



Gateshead Local Safeguarding Children Board & Northumbria Police (Gateshead Area Command)

Procedures regarding missing children and young people

**(Incorporating the Joint Protocol between Northumbria Police and
Children's Services regarding missing children and young people).**

January 2010

Review due January 2011

1. Introduction
2. Definitions
3. Risk assessment
4. Police responsibilities and powers
5. Responsibilities of the Local Authority when children in care are reported missing
6. The return
7. Repeat absences
8. Out of area placements
9. Harboursing
10. Safeguarding & child protection
11. Information sharing and data collection
12. Finding young people who are not reported missing to Police
13. Informing the media
14. Children Missing Education (CME)
15. Supporting agencies

1 **Introduction**

These procedures refer to situations when children go missing from home or when children who are looked after by the local authority go missing from residential or foster care.

It defines the roles and responsibilities of agencies and staff concerned with safeguarding children and young people.

This document should be read as guidance, which cannot anticipate every situation. Police, Children's services staff and foster carers should use their professional judgement to take any action they feel necessary to protect the safety of the child based on an assessment of risk for each individual child.

All parties involved in the protocol should be clear about the definition of a "missing person", and discourage the casual reporting of 'unauthorised absences' as missing persons.

Children who go missing may place themselves and others at risk. As well as short-term risks there are also long-term implications; adults with serious problems have often run away as children.

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 proper attention from the professionals involved with the missing person and they must collaborate to ensure a consistent and coherent response is given to the missing person on his/her return.

2 **Definitions**

Where this protocol refers to a 'child' or 'children', these terms include young people under the age of 18 years.

2.1. Unauthorised absence

Clearly some children absent themselves for a short period and then return and during their absence their whereabouts are known or they have made contact. Sometimes children stay out longer than agreed, either on purpose or accidentally, and may be testing boundaries, but do not jeopardise their wellbeing. This kind of boundary testing is within the range of normal teenage behavior and not necessarily considered a risk.

Whether the absence is careless or deliberate, if there is no apparent risk for their immediate safety, or that of the public, it may fall within the unauthorised absence category. The assessment of the carer is initially that they are safe but are away from

home without permission. It is still important that staff/ carers record these incidences (as unauthorised absences, not missing episodes), in case the level of risk changes and decisions are auditable. Unauthorised absences must be carefully monitored however as the child may subsequently go missing.

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

For example, in some circumstances young people staying with a friend without prior agreement may not be 'at risk' and it would be inappropriate to flag this event as a missing from care incident or report it to the police.

In situations where a child is absent without permission the first response may be that providers of their care along with any relevant staff from their responsible authority, which could include the child's social worker, should act as a responsible parent and take all practical steps to establish the child's location and to ensure that they return to their placement without delay.

A child or young person who is absent should be classified as unauthorised absence if the criteria below apply:

- They have deliberately or carelessly absented themselves
- They are likely to return of their own accord or they are staying with others known to them
- They are likely to be easily located
- They are unlikely to suffer or cause significant harm whilst absent

The person's absence must be kept under review and if he/she has not returned within a reasonable period of time, (generally after 8 hours or less should the risk assessment determine otherwise) serious consideration must be given to reporting them as missing. The responsibility for managing this type of absence lies with the staff of the care home (i.e. the Lead Person on duty) or the foster carer in conjunction with the child's social worker.

A child or young person in this category should not routinely be reported to the Police.

2.2 Missing.

For the purposes of this protocol, a child is categorised as missing 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.

A child or young person who is absent should be classified as missing if one or more of the criteria below apply:

- There is 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
- There are suspicious circumstances
- The absence is out of character or unusual behaviour
- There are indications that the child has already come to harm

- There are indications that the episode is not a deliberate or careless 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

A child or young person in this category must be reported to the police.

2.3 Absconder.

An absconder is a child or young person who is absent from a placement without the permission of the responsible person and who is subject to a legal order or requirement resulting from the criminal justice process or a secure order made in either civil or criminal proceedings (e.g. remands, curfews, tagging, other bail conditions, wards of court Ward of Court or PACE detention)

A child or young person in this category must be reported to the Police as soon as possible and treated as a wanted person. The Police must be made aware of the particular order under which the child has been placed in the residence and the expiry date of the order.

3 Risk Assessment

In assessing the significance of any child's absence a risk assessment must be conducted.

Where a child is missing, relevant staff from Local Authority and Police, must consider the above definitions and take into consideration guidance already agreed on and incorporated into the child's care plan and factors listed below, when assessing risk: -

- The legal status of the person in care (e.g. Emergency Protection Order, Full or Interim Care Order, remanded, curfew conditions etc.
- Previous behaviour patterns. (Such as a history of absence and quick return)
- The child's state of mind/perceived risk. (Is child likely to self-harm or commit suicide? Does child see risks in a balanced way?)
- Group behaviour at the time of the absence.
- Whether the young person is perceived as running to someone or running from a situation.
- Any physical or learning disabilities the child may have which increase the risk to them.
- Is the child vulnerable due to age or infirmity 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
- Does the missing person have any physical illness, disability or mental health problems
- 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 ongoing 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
- Is there drug or alcohol dependency or substance misuse
- Any other particular circumstances at the time of the incident influencing the risk assessment

As a minimum requirement the risk assessment should be reviewed every eight hours and the level of prevailing risk agreed by carers and other professionals responsible for that young person's health safety and well being.

Categories of risk

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 are 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.

Important: The assessment of risk is a dynamic process and should be reconsidered and challenged at every point during a child or young person's absence.

4 Police responsibilities & powers

Police will investigate all cases falling within the 'missing' definition and will respond in accordance with the Northumbria Police Missing Person policy and procedure, keeping a record on the appropriate missing person report / computer system.

The table below sets out the definition of each category and what each category means in terms of operational response:

DEFINITION OF RISK	OPERATIONAL RESPONSE
<p>HIGH RISK The risk posed is immediate, and there are substantial grounds for believing that the missing 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 missing person presents a danger to the public</p>	<p>This category will attract high level (silver) command involving the duty Superintendent or Critical Incident Manager (CIM). This requires the immediate deployment of police resources. The Duty Superintendent must be involved in the examination of initial enquiry lines and approval of appropriate staffing levels and allocation of ownership. Such cases will always have allocated a named investigating officer. There should be a press/media strategy and/or close contact with outside agencies.</p>
<p>MEDIUM RISK The risk posed is likely to place the missing person in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others.</p>	<p>This category requires an active and measured response by police and other agencies in order to trace the missing person and support the person reporting.</p>
<p>LOW RISK There is no apparent threat of danger to the missing person or the public.</p>	<p>In addition to recording the information on the PNC, the police will advise the person reporting the disappearance that following basic enquiries and unless circumstances change, further active enquiries will not be carried out by the police. Low risk missing persons however must be kept under review as risk can increase with the passage of time.</p>

Children's Services will work collaboratively with police during any enquiry, to locate a missing child. When Police locate a child, reported as missing, Police will return the child to parent/carer/placement. In some instances it may be inappropriate to return a child to their home or placement and in all such cases Police will contact EDT for an evaluation of their safety.

Even after reporting a child or young person missing, parents and carers should recognise that they are responsible for children and young people in their care at all times and this responsibility remains when they have reported a child or young person missing to the Police.

A child under the age of 16 will not be assessed as being of low risk by the police.

In all cases, police will inform Children's Services through the submission of a child concern (CCN) of all children who are reported missing within 1 working day.

4.1. Police Powers

Police powers are limited and difficulties can arise when missing children or young people are found but do not want to return to their home or placement. In some instances it may be inappropriate to return a child to their home or placement, in all such cases Police will contact EDT.

Under the Children Act 1989, where there is reasonable cause to believe that a child or young person could suffer significant harm the police can take that child or young person into **Police Protection** and remove them to suitable accommodation which could include the home from which the child or young person originally went missing.

The Police are not given the power to use force to take a child or young person into Police Protection but reasonable force may be used to prevent a child or young person suffering significant harm.

Where **Police Protection** is taken Police will inform the Local authority via the local CAIU during office hours, or EDT will be contacted out of hours.

Any child or young person who is unlawfully at large from a secure unit or penal establishment may be arrested and returned by Police.

If the child or young person is on remand without conditions, the Police will return the child or young person to the designated placement. If the child or young person is on remand with conditions (e.g. curfew) they will be detained and brought before a court.

5 Responsibilities of the Local Authority when children in care are reported missing

5.1. Initial action to be taken by carers, when a child is missing

Carers must take all reasonable and practical steps to

- Establish the whereabouts and well-being of the child or young person
- Determine the level of risk of harm to the child or young person
- Determine the nature and reasons for absenteeism
- Ascertain the likely intentions of the child or young person **before** contacting the Police

Actions should include

- Searching their own premises and immediate locality
- Make enquiries with other children and young people in the home / school / workplace
- Make enquiries with other professionals
- Make enquiries with relatives unless it is considered not in the child or young person's best interests

- Consider recent events
- Telephone / text the child and young person to establish their safety and well-being

All issues / decisions / actions should be fully documented.

5.2. Informing the Police

Whenever a child goes missing from a children's home or foster home then the foster carer or the Lead Person on duty in a children's home must ensure that the following individuals and agencies are informed as soon as practicable and in all cases within 24 hours

The carer or other responsible person must inform

- The parents or those who have parental responsibility, where appropriate
- The Social Worker or Team Manager
- The Emergency Duty Team, if out of hours.

If the absence is considered to fall within the definition of 'missing' or there is identified and imminent risk of harm to the child or young person, the carer or other responsible person must inform the local Police without delay.

If the absence is considered to fall within the definition of 'unauthorised absence' the carer should seek the views of other professionals responsible for that young person's health, safety and well-being and continually review the status of the child or young person

If the absence continues for an extended period of time consideration must be given as to whether the absence should fall within the definition of 'missing'.

It remains entirely a matter of professional judgement - taking into account all known factors and the views of other professionals - as to when an 'unauthorised absence' has gone on too long and the child or young person's absence should be reported to the Police.

Any case of an absent child or young person which causes significant concern or the circumstances give rise to suspicion that the child or young person is at risk of significant harm, should be brought to the attention of the relevant manager and the Police as soon as possible.

5.3. Reporting procedure

Once a decision has been made to report the child or young person missing the carer should contact Police using the non-emergency telephone number.

The carer, in consultation with other professionals responsible for the young person's health, safety and well-being, must be explicit when reporting an episode to the Police so that the level of perceived risk to the child or young person is clear from the outset. **This will determine the level of Police response.** The carer will be given a unique reference number, which should be retained and used in any future contact with the Police.

5.4. Information to be made available

When reporting to the police the following minimum information is required;

1. Description of the child or young person including their clothing
2. Details of where the child or young person was last seen and with whom
3. Recent photograph
4. Relevant addresses
5. Known associates and addresses frequented
6. Personal details of the child or young person
7. Previous history of absenteeism and circumstances of where found
8. Circumstances under which the child or young person is absent
9. Any factors which increase the risk to the child or young person
10. Name of the staff member completing the risk assessment and / or the search of the home and locality.

5.5. Missing during external activity

If a child or young person becomes absent outside of their area, the carer in charge of the external activity will

- Arrange a search in the area where the child or young person became absent
- Notify the local police for that area
- Notify the child or young person's parent or guardian
- Notify the child or young person's Social Worker or Team Manager
- Notify a senior manager of the home
- Notify the Youth Offending Team if the child or young person is on remand
- Notify the Emergency Duty Team, if out of hours

5.6. Longer absences

Whenever a child or young person is missing for a longer period of time and in any case where the child or young person has been missing for **5 days**, a senior manager (including the Head of Service and Director Children and Young People) in Children's Services will be informed.

A responsible person in the Children's services will make the decision to convene a meeting for the purpose of developing a strategy to locate and return that child or young person to safety.

This decision will be based on ongoing risk assessment and depend upon the child or young person's individual circumstances.

The meeting will involve

- The Team Manager from the Authority responsible for the child or young person's welfare
- The local Police Superintendent (or their nominee)
- Other relevant staff representatives from the Authority where the child or young person is living
- The registered manager of the children's home or fostering service

- Parents or carers

These senior officers will review the actions taken up to this point and satisfy themselves that all possible steps are being taken to locate and return the child or young person.

If the child or young person has been missing for **28 days** a senior Police manager and the appropriate Children's Services manager for the area should jointly review the case and take any actions they consider necessary to locate and return the child or young person.

5.7. Recording

Throughout the period that the child or young person is absent carers and Social Workers must keep a full record of all actions taken and messages received or given.

Police will keep a record on the appropriate missing personal report / computer system.

The records should clearly include details of where the young person was found, any reasons the child has given for going missing and any actions taken in light of those reasons. This information is important for any future missing from care episodes.

5.8. Planning for return

If a child or young person is categorised as 'missing' the appropriate Children's Services Manager in consultation with social workers, carers and police as appropriate, should prepare a contingency plan for when the child or young person is found. Considerations should include

- Arranging for an independent person to talk to the child or young person about the reasons that they went missing
- Arrangements to escort the child or young person and support them on their return
- Whether the Police wish to interview the child or young person before he / she is returned to placement.

5.9. Planning before the event

When children become looked after, parents or carers consideration should be given as part of the core assessment of their needs as to whether they have ever runaway, staying in unknown, possible unsafe, places.

Prevention and early intervention services should be reviewed, and effectiveness evaluated every year, gaps identified and plans made to fill any gaps.

A prevention or early intervention service working with those identified as being at risk of going missing or who have already gone missing should be in place to prevent the continuation and escalation of behavior.

If the Referral and Assessment Team of Gateshead Council Children, Families and Young Offenders Service receive three or more CCNs on the same child, regardless of

the reason, a further discussion would be triggered, regardless of the outcome of each individual CCN. This will capture those children running away on repeat occasions where each individual episode does not give cause for concern when viewed in isolation, however when viewed as a pattern of episodes more concerns may be raised.

All CCNs submitted by Gateshead Child Abuse Investigation Unit are sent electronically to a central inbox within the Referral and Assessment Team. Upon receipt of all CCNs, Referral and Assessment should also copy this e mail to the secure MEG inbox (LSCBMEG@gateshead.gov.uk) where details regarding each missing episode will be extracted and recorded in a spreadsheet. All CCNs will be deleted from the MEG inbox as soon as they have been read and appropriate information extracted.

The MEG inbox acts as a central receiving point and onward referral for return interviews (via the Area Based Teams, see Section 6) and appropriate intervention.

This process will be overseen by the LSCB Business Manager and, where appropriate, further assistance from analysts within Gateshead Council will be sought

These arrangements will be reviewed every year and evaluated, addressing any gaps.

Where children do run away from their care placement then their needs should be reassessed and their care plan updated to incorporate a risk management strategy to minimise missing from care incidents.

The assessment should consider

- Risk factors
- Likelihood of the child or young person going missing
- Previous episodes
- Trigger incidents
- Risk of harm / vulnerability of the child or young person
- Risk of harm posed by the child or young person to others
- The child or young person's view of placement
- The child or young person's view of going missing and the associated risks
- Views of parents / relatives / carers of the child or young person's needs
- External influences
- Risks associated with addresses / locations frequented by the child or young person
- The likelihood of the child or young person being harboured
- Recent photograph
- Description of the child or young person

6 The return

When a child or young person is located, Police, Parents, Social Workers and any other person informed of the child or young person's absence should be notified without delay (unless these would place the young person at risk of significant harm).

For Looked after Children the general principle is that the children's services for the area from where the child is missing will be responsible for recovering the child or young person and returning that individual to their home or placement, unless the child is located by police. In some instances it may be inappropriate to return a child to their home or placement and in all such cases Police will contact EDT for an evaluation of their safety.

If there are specific and identified issues of safety or public order associated with returning that child or young person then a coordinated approach to recover the child or young person should be agreed with the Police.

Any out of hours referrals received by EDT involving a child or young person who has been reported missing or has returned should be forwarded to the relevant social worker or the Referral and Assessment (RAAT) team. A copy of this should also be forwarded to the MEG mailbox. This information must include where the young person was placed.

The return interview

Police interview or 'Safe and Well Check'

The Police will interview all children when they return from a Missing episode. The purpose of the interview will be to gather intelligence about the missing episode and it serves to confirm the identity of the child and that they have returned. If the child makes an allegation of crime that occurred whilst they were missing or that contributed to him/her running away, the police officer will record this allegation in their pocket note book and take appropriate action.

Return Independent interview

Return interviews will be conducted, where appropriate by an independent suitably trained person from within the Area Based Teams for every instance of running where a child has

- Been missing for over 24 hours
- Been missing on two or more occasion
- Engaged (or believed to have engaged) in criminal activities during their absence
- Been hurt or harmed whilst they have been missing (or this is believed to be the case)
- Known mental health issues
- Known risk of sexual exploitation or contact with persons posing risk to children

This interview should take place **within 72 hours** of the child or young person's return. Area based workers will be notified of all children and young people fitting the above criteria from the MEG data.

Information gathered, as part of the return interview should be shared with children's services, police and returned to the MEG mailbox to enable an appropriate multi agency response.

Where any allegation of abuse is made or becomes evident, local child protection procedures must be implemented.

If there is evidence that a child or young person has been a victim or perpetrator of crime, consideration must be given to securing evidence by Police, including forensic examination (with appropriate consent). It is essential to recognise that the welfare of the child or young person is paramount and careful consideration should be given to the potential effects of the procedures on the child or young person.

Where children are in Local Authority care the Social Worker and Line Manager should decide in consultation with residential staff and the child or young person, whether they should convene a statutory review of the child or young person's care plan.

Within each of the Area Based Teams there will be an identified male and female member of staff who will offer all young people who are reported missing from home an independent interview upon their return in line with the National Guidelines.

Having received the referral into the MEG mailbox the nominated person within the Safeguarding Children Unit (currently the Business Manager /Community Development Officer) will analyse the information to see if the matter should be considered at the next MEG meeting.

The nominated person will also forward the details by e-mail to the identified persons within the Area Based Teams to enable a return interview to take place.

The outcome of the return interview will be returned to the MEG mailbox via e-mail where again it will be evaluated by the SCU nominated person.

7 Repeat absences

If a child or young person repeatedly goes missing or causes specific concerns due to risk factors when missing, a **multi-agency strategy meeting** should be held to develop a strategy to prevent future missing events and reduce the risk of harm to the child or young person should they go missing again.

The purpose of the strategy meeting is to

- Agree and record a pre-risk assessment
- Agree a reporting strategy
- Recommend the minimum enquiries to be undertaken by
- Carers
- Children's Services
- Police
- Agree an appropriate return strategy
- Consider appropriate interventions to address the long term issues

A child protection action plan to bring about behaviour change should be put in place, and regularly reviewed in accordance with child protection procedures for its effectiveness.

Research has shown that there is no developing pattern in which the risks to a young person escalate the more often that they run away. Short absences may present the same risk as longer ones and should be viewed with equal seriousness and urgency. The assessment of the risk that a young person might run way again should be based on information about their:

- Individual circumstances, including family circumstances
- Motivation for running
- Possible destination
- Recent pattern of absences (if any)

It is not the number of previous absences but the particular information about what happened when the young person was away from home that indicates the level of risk that they might face should they go missing again.

Consideration should be given to carrying out a new assessment every time a young person runs away. Repeat runaways should be viewed with as much concern as children who run away for the first time. The persistence of this behaviour would suggest at least that the action following from earlier assessments should be reviewed and alternative options considered.

8 Out of area placements

In cases where a child placed in Gateshead by another authority runs away from their placement, the home authority should call a strategy meeting involving the relevant organisations from the host authority (Gateshead) to establish the CP plan as outlined above. Local procedures should be followed and the response should also be based on the risk assessment in the child or young person's care plan.

Where there is a history of running the home authority must inform the host authority of this risk as part of the placement agreement. Appropriate details should be shared to support the home authority (who retains ownership) to manage the risk and informal care planning for the child. (NI71 – 3)

9 Harboursing

Vulnerable children and young people who abscond or go missing risk placing themselves at additional risk of harm. It is frequently the case that parents, foster carers or social workers know where the young person is staying but feel powerless to prevent the adult in question from harbouring the child because there is no proof of a crime being committed against the child. In accordance with the Missing Children Protocols, the Police are usually called upon to assist with retrieving the child/young person, which involves their service in a great deal of time and resources, often with no positive outcome for the child.

In order to address this, the police in Gateshead have adopted a harbouring procedure aimed at disrupting and prosecuting those who present a risk to children and young people who they enable to stay away from lawful custody.

10 Safeguarding and Child Protection

On each occasion that a child is reported missing from home or Local Authority care,

Police action

- Police will submit a child concern to Children's Services in accordance with Northumbria Police procedure within 24 hours. At the point of return a Police Officer will visit the child/young person. Where possible the young person should be seen alone. The officer will provide contact details to the child to allow future contact if child wishes.
- Police information will be supplemented by information from other statutory partners and where appropriate the voluntary sector. Information from return interviews will be shared with Police and Children's Services

Children Services action

- A full needs assessment should be considered by Children's Services so that their broader needs can be identified and addressed.
- Children's Services will provide early intervention and support where necessary to understand and address reasons for running away.

Where there is any child protection concern, the Police Child Abuse Investigation Unit should be involved and local child protection procedures followed.

11. Information Sharing and data collection

Information will be shared on a regular basis between the Police and Children's Services to enable them to identify patterns where a child has:

- Gone missing on 2 or more occasions
- Has been involved as a victim or perpetrator in criminal behaviour whilst missing
- Known mental health issues
- Known risk of sexual exploitation
- Known risk of contact with persons posing risk to children
- Incidents that have generated assessments of needs via Common Assessment Framework, S47, or S17 of the Children Act 1989

Aggregate data about the profile of running away in the area will be collated by the Police and forwarded to the MEG mailbox through which it is shared with Children's Services and other partner agencies through the monthly MEG meeting. This together with case data recorded via the MEG will allow the LSCB to identify:

- Incidences of running away
- Children's homes that have particularly high levels of missing report in relation to other homes in the area
- Areas where missing young people are frequently
- The proportion of young people who are hurt or harmed whilst they are away
- The proportion of young people who have committed an offence whilst they are away

The monitoring of CCNs via the MEG inbox will also allow the LSCB to identify:

- Individuals who have run away
- Individuals who have run away on more than 2 occasions
- Incidents that have generated a case conference or professionals meeting

This process will be overseen by the LSCB Business Manager and, where appropriate, further assistance from analysts within Gateshead Council will be sought.

Information will be broken down by:

- Child's age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Missing from home
- Missing from care
- Whether the child is an out of area placement

The data will be regularly reviewed and analysed by the LSCB and will inform a proactive response to running and patterns of running in the local area.

Children's homes also have to complete monthly return on their missing figures. These should also be copied to the MEG inbox (LSCBMEG@gateshead.gov.uk) Returns from children's homes on a monthly basis to the mailbox?

This process will be overseen by the LSCB Business Manager and, where appropriate, further assistance from analysts within Gateshead Council will be sought.

12. Finding young people who are not reported missing to Police

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. Information will be shared via a child concern in such circumstances.

13. Informing the media

The Police have responsibility for advising the media regarding children and young people who are missing in order to assist in locating that person or warning the public if the child or young person poses a significant threat.

Decisions to publicise will always be made in consultation with the Children's Services who in turn will consult with parents and / or carers prior to any media coverage.

14. Children Missing Education (CME)

Children missing education are defined as:

- Children of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll, not placed in alternative provision by a local authority, and who are not receiving a suitable education at home.

Gateshead Council has robust measures in place to identify quickly when a child is not receiving a suitable education. When a child is absent from education it is possible that this is due to other behaviour, associations or activity that puts them at risk of harm. The local authority should investigate all cases of children missing from education.

A child or young person in this category in the first instance should be dealt with by the relevant education welfare Officer (EWO). Should they not be traced the matter will be referred by the EWO onto the Children Missing Education Officer (CME) with a referral as appropriate through the Missing and Exploited Sub Group of the LSCB or in urgent cases direct to the police and children's Services.

15. Supporting Agencies

Missing children cannot be managed effectively by the Police service alone. There are a number of statutory and voluntary organisations that play a role in the prevention and management of all missing children.

NATIONAL POLICE IMPROVEMENT AGENCY

Notification to National Police Improvement Agency Missing Persons Bureau must be made in the following circumstances:

- All missing persons outstanding after 14 days
- All foreign nationals missing in the UK or British nationals missing abroad
- All unidentified bodies or body parts to be notified to NPIA within 48 hours

MISSING PEOPLE (formerly National Missing Persons Helpline)

Missing people (formerly the National Missing Persons Helpline) is a charity dedicated to helping missing people, their families and those who care for them. Missing People receive information from Police and other public, private and voluntary organisations, and from individuals. National Missing Person Helpline (NMPH) and Police will share information in accordance with the ACPO/NMPH National Data Exchange Protocol of April 2007.

Police and families can contact the 24 hour free phone confidential helpline on 0500 700700.

Whenever a report is received by the police and the risk assessment authorised by a Supervisor is assessed as **HIGH**, the Investigating Officer will consider notifying Missing People as a matter of urgency in order that Missing People can record the disappearance, search their records and inform Police of any information held by them which could assist the investigation. Otherwise, the details will be forwarded by Police to Missing People as soon as practicable. The Investigating Officer must make clear to Missing People what action, if any, they require of Missing People in terms of publicity to assist the Police media strategy. A record shall be made on the missing person report that the information has been shared with Missing People. Prior to sharing the information with Missing People, Police will ask the family or carer who made the missing person report, for their representations regarding the proposal to share information with Missing People.

For reports assessed as **MEDIUM** risk, the Police will notify Missing People **72 hours** after the time the missing person was reported to the police, and will make a record on the missing person report that the information has been shared with Missing People. Missing People will make a record of the disappearance, search their records and inform Police of any information which will assist the investigation. Prior to sharing the information with Missing People, Police will ask the family or carer who made the missing person report, for their representations regarding the proposal to share information with Missing People.

For reports assessed as **LOW** risk, if the person is still missing after 14 days, details will be forwarded to Missing People. The parent/carer making the missing person report **must consent** to the sharing of the information in low risk cases.

In all cases, Police will share the following information:

- Name/gender/date of birth/ethnicity/height/build/hair colour
- Date reported missing/date last seen
- Risk assessment
- PNCID no./Force/Station/Police reference no./Single point of contact

Other information may be shared at the investigating officers discretion, having regard to the 1st Data Protection principle as contained within the Data Protection Act 1998: namely, that sensitive personal data must be processed fairly and lawfully where it is necessary to protect the interests of the data subject or for the exercise of a function of a public nature exercised in the public interest.

Police will inform Missing People as soon as practicable when a missing person has returned.

UK MISSING KIDS WEB-SITE

The UK Missing Kids Website, <http://uk.missingkids.com> helps the police to find missing and abducted children. The website enables the police to transmit photographs and information about a missing child to other forces around the UK and abroad.

To improve the likelihood of locating a missing child, police officers are advised to submit cases for entry onto the website, where all of the following criteria are met:

- The child was under 18 years when he or she went missing.
- There are descriptive details and photographs of the child, sufficient to enable identification by a visitor of the website.
- The SIO believes there will be no risk to the child through placement on the website or associated media campaigns
- The parent or guardian or the child agrees to the child being featured, **OR** the SIO believes that it is in the child's best interests to be featured on the site against the parent or guardian's wishes.
- **EITHER** the child has just been reported missing and is at extremely high risk **OR** the child has been missing for over 48 hours and may be at a lower risk.

How to use the site

In the UK the Missing Kids Website is run by a network of hub forces, which input case information from their surrounding regions. Quality control and policy development is

provided by the Police National Missing Persons Bureau. The charity PACT (Parents and Abducted Children Together) helps the police to promote this site in the UK.

Features of the website - missing kids.com

Only trained police officers in South Yorkshire Police can input information on the site. It is extremely secure. Website content is fully protected from unauthorised interference by a complex security system.

It allows posters to be quickly and easily distributed.

It enables police forces to instantly transmit the photograph and details of a missing child to other forces around the UK and abroad.

The website has now been introduced in 14 countries, with 10 more countries in development.

The national sites are linked together with in-built translation technology, so the cases placed on the site in English can be read worldwide, and posters produced in the local language. This feature can be particularly useful in cases of international abduction.

The technology also includes age progression techniques that have proven successful in identifying and retrieving children years after they went missing.

CHILD RESCUE ALERT

The scheme is intended to be used within tightly defined criteria in relation to the abduction of a child. It is a fast response scheme designed to save a child from harm and should only be used in **HIGH-risk** cases and with the authority of the on call SIO (Detective Superintendent).

The scheme relies on coordinated action with the media who will broadcast the alert via radio and T.V. The criteria for issuing an alert have to be strict or there is a risk that the public and media will become de-sensitised to them. There are four factors which must be met before a Child Rescue Alert is authorised:

- The child is under 18 years of age;
- There is reasonable belief that the child has been kidnapped or abducted;
- There is reasonable belief that the child is in imminent danger of serious harm or death (decision by on call SIO Detective Superintendent);
- There is sufficient information available to enable the public to assist the police in locating the child.

The alert will normally be enforced for a maximum of **four hours** but this could be extended by **up to two hours** if authorised by the on call SIO

Alerts should be cancelled at the conclusion of their use.

SCARPA (Safeguarding Children At Risk- Prevention & Action)

The SCARPA project has been established in Newcastle to provide an intensive support service to young people aged 11-18 years who are either experiencing, or are at risk of running away, sexual exploitation or trafficking.

It is a voluntary sector collaboration between the Children's Society, Barnardos and Save the Children and reports to the Newcastle Local Safeguarding Children Board.

Referral criteria has been agreed and individual cases should be discussed with and referred through local PPU's using the agreed referral forms and procedures. Currently SCARPA only accepts referrals for young people living in the Newcastle area in relation to going missing and runaways, however their service in relation to sexual exploitation is available to young people living in any Area Command in the Northumbria Police force area.



Total Policing

Gateshead Local Safeguarding Children Board
c/o Safeguarding Children Unit, Felling District Office
Booth Street, Gateshead, NE10 9EW