 for further information regarding return interviews.

BCU Missing Person Co-ordinators will be the recipient of the Return Interview reports for the police, using the contact information below. It will be their responsibility to disseminate the intelligence from the report, ensuring that it is recorded appropriately in CONNECT. If further investigation is needed, they will pass this to the most appropriate officer/team.

Local Authority Leads will be the recipients of the Return Interview reports, using the contact information set out at section 3. It will be their responsibility to disseminate the intelligence from the report, ensuring that it is recorded appropriately for future reference. If further work is needed, they will pass this to the most appropriate member of their team.

Where return interviews highlight the need for urgent protective action, the sharing of this information with the appropriate people / agencies / BCU Missing-Co-ordinators must be done without delay.

Completed return interview forms should be sent to the relevant Lancashire Constabulary Missing Person Co-ordinators (below) and relevant Health professionals (as per contact information at section 3). Please note that these email addresses are for non-urgent contact and should only be used for sending the completed return interview forms.

Lancashire Constabulary BCU Missing Person Co-ordinators:

- East BCU: East-MFHCO-ORDINATOR@lancashire.police.uk
- South BCU: South-MFHCO-ORDINATOR@lancashire.police.uk
- West BCU: West-MFHCO-ORDINATOR@lancashire.police.uk

6. Return interviews: safety, assessment and information gathering

6.1 'Return Interviews'. [Statutory Guidance \(DfE; 2014\)](#) on children who run away or go missing states that when a child is found or returns to their home or placement, they should be offered an Independent Return Interview within 72 hours of their return. [\(DfE; 2014:14\)](#). Guidance states that this should be an in-depth interview that is best carried out by an independent person – someone not involved in caring for the child.

The return interview should include an in-depth exploration of the reason the child left their home or placement (as well as what risks they were exposed to whilst missing) and helping the child plan how to prevent repeat missing episodes. The 'return interview' is different from the police 'safe and well' check.

6.2 The return interview is important in safeguarding the child in the future, including providing information of how to prevent future missing episodes. It must not be viewed as a routine or administrative task but as an opportunity to inform case planning, take account of the child's views and inform wider strategic planning.

6.3 Where return interviews highlight the need for urgent protective action, sharing information with the relevant services already involved with the child (including with children's social care and where appropriate the child's Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) must be undertaken in addition to informing the police missing person's co-ordinator.

The Local Authority is responsible for deciding whether a return interview is conducted for each missing episode in which they receive. Each local authority will also decide the appropriate arrangements to ensure the interview is carried out by an independent person or in some cases the most appropriate person involved with that child. If the child refuses to participate in the first return interview offered, then consideration should be given by the Local Authority if there is a more suitable professional to try and encourage participation in the interview. For children that are not open to the Local Authority, each child needs to be considered on an individual basis and reviewed whether the right level of intervention is being received by the family in order to ensure missing episodes do not escalate. In particular, for unopen missing children where parental consent

is not obtained for the child to participate in a return interview, a review of the information held for the child and analysis of any missing episodes will be undertaken with management oversight to determine the thresholds and level of risk. to ensure escalation is not required before the episode is closed.

6.4 Where a practitioner is unable to engage with a child, parents and carers should be offered the opportunity to provide any relevant information. The aim of this is to ensure further instances of missing from home/care can be prevented and identify early any support required.

6.5 For all children the return interview should be offered in a neutral place where they feel safe.

6.6 Where a child in care is living more than two hours outside of the local authority area and goes missing, the local authority will be responsible for commissioning a service to undertake the return interview. Where a looked after child goes missing and is within a geographical location of no more than two hours travel time, the local authority will be responsible for completing the return interview.

6.7 The person conducting the return interview must endeavour to cover and assess the following factors in the interview:

- Adopt a strength based and Trauma Informed approach;
- identify and deal with any harm the child has suffered, either before they went missing or whilst missing;
- understand the child's individual and family circumstances including the child's characteristics, vulnerabilities and risk factors;
- understand and try to address the reasons and motivation(s) why the child went missing, including any push and pull factors;
- information about potential destinations, associates and the circumstances in which the child was found/returned;
- help the child feel safe and help them understand they have options other than running away to prevent repeat instances of missing;
- provide information to the child on how to stay safe (statutory /community /family /friends resources, helplines etc) if they choose to run away again.

6.8 Following the return interview (and Police Safe and Well check) the different agencies should work together, remain professionally curious and share information in order to:

- identify immediate safeguarding needs;
- to build a comprehensive picture of why the child went missing;
- to understand what happened whilst they were missing;
- about who they were missing with;
- about where they were found;
- to analyse the individual missing episode with any past patterns (including for residential looked after children analysing patterns in relation to other children in the residential setting);
- to provide support in preventing future missing episodes and ensuring all needs and risks are identified and responded to in accordance with statutory guidance.

6.9 All actions taken in fulfilling these requirements should be clearly recorded in the child's records including management authorisation and reasons for any departures from the required

guidelines and timescales. Recording and Information Sharing practice must be in line with CSAP policies and procedures.

7. Assurance Arrangements

7.1 Each agency will collate and report performance management and quality assurance information internally within their organisation. The effectiveness of each agency's arrangements in meeting the requirements of this protocol should be monitored regularly by each agency and reported to the Children's Safeguarding Assurance Partnership.

7.2 To fulfil their role, the CSAP will give due consideration to the safeguarding risks and issues associated with children who go missing from home or care. CSAP will seek assurances that partners from children's social care, police, health, education, care providers and other services are working together effectively to safeguard children who go missing. The CSAP will ensure that the protocol is adequate for the safety of their local children and that it is kept up to date.

7.3 The CSAP will require from all partners working with children who go missing to report the following on a regular basis:

- reports analysing and scrutinising data on children missing from home and care;
- analysis of information from return interviews, including analysis of the child's views and wishes; and
- reports from children's homes used by or within the local authority on the effectiveness of measures to prevent children from going missing.

8. Appendix A – Definitions

The following definitions are relevant to this protocol and relate to children who go, or have gone missing.

- Accommodated: A child is accommodated if the Local Authority looks after her/him with the voluntary agreement of his/her parents or with the child if s/he is over 16 years old.
- Care Leaver: An eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989.
- Child: Anyone who has not reached their eighteenth birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people'.
- Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE): CCE is not defined in law but is a term that has come to be associated with 'county lines'. The government definition of county lines is set out below together with further notes. It is a term, which is increasingly used to describe this type of exploitation where child is involved. CCE occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child into any criminal activity:
 - in exchange for something the victim needs or wants;
 - for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator;
 - through violence or the threat of violence.

The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. CCE does not always involve physical contact, it can also occur through the use of technology. The criminal exploitation of child is not confined to county lines but can also include other forms of criminal activity such as theft, acquisitive crime, knife crimes and other forms of criminality.

- Child Sexual Exploitation: Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is not defined in law. CSE is a form of sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child under the age of 18 into sexual activity in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. CSE does not always involve physical contact, it can also occur through the use of technology.
- County lines: County Lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas [within the UK], using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of 'deal line'. They are likely to exploit a child to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.
- Frequent Missing Child: This is a child that has been missing and formally reported as such, 3 times in a 90-day period.
- Host local authority: The local authority in which a looked after child is placed, when placed out of the responsible local authority's area.
- Human Trafficking: the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. 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. 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).

- Child Looked After: A child who is looked after by a local authority by reason of a care order, or being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.
- Missing child: A child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers.
- Missing from care: A child in care who is not at their care home or the place they are expected to be (e.g. school) and their whereabouts is not known.
- Missing person: ACPO definition: "Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another."
- National Referral Mechanism (NRM): a national framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support.
- Repeat Missing Child: This is a child that has been missing and formally reported more than once.
- Responsible Local Authority: The local authority that is responsible for a child's care and care planning.

9. Appendix B – Trigger Plan

Child's Missing from home TRIGGER PLAN & PROFILE

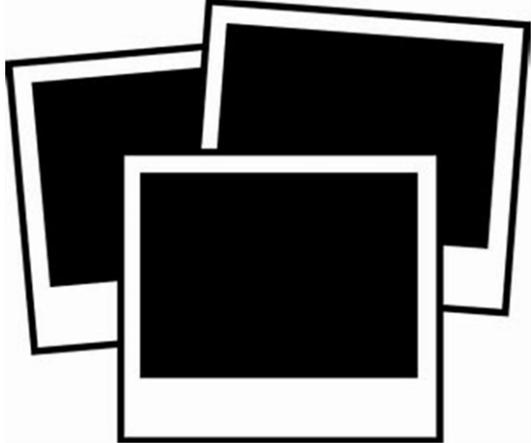
The purpose of this 'Trigger Plan & Profile' (TP&P) is to set out an effective tactical response to protect and prevent children who are considered to be at risk of going missing, and where there is a significant risk of harm to the subject or the volume of times they go missing is considered to be excessive.

The TP&P will be completed by the allocated worker who knows the child best. If the child is not currently open to services, the TP&P will be completed by the worker carrying out the RHI. It is the responsibility of the completing authority to ensure that the TP&P is up to date and accurate and any changes are passed to Lancashire Constabulary.

The TP&P is a key document that will be used by the Local Authority, the staff in Care settings and the Constabulary should it be agreed that the child is missing

Child's name	
Age and D.O.B	
Child's mobile number	
Nationality	
Care/ legal status	
Current address and contact details	
Lead professional Name and Role	
Lead professional contact number	
Child exploitation risk level if applicable	

Photograph of child



Approximate date the photo was taken:

Child's physical description	
Height	
Build	
Hair colour/style	
Eye colour	
Distinguishing features (birth marks / scars, piercings etc.)	

Social Media Accounts		
Platform	Username	Password

Child's Mobile Number:	
------------------------	--

Make / Model:	
IMEI Number if known:	
Network:	
Child's Email Address:	

Background and Summary of all identified risks and vulnerabilities
 Posed to the Missing person and professionals and professionals engaging with them

Things to be considered:

1. Does anyone pose a risk to the Child (Please provide detail): Has a Child abduction Notice (S2/ S49) or Community Protection Warning/Notice ever been served?
2. Does the Child pose a risk to anyone? (Please provide evidence)
3. What event(s) trigger the child's risks / trigger missing episodes?
4. Any significant Dates – Birthdays of Parents/siblings, deaths etc
5. Significant places of interest:
6. Trigger events?

PARENTS/CARERS AND FAMILY (address, contact number and comments)

Name	Address, contact number and comments

ASSOCIATES (address, contact numbers and comments) N.B are there any S2s of S49s

Name	Address, contact number and comments

RELEVANT ADDRESSES AND LOCATIONS FREQUENTED / FOUND AT (Are there any CPWs or CPNs)

Address	REASON FOR RELEVANCE (include dates and locations previously found)

What is the plan for when the child goes missing?

What action needs to be taken and by whom? (This should reflect what the child tells us would support a safe return and include expectations for parents, carers and professionals and an agreement for notifying the police and social care).

What support is required from the police or other partner agencies when the child is missing to assist in locating them?

What is the proposed prevention plan once the child is found?

Date of trigger plan:

Completed by:

Please share this form with the relevant Missing Person Co-ordinators via the email addresses below, and relevant professionals. Ensure a copy is uploaded to the child's case file.

- East BCU: East-MFHCO-ORDINATOR@lancashire.police.uk
- South BCU: South-MFHCO-ORDINATOR@lancashire.police.uk
- West BCU: West-MFHCO-ORDINATOR@lancashire.police.uk