Children Missing from Home, Care and School Multi Agency Protocol

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Introduction

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and in particular protecting them from significant harm depends on effective joint-working between agencies and professionals that have different roles and expertise. Individual children especially some of the most vulnerable children and those at greatest risk of social exclusion need co-ordinated help from police, health, education, children's social care, preventative services, the voluntary sector, and other agencies.

This protocol describes how agencies and professionals will work together when a child is missing. It has been developed and adopted by the South Gloucestershire Children's Partnership for the use by all agencies, organisations, professionals, and carers with a responsibility to safeguard children in this local authority.

Part 1 – Police definitions and responses

Missing: Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established until located and their wellbeing or otherwise confirmed.

Police response: Once a report of a missing child is made to police, a series of standard questions will be asked by them to determine a risk assessment of low/medium/high and an officer deployed to commence inquiries proportionate to that level of risk. NB. Anyone reported as missing to the Police under the age of 18 will not be treated as low risk.

Initial inquiries will include visiting the scene (where child is missing from) to gather further information.

Upon the missing person's return a police debrief will be conducted. This is called a Police Prevention Interview (PPI). Its main purpose is to ensure the child is safe and well and offer any immediate advice.

Police missing person's coordinators are responsible for identifying safeguarding issues and will work with partner agencies to tackle and reduce the incidence of repeat missing episodes.

It is for the police to advise the media regarding a missing child and will do so in the best interests and welfare of the missing child.

A decision to use the media to publicise the case of a Child in Care (CIC) should always be taken in consultation with children's social care.

Part 2 – Responding to the needs of all children and young people who go missing.

Key principles

- ✓ The safety and welfare of the child is paramount.
- ✓ Locating and returning the child to a safe environment is the main objective.
- ✓ Effective communication and information sharing between agencies is key.
- ✓ Child protection procedures will be initiated whenever there are concerns that a child who is missing may be at risk of significant harm.
- ✓ The police will act on any report of a child missing.
- ✓ Every 'missing' child who returns will be interviewed by someone other than their direct carer.
- ✓ Information from return home interviews and police prevention interviews will be analysed to assist in planning for the reduction of future episodes.

The safety and welfare of a child must be the first consideration when making decisions about sharing information about them and so where concerns arise, it may well be necessary to share information about them to ensure they are safeguarded.

Specific additional procedures apply if a child is in the care of the local authority or is receiving a service from Children's Social Care.

Agencies working with children and their family's/carers must use well established, comprehensive, transparent, and lawful information sharing systems and processes that place the child at the centre of how their information is used.

This must be delivered in accordance with relevant legislation such as:

- ✓ Data Protection Act (2018)
- ✓ Children Act (1989)
- ✓ Human Rights Act (2000)
- ✓ Children Act (2004)

All information obtained and shared in support of this protocol must be fully recorded within the organisation's management systems and be clearly referenced to the evidence and the information upon which decisions have been made. This must include details for any third parties and full details of all the information/evidence that they have supplied/been given.

How this information is used within the Local Authority.

Reports of missing children are shared by the police with the local authority (LA) daily. This enables the LA to fulfil its statutory duty in offering every individual a Return Home Interview. In addition, the LA produces a weekly report to managers to provide them with oversight of the children reported missing in South Gloucestershire, highlighting any patterns relating to missing children or groups and/or locations of concern. This ensures, as far as possible, that the children get the support they need at the right time as well as enabling partners to work collaboratively with these children.

Other related issues

Child abduction: Where a child has been abducted or forcibly removed from their place of residence, this is a 'crime in action' and should be reported to the police immediately.

Forced marriage: Some children go missing because they are at risk of abuse. Forced marriage in particular can lead to young women going missing from home. The South West Child Protection Safeguarding Procedures re Forced Marriage are available here.

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE): is a form of child abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. Child Sexual Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology (DFE 2017). Evidence suggests that 90 per cent of children subjected to sexual grooming go missing at some point.

Criminal Exploitation: is common in County Lines and occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control or manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology. Further information can be found here.

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 forms of 'deal line.' They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money. They will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons. More information here.

Child trafficking: The trafficking of UK born or foreign children may be for the purposes of exploitation, domestic servitude or for other reasons. Children may be trafficked within the United Kingdom or brought in from abroad. For example, a child may be trafficked from Bristol to South Gloucestershire, or within South Gloucestershire. South West Child Protection Procedures in relation to exploitation and trafficking of children. Further information here.

Modern Slavery: The Modern Slavery Act 2015 was introduced to protect victims of a number of forms of exploitation – forced labour, domestic servitude, criminal, and sexual exploitation. Further information to assist in the identification and support for potential victims can be found here.

Radicalisation: Radicalisation is defined as the process by which people come to support terrorism and extremism and, in some cases, to then participate in terrorist groups. Since the publication of the Prevent Strategy, there has been an awareness of the specific need to safeguard children, young people, and families from violent extremism. There have been attempts to radicalise vulnerable children and young people to develop extreme views including views justifying political, religious, sexist, or racist violence, or to steer them into a rigid and narrow ideology that is intolerant of diversity and leaves them vulnerable to future radicalisation. Further information can be found here.

Where there are concerns a child has been harmed by risk outside of the family home (ROTH) the ROTH Guidance on this page and the ROTH Tool should be used to assist in identifying those children who may be at risk and to assist in informing what action practitioners should take.

Addressing the causes for children going missing

Children are reported missing for a variety of reasons, when talking to children it is important to understand the reason they have been reported missing from their point of view and understand the causal factors behind any missing incident. Often these factors relate to:

Push factors

- Problems at home – ranging from arguments with parents to long-term abuse or maltreatment.
- Family break-up – children drawn into their parents' conflicts are less likely to do well at school and more likely to truant or go missing from home.
- Mental health problems – a disproportionate number of children who go missing from home have a mental health problem.
- Bullying – children who are being severely bullied are more likely to go missing from school and home or care.

- Problems at school, fixed term or permanent exclusions, managed moves, which make may add to tensions at home and leave children feeling they can't go home as further conflict may arise.
- Teenage pregnancy – some young women go missing or are forced to leave home because they become pregnant (or fear that they may be pregnant). They may also be in denial about their pregnancy, meaning that they are not getting the advice they need about pregnancy options. There is also a greater risk of pregnancy when girls go missing, and those working with them will need to ensure they have rapid access to confidential contraception and sexual health services to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

Pull factors

- Going missing to be near friends or family – especially when a child is in care and there are problems in contact arrangements with family and friends.
- Grooming for potential exploitation (sexual or criminal) or child trafficking – children may go missing following grooming by adults who will seek to exploit and/or harm them.

The process of offering the child the RHI should seek to explore the push/pull factors and try to come up with a plan to address them to reduce the likelihood of repeated patterns.

Assessing risk

Professional judgement will need to be used in deciding the level of risk to a child in relation to either a single episode of going missing or repeat episodes. It should take into consideration the circumstances of the child and their absence(s). This will include detailed consideration of:

- ✓ The legal status of the child
- ✓ Age of child
- ✓ The maturity and general vulnerability of the child
- ✓ Any additional needs that the child may have, whether these be physical, emotional, learning, or mental capacity
- ✓ The circumstances of the absence, especially concerns about state of mind e.g. unusual behaviour prior to disappearance, disappeared with no prior indication, or seeming troubled.
- ✓ Environmental factors including weather, time of year, time of day, community events.
- ✓ Family or relationship problems, or recent history of family conflict or abuse

- ✓ Previous behaviour patterns and history of the child, especially previous history of absence whether the child:
    - Lacks reasonable awareness of the risks associated with going missing.
    - Needs essential medication or treatment not readily available to them e.g. inhaler, insulin.
    - Has previously disappeared and suffered or was exposed to harm whilst missing.
    - Has a history of suspected suicide or self-harm.
    - Has a tendency to drug, alcohol, or substance misuse /dependency.
    - Is perceived as missing to or from someone or a situation.
    - Is known to associate with adults or children who present a risk of harm e.g. sexual offenders, offenders against children.
    - An ongoing victim of bullying, harassment, or exploitation
    - At risk of posing a danger to others and the risk of offending

Any circumstances within the home/foster home that may be relevant to the absence, such as:

Involvement in violent and/or racial incident or confrontation prior to disappearance

The influence of peer groups, families, or friends

The predatory influences on the child e.g. others want to use the child for crime, sex, or drugs.

Details of any locations, where the presence of the child will or will not be permitted, or that may be a cause of concern financial problems.

Use of social networking sites

School, college, or employment problems

Any other particular circumstances at the time of the incident which might be relevant.

Management of missing episodes

Children are reported missing due to concern for their welfare; the reasons behind any missing episode can be vastly variable. The key to reducing future missing episodes is understanding the causal factors behind the episode and then ensuring that advice and support is offered to address these.

Within any missing episode there are sources of information that can assist in understanding any ongoing needs of a child; the police missing person report, any information from social care records, which could be current or historical

and the information gathered as part of the return home interview (RHI) process.

Where needs are identified as part of the RHI process, these will be acted upon, either by informing the child care social worker or preventative services (PS) worker if the child's case is already open, or by an internal referral to preventative services. Where there is an identified need for the case to be considered for assessment by children's social care, the RHI will act as a referral to the Access and Response Team (ART), who will process the referral in the usual way.

Some children will go missing on more than one occasion and others will go missing frequently. The police have two plans that enable clear recording of information about a child to support the police in locating children as soon as possible. One is the Philomena Protocol, and the other is a trigger plan. Both plans lay out basic details about a child. The Philomena Protocol can be used as a preventative measure or for children who may go missing more than once; information is held by the carer for that child and sent to the police when a child is missing. More information can be found here. The Philomena Protocol is particularly useful for children who live in residential homes or supported accommodation where information needs to be known to a number of different carers. For children who are reported missing frequently and are deemed to be at some degree of risk when their whereabouts in unknown, it is important that their missing episodes are scrutinised through the convening of a meeting of those involved with the child. It should be coordinated by the Lead Professional. This meeting should be called in line with whichever framework the child is being worked with under i.e. EHAP, CIN, CP, CIC to share information and ensure the current plan remains appropriate for the child. It should also share the following information to enable the police to devise a Trigger Plan (should the police feel this is needed) for response to future episodes.

The information needed for the police to provide a Trigger Plan is:

- ✓ Known locations the child may go to
- ✓ Known associations the child may have and addresses/phone numbers for these people.
- ✓ Clarity about what the parents or carers will do, to locate the child prior to making a formal report of the child being missing.
- ✓ Clarity about what the child's curfew time is and therefore what is an appropriate time to report them missing.
- ✓ Any known risk the child may be at when their whereabouts is not known e.g., by association, mental health, learning difficulties.

- ✓ Phone numbers/social media information for the child (and associations if possible)

The need for a coordinated meeting needs to be made on a professional assessment of risk about the episode in question and the likelihood of future missing episodes. Factors that need to be considered when making the decision about whether to hold a meeting to discuss the missing episodes are:

- ✓ the number of episodes in 6 months
- ✓ a single episode of 24 hours or more which is of concern.
- ✓ periodic episodes which appear to be continuing with no evidence of any change in push/pull factors.
- ✓ they are requested by the police.
- ✓ a first formally reported episode makes reference to previous unreported episodes which raises concerns about carer/parent responses when the whereabouts of their children are unknown.
- ✓ clear messages about inappropriate reporting by parents/carers are not being adhered to and there may be benefit of holding a meeting to ensure parents/carers understand their roles in seeking to find their children prior to reporting.
- ✓ associations or locations highlighted within the report give rise to concern about a young person.

Where the decision has been made that a child needs a trigger plan, these should be clearly visible on Police systems, a copy on the child's Mosaic record within the council and a copy provided to the Emergency Duty Team (EDT). An alter should also be added to the front page of the Mosaic system. Those involved in the child's care should ideally also have a copy, so they are clear about the expectations placed on them prior to and when a child is reported missing.

Some missing episodes will provide evidence or suspicion that a child has or may have suffered significant harm whilst they were missing. In this circumstance a strategy discussion should be held. Whilst it is important that the management of future missing episodes are considered, this should not take precedence over ensuring the child's immediate safety. Where a strategy discussion is held and it is not possible or appropriate to complete the trigger plan at the same time, the manager who chairs the strategy discussion is responsible for ensuring the communication with the police missing person co-ordinator to ensure there is a trigger plan on file within one week of the strategy discussion.

All agencies who come into contact with children who have been reported missing should consider whether a child may have been trafficked during the missing episode.

Human trafficking takes place when someone has arranged or facilitated the movement of a child with a view to them being exploited for: slavery, servitude (e.g. sexual or criminal exploitation), forced or compulsory labour.

Agencies must be aware that trafficking should be considered when the child has been moved not only outside of the county or country but also for shorter distances within the area they live e.g.: from South Gloucestershire to Bristol.

Where a professional has cause for concern that a child they are dealing/working with may have been trafficked for the purposes of exploitation during a missing episode, they should consider a referral to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). The NRM was introduced in 2009 to meet the UK's obligations under the Council of European Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. It offers potential victims of human trafficking additional protection and support. Further details of who can and how to refer potential victims of trafficking to the NRM can be found here. Staff within Children's Services should ensure that any referrals made to the NRM are recorded on the mosaic record for the child.

Part 3 – Children missing from home

What to do if a child has gone missing from home

If a parent/carer or other family member is concerned that they cannot establish the whereabouts of their child, the circumstance is out of character and the contexts suggests they may be the subject of crime or risk of harm, they should report this information to the police.

If a professional is concerned about a missing person, it is recommended that they contact the police.

Reasonable steps should first be taken to attempt to establish the whereabouts of the child/young person prior to reporting the matter to police. This may include attempts to contact family and friends, checking social media and checking places they are known to go.

- ✓ where there is concern a child may be at risk of immediate harm, this should be reported to 999.
- ✓ where there is concern a child is missing this should be reported to 101. Parents/carers and other professionals and agencies involved should then continue to work together with the police to respond to the incident in a timely way to locate the child as quickly as possible.

Managing the return

While the child is still missing, plans should be put in place across relevant agencies with parents/carers to ensure that the return is managed effectively.

This will be especially important for those children who are considered as high risk, are being harmed and/or are frequently reported as missing.

In particular when planning for their return, consideration should be given to:

- ✓ how the child will be dealt with on the first contact
- ✓ appropriate accommodation for their return should the place from which they went missing not be safe.
- ✓ how the child should most appropriately be debriefed.

If it is considered that the place where they live is no longer appropriate, the location to which they are to be returned should be considered at an early stage. It might be necessary to consider options such as the child staying with a friend or family member or the provision of emergency placement to cover the initial period following their return.

It may become apparent that a child who is thought to have been missing from home, is in fact, living somewhere by agreement with the parents who is not a close family relative. If this is found to be the case, then all agencies dealing with that child should be aware of the Private Fostering Legislation and ensure that if the child is not already known to Children's Services, that a referral is made to ART to ensure that their needs are fully assessed as per the duty placed on the local authority to do so.

Once the child has returned the police should be notified at the earliest opportunity if anyone other than the police has located them.

Police Prevention Interview (PPI).

This is carried out by the police as soon as possible after the child has returned. Its purpose is to check for any indications that the child has suffered harm; where and with whom they have been; and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by, or against, them. Where a child goes missing frequently consideration will be given by the police to allocate a local beat officer to undertake these checks, in the hope that the building of a rapport with the police may assist in reducing the episodes.

Every effort should be made to visit those children missing from home on every occasion. Officers undertaking safe and well checks should provide every child with the leaflet designed by young people and endorsed by the South Gloucestershire Children's Partnership, which can be found here.

Return Home Interview (RHI)

South Gloucestershire Children's Services will endeavour to ensure that a return interview takes place within 72 hours of the child being located. These interviews will be conducted by staff within Children's Services following notification from ART. If the young person already has an allocated worker

within Children's Services, they will undertake/coordinate this interview and if not, it will be offered by the Young People's Support (YPS) Team.

Many children who go missing need to build up trust with somebody before they will discuss in depth the reasons why they were reported missing, so where children are known to services, they will be offered the interview by someone within the team around them. The interview and actions that follow from it should:

- ✓ identify and deal with any harm the child has suffered – including harm that might not have already been disclosed as part of the police prevention interview (his/her medical condition should be discussed and any need for medical attention assessed)
- ✓ understand and try to address the reasons why the child ran away try to prevent it happening again.

Research that tells us that children who are at risk of exploitation will usually go missing at some point, therefore, workers undertaking RHI should always consider whether the information being shared with them leads them to believe there is a risk of exploitation. See definitions on page 5.

Where child exploitation is considered a risk/concern, workers should consider whether completing the ROTH TOOL would be beneficial to further inform their assessment to help better understand the risk and enable thinking about future protection for the child. Guidance about exploitation and South Gloucestershire processes can be found here.

Support for 16 and 17 year olds

As 16 and 17 year olds have greater independence from their parents and carers and can choose to leave home, it may be necessary to involve other services such as housing officers in the assessment of their needs. South Gloucestershire must provide accommodation for any 'child in need' within their area who meets the criteria in section 20(1) of the Children Act 1989. Local authorities must also provide accommodation for a 'child in need' who is over 16 and whose welfare is likely to be seriously prejudiced if they do not provide him or her with accommodation (section 20(3).

The Judgement of the House of Lords in May of 2009 (The Southwark ruling) sets out the responsibilities of housing and children's services, in relation to 16-17 year olds who present to a local authority as homeless.

When a 16-17 year old presents as homeless, the Southwark ruling states that it should be children's social care rather than housing who undertake an assessment.

Part 4 – Children missing from care.

Introduction

When children are missing from their care placements (residential or foster care), it is essential that the professionals and agencies concerned work closely together to respond to
any incident in a timely way to locate the child as quickly as possible. The child's independent reviewing officer (IRO) must be informed of all missing episodes.

Once the child has been located, it will be essential to assess their needs to ensure all appropriate plans and services are in place.

Child's care plan

Every child in care has a care plan based on a comprehensive assessment of their needs that takes into account their wishes, feelings, and aspirations for their future. The care plan informs the decision as to which placement (e.g. foster care or children's home) will be most suited to meeting the child's needs. Where children have established a pattern of going missing from placements, their care plan should include a strategy to minimise the likelihood of the child going missing in future and how to respond if they do.

Child in Care (CIC) Review

All care plans are kept under review. The review meeting (CIC Review), chaired by an IRO, considers the plan for the welfare of the child, monitors the progress of the plan, and makes decisions to amend it as necessary in light of changed knowledge and circumstances. The IRO is also responsible for monitoring the implementation and management of the plan outside of the CIC review.

When children have gone missing from their placement, their statutory review provides an opportunity to check that their care plan has been appropriately amended to address the reasons why the child was missing and includes a plan to prevent re-occurrence should the child go missing in future. Any amendments to a child's care plan in light of their missing episode should address any safety concerns that have arisen as a result. The CIC
Review provides an opportunity to check that the placement remains suitable for meeting the child's needs.

Communication

Whenever a child goes missing from their care placement and all enquiries to locate them have been unsuccessful, the responsible carer will ensure that the following individuals and agencies are informed:

- ✓ the local police

- ✓ the authority responsible for the child's placement.
- ✓ the child's social worker (he/she should be responsible for ensuring family members are notified if it has not already been agreed that the foster carer/care home should do this, as part of any placement planning).

Out of area placements

For some of South Gloucestershire's children in care, an appropriate placement may be one outside of South Gloucestershire. In these cases, South Gloucestershire Children's Social Care should make sure that these children have access to all the services they need. In the case of a child being reported missing to the police the carer should also inform the child's social worker and ART/EDT (out of hours team) in order to ensure that a return interview can be offered on their return. Where young people are placed outside of CUBA (Counties that used to be Avon) this can be offered by telephone if a visit is not viable within 24 hours or if there is no local commissioned service set up to offer this to our children on our behalf. The reason for any decision made for the interview not to be face to face should be recorded within the RHI document.

Action to be taken when children go missing from care.

South Gloucestershire Council and Avon and Somerset Police no longer use the terms 'absent without authority' or 'unauthorised absence.' As such partners have been advised to report all missing person incidents to the police. However, there are actions that should be taken by those who are Corporate Parents for our children looked after (CIC) prior to reporting CIC children formally 'missing' to the police.

It is expected that all carers will take all the steps a reasonable parent would take if a child they are looking after fails to return home when expected. This will include, calling friends (and family where appropriate) and checking known locations (when safe to do so).

This is part of the assessment of risk that the carers need to present to the child's social worker or EDT in order that a decision is made *jointly* about the necessity (or not) to report the child formally as 'missing' to the police. This should be based on an assessment that either, their whereabouts remains unknown and so there is ongoing concern for their welfare, or their whereabouts is known but there is concern about where they are/who they are with and there is a concern for personal safety to recover them and therefore police assistance may be needed to recover them. When talking to the police, it should be made clear if the child is missing or their whereabouts is known but there is a concern for their/personal safety; this will enable the police to consider their response and support to recover the child.

Where a decision is made to report the child 'missing' the carer should provide the police with all of the details of the enquiries they have made and as well as answering questions, advise the call handler if there is a missing trigger plan or Philomena is in place for the child. This may assist the police with streamlining any action/enquiries.

Where children do not return to placement when expected and are refusing to return and the carer is able to establish their whereabouts, the child should NOT be reported missing to the police unless there is a concern about their safety where they are.

Where children are not reported as missing, their absence should still be notified to the child's social worker/EDT as soon as possible so that these incidences can be logged as the child may subsequently go missing. All periods of absence should be kept under review by the carer, social worker/EDT in order that consideration can be given to whether there has been a change in possible risk factors that would warrant the child subsequently being reported as missing.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) who go missing from care.

Whilst not exclusive to this group of children, UASC may have additional vulnerability factors that must be considered for any missing episode - the risk of being trafficked and the risk of being exploited. Any period of absence for a UASC must therefore be risk assessed immediately so that appropriate safeguarding measures can be undertaken.

Where there is a concern that there is risk of radicalisation for a UASC, the PREVENT guidance should be followed alongside the safeguarding procedures.

Return of the child

When a child has been missing from their care placement, children's social care will ensure that plans are in place to respond promptly once the child is located. If the child is located, but the professionals involved are unable to establish meaningful contact with the child, perhaps because they are under duress or being harboured, then the accountable staff will need to consider how to manage the return, maybe with the assistance of the police or where appropriate by applying to court for a recovery order.

When the child has been located, children's social care will be responsible for making the decision about whether they should be returned to their placement ensuring that they have taken full account of the circumstances that led to the child going missing from their placement and being confident that it is safe to do so.

The police must be notified at the earliest opportunity that the child has returned.

Return of the child to their placement

It is the responsibility of the carer to notify the child's social worker and police of a child's return. The carer should also record the circumstances of the child's return and any reasons given by the child for being away from the placement.

When a child is found or returns to their placement, the carer will need to reassure the child of their commitment to them, as well as expressing their concern for the child's safety. It will be essential to assess their needs so that appropriate services and additional support can be provided.

Police Prevention Interviews (PPIs) and return home interviews (RHI's)

The same processes as described in Part 3 - missing from home will be applied to those missing from care.

Children in Care placed within South Gloucestershire.

Some children looked after residing within South Gloucestershire will be the responsibility of other Local Authorities, known as 'placing authority.' For these children South Gloucestershire is known as the 'host' Authority. If these children are reported missing, the services offered to them remain the responsibility of the placing authority. South Gloucestershire will receive the police notification of the missing episode, and this information will be sent via ART to the relevant Local Authority. Should local services be needed for any of these Children in Care, individual requests for support, including RHI's will be considered on an individual basis. The only exception to services offered to these children automatically is by the police. Where the child's home address is within the Avon and Somerset Constabulary Police Force area, they will continue to offer police prevention interviews (PPIs).

Care Leavers

Vulnerable children looked after who have had or may be predicted to have a pattern of missing episodes when they turn 18 years of age must continue to be protected, as far as possible from harm. This cohort of children are likely to have had a trigger plan in place with the police prior to their 18th birthday. It will need proper review prior to their birthday as police responses to missing episodes vulnerable adults have different criteria to that of children.

As such, it has been agreed that for all South Gloucestershire CLA who fit this criteria, a professionals meeting should be convened prior to their 18th birthday

to agree the ongoing management of their missing episodes. The invite should include a member of the neighbourhood police team and/or the Police Missing Person Co-ordinator.

Part 5 - Children and Families that go missing, including unborn children.

Some children go missing with their families and this can raise significant safeguarding concerns for them. In this instance the protocol on the South West Child Protection Procedures should be followed - available here

This document refers to a number of professionals that should be contacted when managing a child/ren/unborn who has gone missing with their family. In South Gloucestershire, the contact information for those additional professionals referenced who need to be contacted/involved in any strategy discussion are:

The Pupil Tracking Officer – childrenmissingeducation@southglos.gov.uk

The Manager of the List of Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan/Manager of the Safeguarding and Reviewing Unit – the QARU Manager

The Designated Safeguarding Children Nurse – bnssg.safeguarding@nhs.net

A Senior Manager of Children's Social Care – this is the Service Manager for the service area where the child's case is being managed.

The Police – in the first instance this should be the LSU LSUDMNorth@avonandsomerset.police.uk Going forward the police should advise if anyone different should be invited/involved in further meetings.

NB – South Gloucestershire have devised a standardised form that is only for use by council staff to enable notification information to be sent to colleagues nationally to assist in any searches/presentations of the families. The form can be found here for distribution to other LAs the PA to the Director of Children's Services is the person who will distribute the information to the ADCS network.

Part 6 – Children missing from school.

Truanting from school will not normally be dealt with as a missing person's investigation, unless there are aggravating factors or concerns that indicate such a response is required. Where a report of a child truanting from school is received, information regarding the circumstances will be taken and recorded by the police and a professional judgement made, taking account of the circumstances, as to whether an investigation is warranted. The school may well be reminded to review its internal policies and to liaise with parents/carers

before considering involving the police locate a child/young person who has failed to attend or has left the school without authorisation.

Where there is a matter of immediate concern, the school should be supported in its decision to report this to the police. Schools are responsible for monitoring attendance and for sharing any relevant safeguarding concerns with partner agencies.

As such the following is advised for schools:

It is strongly recommended that schools have risk assessments in place the cover the following:

- ✓ Students leaving school during the day.
- ✓ A student being separated from the class during a school trip.
- ✓ The risk assessments should consider the sequence of the planned actions in these circumstances and the person assigned to carry out the different actions.

The risk assessment needs to take into account a number of circumstances including:

- ✓ The age of the student
- ✓ The location
- ✓ Specific factors associated with the student e.g. medical issues, child protection issues.
- ✓ If a school is involving the police, they will need to be able to inform the police of:
- ✓ Details of the clothing the student is wearing.
- ✓ Details of the student appearance e.g. hair colour, hair length etc.
- ✓ Age of the student
- ✓ Name of the student
- ✓ The student's home address
- ✓ Last know location of the student
- ✓ Where the student appeared to be heading
- ✓ Students not arriving for registration.
- ✓ Schools should have clear procedures in place to ensure that students who do not arrive at school are safe.

Additional reading

Children Missing Education

Please follow the link below for guidance regarding Children Missing Education: Children missing education | South Gloucestershire