

Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care

Supporting local authorities to meet the requirements of National Indicator 71 – Missing from Home and Care

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Contents

Introduction	3
Who should read this document?	5
Acknowledgements	5
Chapter 1	6
Responding to the needs of all children and young people who run away and go missing	
1.1 Definitions	6
1.2 Key principles	8
1.3 Push/pull factors – addressing the causes of running away	9
1.4 Strategic overview	14
1.5 Regional arrangements and cross-border issues	17
1.6 Out-of-hours responses	17
1.7 Actions-to-take checklist	19
Chapter 2	20
Children who run away and go missing from home	
2.1 Working together	20
2.2 Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) protocols	21
2.3 Assessment of need	22
2.4 Risk assessment	23
2.5 Police Safe and Well Check and Return Interviews	24
2.6 Support for 16- and 17-year-olds	26
2.7 Young people missing from home process flowchart	27
2.8 Actions-to-take checklist	28
Chapter 3	29
Children who run away and go missing from local authority care	
3.1 Introduction	29
3.2 Strategy and procedure	30
3.3 Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) protocols	30
3.4 Care planning	32
3.5 Placement matters	33
3.6 Risk assessment	35
3.7 Planning for the return	35
3.8 Looked-after children trafficked from abroad	38
3.9 Support for care staff	39
3.10 Young people missing from care process flowchart	40
3.11 Actions-to-take checklist	42

2 Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care

Conclusion	44
The law concerning missing or runaway children	45
Signposting – other useful information	46
Annex 1: assessing the risks that looked-after children may go missing	49
Annex 2: glossary of terms	50
Annex 3: national Indicator 71 – Missing from Home and Care criteria	51
Bibliography	60

Introduction

“No-one runs away for no reason.”

Amie, 13, Surrey

- 1) **This document is issued under Section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 which means that, except in exceptional circumstances, local authorities must act in accordance with this guidance.**
- 2) The Every Child Matters agenda states that children have the right to happy, healthy and safe childhoods that will prepare them for adult life. *The Children’s Plan* builds on this by stating that Britain should be the best place in the world for children and young people to grow up. It sets out a number of goals to achieve this.
- 3) We all have a responsibility to safeguard the young and vulnerable. Chapter 2 of *The Children’s Plan – Safe and Sound* – sets out the vision for making children’s safety everyone’s responsibility. One of the key principles underpinning *The Children’s Plan* is that local services need to be shaped by, and responsive to, children, young people and families – not designed around professionals. This is of vital importance when it comes to supporting children and young people who go missing or decide to run away.
- 4) Running away can be symptomatic of wider problems in a child or young person’s life, but whatever the reason, one thing is very clear: children who decide to run away are unhappy, vulnerable and in danger. Research from The Children’s Society report, *Stepping Up* (2008), states that as many as two-thirds of young people who run away are not reported to the police as missing, and even fewer as having run away.
- 5) As well as short-term risks, there are also long-term implications. Nearly half of sentenced prisoners report having run away as children, and nearly half of homeless young people at Centrepont ran away as children.¹
- 6) In June 2008, the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families published the *Young Runaways Action Plan*. The plan was developed after evidence from The Children’s Society report *Stepping Up*, and findings from a series of parliamentary hearings led by Helen Southworth MP and other members of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Children who Run Away or Go Missing, found that more needed to be done to support young people who run away from home.
- 7) The *Action Plan* highlights the Government’s commitment to working with local authorities, the police and the voluntary sector to ensure that young people who run away, or who feel they have to leave, are kept safe, and receive the immediate and ongoing support they need.

1. Social Exclusion Unit (2002) *Young Runaways*.

4 Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care

- 8) This guidance replaces the *Missing from Care and Home Guidance* published by the Department of Health in 2002. The Government committed to updating the guidance in the *Young Runaways Action Plan* to reflect recent developments across children's services, in particular the introduction of Targeted Youth Support (TYS), Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and the role of the Lead Professional and Team Around the Child (TAC). It also supports local authorities in meeting the requirements of National Indicator 71 – Missing from Home and Care, which began in April 2009.
- 9) The guidance serves to safeguard **all** runaways and to redress the imbalance that currently exists between services offered to runaways from the looked-after population and those who run away from home. The Children's Society report *Stepping Up* found that half of local authorities surveyed had no protocol for managing cases of children missing from home, however nearly 93 per cent had protocols for children missing from care.²
- 10) Establishing strong communication networks between agencies and practitioners in the locality will help ensure risk factors are identified early, and the completion of a CAF where necessary, will identify a child or young person's additional needs and which services are required to address the young person's needs. This document provides supplementary guidance to *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (2006) and should be read in conjunction with that guidance.
- 11) This guidance draws out the particular requirements related to responding to children who run away and go missing from care, as these are overrepresented in missing person's reports³. Local authorities have specific statutory responsibilities towards all looked-after children which they must fulfil. Where there is a possibility that an individual looked-after child might go missing from their care placement, their personal care plan should include strategies to minimise this possibility.
- 12) This revised guidance will help local authorities provide the best possible support for all children who feel they need to run away, wherever they run from, by shining a light on some of the good practice that already exists. The guidance contains case studies covering a range of examples and provides links to other useful information.
- 13) The guidance contains 'Actions to Take' at the end of each chapter, referring back to the relevant sections and making links to the national indicator criteria where appropriate.
- 14) The guidance also addresses the following issues:
 - Roles and responsibilities in a multi-agency response, within and across local authority borders, including strong working with the police and the role the voluntary sector can play in providing independent and non-statutory services to children running away from home and care.
 - The need for local and regional Runaway and Missing from Home and Care protocols to be in place (referred to in this guidance as RMFHC protocols) especially for out-of-hours referrals.

2. The Children's Society (2008) *Stepping Up*.

3. Wade, J & Biehal N (1998) *Going Missing – Young People Absent from Care*.

- The importance of a return interview for children and young people missing from both home and care to explore the reasons they ran away, referring on, or linking into, care planning as appropriate.
- Recommended characteristics of, and standards for, provision of effective emergency accommodation drawing on the findings of the emergency accommodation review once this has been completed.
- Practices and procedures for gathering information and intelligence on running away in an area, to support the new national indicator and to inform local practice.

Who should read this document?

- 15) All Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) and their partners in local areas should take account of this guidance.
- 16) The guidance is primarily aimed at LSCB partners, managers, practitioners and other professionals working with children and young people who go missing or run away from home and care.
- 17) Police forces may also find it useful to use this document in conjunction with the revised guidance on the Management Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons which is currently being revised and will be published in late 2009. www.acpo.police.uk/asp/policies/Data/missing_persons_2005_24x02x05.pdf
- 18) While this guidance is specific to England, the challenges are common across the four countries of the United Kingdom. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) will work closely with the Devolved Administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, recognising their particular and varying responsibilities. Each will consider the most appropriate arrangements in those areas for which they have responsibility, to address the issues in ways that meet their own circumstances and needs.

Acknowledgements

- 19) The DCSF would like to thank the group of experts, which included representatives from across national and local government, the police and the voluntary sector, for their time and expertise in helping develop this guidance; as well as the projects and partnerships who have provided links to their protocols, and information for case studies.
- 20) The DCSF would especially like to thank all the young people quoted throughout the document for allowing us to use their experiences.⁴

4. The names of the young people quoted have been changed to protect their identities.

Chapter 1

Responding to the needs of all children and young people who run away and go missing

“I didn’t get on with my stepdad. He used to give us real hidings. At first I slept at friends’ houses and once I had to sleep in a shed for three nights. I stopped going to school – I couldn’t do any work. I couldn’t concentrate, that’s why.”

Debbie, 14, Dorset

1.1 Definitions

- 1) The terms ‘young runaway’ and ‘missing’ in this context refer to children and young people up to the age of 18 who have run away from their home or care placement, have been forced to leave, or whose whereabouts is unknown.

Unauthorised absence

- 2) Where a looked-after child’s whereabouts is known or thought to be known but unconfirmed, they are not missing and may instead be considered as absent without authorisation from their placement.
- 3) Categories of unauthorised absences should be agreed between agencies locally. Protocols must ensure that clear actions are set out to address unauthorised absences. The responsible care provider and, where appropriate, the police should work together to ensure the child’s safety. Any unauthorised absence must be carefully monitored as the child may subsequently become a missing child.

Child abduction

- 4) 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.
- 5) **For guidance on the following circumstances, please use the links to refer to the dedicated resources available:**

Forced marriage

- 6) Some young people run away because they are at risk of abuse. Forced marriage in particular can lead to young women running away from home. Further guidance and information can be found at: www.fco.gov.uk/en/fco-in-action/nationals/forced-marriage-unit/

Children not receiving a suitable education

- 7) Children not receiving a suitable education are defined as children of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll, and are not receiving a suitable education otherwise than being in school, for example, at home, privately, or in alternative provision.
- 8) Evidence suggests young runaways face more challenges to accessing universal services and may be missing from education. Those with local responsibility for children who run away or go missing from home and care will need to ensure they link up with 'Children Missing Education' officers and those with responsibility for other universal services such as health. Guidance for local authorities on children not receiving a suitable education can be found at: www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/ete/childrenmissingeducation/

Grooming for potential sexual exploitation

- 9) In some cases, young people may run away or go missing following grooming by adults who will seek to exploit them sexually. Evidence suggests that 90 per cent of children subjected to sexual grooming go missing at some point.
- 10) The supply of drugs and alcohol or the offering of gifts may be used to entice and coerce young people into associations with inappropriate adults. Both girls and boys are at risk of sexual exploitation.
- 11) Looked-after children may also be targeted by those wishing to abuse and sexually exploit them, and encouraging these children to run in order to disrupt their placement is often part of this abuse. Young people living within residential care units are particularly vulnerable to being directly targeted in this way.
- 12) Guidance has been produced to help local agencies identify children and young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation and take action to safeguard and promote their welfare.

Leicestershire Constabulary: Use of the Child Abduction Act

Several police forces across the country are using harbouring legislation⁵ to tackle incidences where young people run away or go missing and are found with people considered to be inappropriate – for example, because they are much older or they encourage the young person to stay away from their home. It has been particularly useful for young people who are thought to be at risk of sexual exploitation.⁶

Leicestershire Constabulary is one of the police forces successfully using the legislation in this way and, along with the Crown Prosecution Service, have produced a protocol which describes the approach to be used. The aim is to disrupt the relationship in the first instance thereby reducing the risks that the young person may be exposed to. In the longer term it aims to reduce repeat incidences of children going missing from home and care.

5. Section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984 or section 49 of the Children Act 1989 if under 18 years and in local authority care.

6. In this situation the young person will often say they are content to be in the company of the person in question.

8 Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care

The process involves the parents/carers informing the child they do not have permission to be away from home or care, making boundaries very clear so the child is in no doubt of their wishes. A statement is taken by the police from the parent/carer to this effect.⁷

The person with whom the child was found is visited and informed of the parent/carer's wishes and that they must take **all** reasonable steps to inform the police if the child comes into their company. They are warned that failure to do this may leave them liable to arrest and prosecution for offences under the relevant legislation. Letters outlining the person's responsibilities and the risk of arrest are formally served⁸. More information can be obtained from: www.leics.police.uk

Child trafficking

- 13) Guidance for practitioners on what to do if they encounter a child who may have been trafficked can be found here: <http://publications.everychildmatters.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=HMG-00994-2007&>

1.2 Key principles

A child-centred approach

- 14) The wishes and feelings of children and young people should be sought and taken into account in reaching any decisions about the provision of services which affect them. However, professionals should be aware that children and young people do not always acknowledge what may be, objectively, a situation of risk, or may not feel comfortable talking honestly about the problems in their lives. The particular needs or sensitivities of girls and boys, children from ethnic communities, or those with physical disabilities or learning difficulties should be reflected in provision of services.

The role of professionals in supporting parents

- 15) Parents play the most important role in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of their children. While professionals will need to take account of family circumstances in assessing and deciding how best to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child or young person, only in exceptional cases should there be compulsory intervention in family life – eg, where this is necessary to safeguard a child from significant harm. Such intervention should – provided this is consistent with the safety and welfare of the child – support families in making their own plans for the welfare and protection of their children.

7. The Act can be used for young people under the age of 16 years or under 18 years for those in Local Authority Care.

8. Police forces should liaise with the CPS over the operational implementation of this Act. Other agencies should contact their local force Missing Persons Unit for further information.

Talk Don't Walk, Warrington – Family Mediation

Talk Don't Walk was set up in 2004 in Warrington, Cheshire and provides a range of services to vulnerable young people and their families, including family mediation and intervention.

Acknowledging that young people don't run away if they are happy and that parenting can be very difficult, it works on a problem-solving approach that rules out blame and enables long-term change.

Young people and their families self-refer into the project or can be referred in by other agencies or individuals. An initial CAF-based assessment is carried out with workers, identifying any other services that may be required, and referring onto these where appropriate.

Each party has a separate worker which helps build trust and ensures a neutral process for the mediation. One-to-one work is carried out with all parties to identify issues and any further support needed. The process involves the identification of coping strategies to help diffuse tense situations, and relationships with siblings are also looked at if they are emulating the behaviour or involved in the issue.

The project's centre in Warrington is used as a neutral venue for sessions to take place and all mediation is carried out by highly-trained and qualified staff.

More information can be found at: www.talkdontwalk.org.uk/

1.3 Push/pull factors – addressing the causes of running away

"I ran away 'cos I wanted to be alone. I know if I get too mad with a situation I'll self-harm."

Joanne, 15, Surrey

- 16) The Children's Society's *Still Running II* (2005) survey estimates that around 100,000 young people under the age of 16 run away from home or care each year across the UK. Many of these young people stay with friends or family members, but there are some who do not have access to these networks of support and end up in harmful situations such as sleeping rough.

Findings of *Still Running II*:

- 52 per cent of young runaways returned to their home or care placement after one night away;
- 1 in 6 young runaways sleeps rough; and
- 1 in 12 young runaways is hurt or harmed while away.

10 Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care

- 17) Running away is usually a sign that a crisis point has been reached. It is vital therefore, that local authorities do everything they can to engage children and young people and inform them about the risks of running away and the services available to support them and their families to resolve issues before they decide to run.

Push/pull factors

- 18) Children and young people run away for a variety of reasons, but whatever the reason, running away is often a sign that something is wrong in the child's or young person's life and a response must be made quickly.
- 19) In order to conduct a thorough assessment, it is important to ask the child's or young person the reason why they have run away, as this will inform decisions about the appropriate service intervention or response.
- 20) Research carried out by the Social Exclusion Unit *Young Runaways* (2002), found that the top reasons for running away are:

Push factors

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

- Running to be near friends or family – especially when a young person is in care and there are problems in contact arrangements with family and friends.
- Grooming for potential sexual exploitation or child trafficking – young people may run away or go missing following grooming by adults who will seek to exploit them.

Government programmes to address push/pull factors

- 21) One of the underlying principles of *The Children's Plan* is that it is better to prevent failure than to tackle a crisis later. There are a number of national programmes in place that will help to address these issues through TYS.
- 22) The Government, in conjunction with The Children's Society (TCS), is developing an online resource pack for schools and youth groups to teach children and young people about the dangers they face if they run away and where they can get help. This will be ready in September 2009 and will be available from The Children's Society website at www.childrensociety.org.uk

Push factor	Support strategy	Further information
Difficult relationships	The Parenting Early Intervention Programme	The Parenting Early Intervention Programme, provides extra support for parents of children aged 8-13 at risk of negative outcomes. Two parenting advisers are also being funded in every local authority.
	Family Intervention Projects (FIPs)	Family Intervention Projects are a key part of government policy to support families at risk. They involve an intensive key worker-led approach which co-ordinates support around very vulnerable families dealing with the practical and deep-rooted problems they face, eg, substance misuse, domestic violence and poor mental health. The Government made a commitment to extend FIPs to every local authority in England by 2010 in the Youth Crime Action Plan (July 2008) and every local authority has received funding from April 2009.
	Family Pathfinders	Family Pathfinders develop services and systems to improve outcomes for families caught in a cycle of low achievement, including those who are not being effectively engaged and supported by existing services. www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/parents/pathfinders/
	The Parent Know-How programme	The Parent Know-How Programme is designed to ensure parents have access to information they need with a particular emphasis on helping parents with teenage children. www.dcsf.gov.uk/parentknowhow/

12 Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care

Problems at school	Safe to Learn	<p><i>Safe to Learn: embedding anti-bullying work in schools</i> includes over-arching and specific advice on how to tackle bullying on the grounds of race, religion and culture; homophobic bullying; the bullying of children with special educational needs and disabilities; and cyber bullying.</p> <p>www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/tacklingbullying/safetolearn/</p>
Personal problems	CAMHS Review	<p>An independent review of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) has been published by the Government and outlines how services can be improved to better meet the educational, health and social care needs of children and young people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, mental health problems.</p> <p>www.dcsf.gov.uk/CAMHSreview/</p>
Teenage pregnancy	Parentline Plus	<p>As part of the teenage pregnancy strategy, the DCSF provides information and support to parents to help them talk to their children early about sex and relationships – which is a protective factor against early and unprotected sex. Parents should be able to access information and support through Families Information Services and local parenting strategies with further advice available through the Parentline Plus helpline and website.</p> <p>www.parentlineplus.org.uk/</p>

Pull factor	Support strategy	Further information
Running to be near friends/family	Care Matters	<p>The <i>Care Matters</i> White Paper includes a wide range of proposals which will transform care services for children and young people. One of the proposals is to ensure that where it is in the interests of the child or young person, they are near their family home.</p> <p>www.dcsf.gov.uk/publications/timeforchange/</p>
	Children and Young Persons Act	<p>The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 recently received royal assent. Section 8 of the Act sets out the considerations that local authorities must have regard to when they are considering making a placement for a looked-after child, including giving consideration – as far as is reasonably practicable – to a placement being near a child’s home and within the local authority’s area.</p>

ReRun Dorset

ReRun Dorset offers support to young people and their families across a large rural area through a detached youth work model. Given the large distances staff cover, most work is done on a one-to-one basis somewhere local to the young person. Although the project undertakes return interviews with young people reported as missing to the police, most of the work is undertaken with unreported runaways referred to the service through other routes.

Casework with the young person is needs-led following an assessment, such as the CAF, which identifies what changes the young person wants to make and who is best-placed to support them to achieve their goals.

Many of the young people supported by the service have not engaged with any statutory agencies and most are not committed to education, training or employment. It can take time and persistence for this group of young people to be able to trust a worker. Workers have to be extremely flexible and dedicate a great deal of time to building a positive relationship with the young person. Due to the young people's chaotic lifestyles, this can mean physically tracking them down for appointments or when they have not been in contact.

By providing independent support and a template for a positive relationship with a professional, young people have been supported to engage with statutory agencies, and specialist and universal services such as health professionals; education and social workers; substance misuse staff; and CAMHS workers.

The project receives funds from multiple sources, but is able to run the service according to the needs of its users without prescribed targets for the number of young people worked with. ReRun's independence from statutory services is vital for engagement with young people and also to retain a greater degree of flexibility in how the service is run.

1.4 Strategic overview

- 23) 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 health, education, children's social care, the voluntary sector and other agencies. Where it is decided that a child needs support from several agencies, having a Lead Professional (see section 2.4) will help ensure that the actions identified in the assessment process are fully co-ordinated.
- 24) In order to achieve effective joint-working, there needs to be constructive relationships between individuals in a range of agencies, promoted and supported by:
 - a strong lead from elected or appointed authority members, and the commitment of chief officers in all agencies – in particular, the local authority's Director of Children's Services and Lead Member for children's services, through forums such as the Children's Trust which can bring all agencies together to provide a co-ordinated response to young runaways; and

- effective joint-working by the local authority, health and voluntary sector partners, with monitoring by the LSCB in each area.
- 25) It is vital that those with strategic responsibility in local authorities build up good working relationships with the local police force to agree the level and type of information to be collected to aid individual risk-assessment and for planning purposes.

Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs)

- 26) Local Safeguarding Children Boards are charged with ensuring children and young people ‘stay safe from harm’ (Children Act (2004) Section 11.) It is important that all protocols complement the work of the LSCB and are actively reviewed with ongoing monitoring and reporting.
- 27) Local Safeguarding Children Boards and the Workforce Development Teams for Children and Young People’s Services are responsible for ensuring that appropriate and effective training is available, particularly in risk assessments and managing return interviews. Some local authorities have chosen to set up sub-groups specifically to deal with the issue of missing or runaway children and find this a helpful way of bringing together representatives from the main statutory and voluntary agencies.
- 28) More details about LSCBs and how to go about setting up a sub-group can be found in Chapter 3 of *Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*.
www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/resources-and-practice/IG00060/

Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board

In September 2007, Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board created an additional sub-group of the board with the remit of missing children. This sub-group is a multi-agency group comprising children’s services representatives that have a role in identifying, supporting and providing services to runaways and missing children. These include health, education, social care (safeguarding and residential services) police, youth offending, youth services, Connexions, extended schools, immigration and housing, Barnardo’s sexual exploitation project, Children’s Society projects; LAMP working with children missing from care, and Safe in the City working with runaways from home.

Each agency has a senior management representative identified as a lead officer to champion the runaways and missing children agenda in their own agency. The group has been successful in developing a work plan that is designed around local front-line, multi-agency issues. The primary focus of the group’s first three-year plan has been to:

- review policy and procedures for children missing from home and care;
- provide multi-agency training for those responsible for management of, and services to, children missing from local authority care;
- develop services for children missing from home;
- develop the multi-agency data collation and information sharing processes.

For more information visit: www.lscbbirmingham.org.uk

Information Sharing

- 29) If there are concerns about a child's or young person's safety or well-being, it may be necessary to share information with other agencies. The safety and welfare of a child or a young person must be the first consideration when making decisions about sharing information about them.
- 30) Any sharing of information must comply with the law relating to confidentiality, data protection and human rights. The local authority should work within their authority's arrangements for recording information and within any local information-sharing protocols that are in place. These arrangements and protocols must be in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 – the key provisions of which are summarised in *Information Sharing: Further Guidance on Legal Issues*, a copy of which can be found at: www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/resources-and-practice/IG00065/

Collecting and analysing data – informing National Indicator 71: Missing from Home and Care

- 31) Collecting the right data at local level is essential to driving improvements in services for young runaways. April 2009 saw the introduction of a new indicator in the national indicator set called 'Children Missing from Home and Care', which helps the Government and local authorities understand the extent to which Children's Trusts and LSCBs have a picture of 'running' patterns in their area; how this information informs local service provision; and what procedures are in place to respond to the needs of young runaways.
- 32) Data collection and sharing is also important to understand the complete picture in relation to running away. Effective information sharing between agencies identifies criminal activity which is otherwise hidden, and similarly identifies how vulnerable some of these children are when they run away.
- 33) For information sharing to be effective, there is a need to train people in how to record this information to make it usable. This will avoid the frustrations of informing the police of something only to find that nothing can be done, because the way the information was gathered makes it inadmissible. This training can easily be achieved through a partnership with the local police.
- 34) To demonstrate that they have good procedures and protocols in place to respond to the needs of these extremely vulnerable young people, local areas will need to show that information about children who are reported missing (from home as well as care) is shared between the police force, the local authority and, where appropriate, the voluntary sector. Local areas will also need to demonstrate that this information is being used strategically, with patterns of running by individuals or by groups of young people identified, and with local services responding appropriately to reduce and eventually stop instances of running by these young people.

Further information can be found at:

www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/resources-and-practice/TP00048/

Link to National Indicator 71 requirements: 1 & 2

ContactPoint

- 35) ContactPoint is a database that will make it easier for practitioners working with a child to identify and contact other practitioners working with the same child. This will support early intervention and integrated working to deliver co-ordinated services to children.
- 36) ContactPoint will also show whether the child's needs have been assessed by a professional using the Common Assessment Framework and whether the child has a Lead Professional co-ordinating any support required. Further information on ContactPoint is at: www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/deliveringservices/contactpoint

1.5 Regional arrangements and cross-border issues

- 37) Police force operational areas often cover more than a single local authority area. RMFHC protocols should therefore be agreed by agencies on a regional/sub-regional basis to ensure a consistent approach is taken to safeguard children and young people. This is of particular importance in metropolitan counties where the small geographical areas mean children and young people frequently move between areas.

It is also equally important for those authorities that border Wales and Scotland to have agreed safeguarding protocols and systems in place, with neighbouring areas in the Devolved Administrations.

- 38) Where runaways from one local authority area present themselves in another local authority it is important that the authority where the child is found (also known as the receiving authority) works with the authority where the child usually resides (also known as the home authority) to ensure they get access to the help and support services they need. Responsibility for making safeguarding enquiries rests with the local authority in which the child is found. If this local authority is not the one in which the child normally resides, it may negotiate with the 'home' local authority to continue with these enquires.⁹

1.6 Out-of-hours responses

- 39) Even with strong systems and services that minimise the likelihood of young people running away, some young people will still feel that they have to run. In all circumstances local safeguarding procedures should be followed as set out in the local RMFHC protocol. If there is concern that the child may be at risk if returned home, the child should be referred to children's services' social care to assess their needs and make appropriate arrangements for their accommodation.
- 40) Not all children and young people who run away from home or care are in need of emergency accommodation, but a recent *Children's Society* survey¹⁰ found that 17 per cent of overnight runaways under 16 had either slept rough or with someone they had just met. These young people need somewhere safe to go and need to know how to access that provision, so that they are not put at even greater risk.

9. Children Act 1989 – Section 47.

10. The Children's Society (2005) *Still Running II*.

18 Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care

- 41) It is up to local authorities to decide on the most appropriate and effective form of emergency accommodation provision in their area. However, it is important that this accommodation is genuinely available in an emergency, and can be accessed at any time of the day or night. Ten out of 27 police forces who responded to a recent survey¹¹ said they had previously had young people staying in police stations overnight due to a lack of genuine emergency accommodation. Police stations are not an appropriate place to accommodate children, even for a short time, not only because they may not have committed an offence, but because of the adults that they may come in contact with whilst they are there.
- 42) Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation is not an appropriate place for any child to stay unaccompanied and should never be used for unaccompanied children aged 15 or under. No 16- or 17-year-old should be placed in B&B accommodation by housing services or children's services, except in an emergency, where B&B accommodation is the only available alternative to rooflessness. In these exceptional cases, B&B accommodation should be used for the shortest time possible and support must be offered to the young person during their stay.
- 43) Housing services and children's services are expected to adopt a shared strategic approach to the provision of emergency accommodation and housing and support pathways for young people in order to eradicate the use of B&B accommodation.
- 44) The Government is carrying out a review of existing models of emergency accommodation provision, which is due to be completed in late 2009. The review is intended to support the development of local, regional and sub-regional commissioning and provision of emergency accommodation, by identifying the strengths and weaknesses of current emergency accommodation models, and identifying perceptions among providers and young people of the adequacy and effectiveness of current emergency accommodation for young runaways.

Helplines

- 45) Helplines offer a clear source of support to young people who have run away, and particularly for those who run 'out of hours' often providing a listening ear, advice and guidance. It is important that all children and young people are made aware of how to access such sources of support.
- 46) Information on helplines available to support young people and families 24 hours a day can be found in the signposting section (page 46).

11. The Children's Society (2008) *Stepping Up*.

Actions-to-take checklist

Issue	Action
<p>Sharing information and collecting and analysing data</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedures in place for recording and sharing information between the police, children’s services and the voluntary sector. • Use information gathered to analyse patterns of running from home and local authority care. <p>Guidance section: 1.4 Link to National Indicator 71 requirements: 1 & 2</p>
<p>Regional arrangements and cross-border issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure RMFHC protocols are linked with protocols in neighbouring local areas and, where relevant, the RMFHC protocols of neighbouring countries. <p>Guidance sections: 1.4 Link to National Indicator 71 requirement: 3</p>
<p>Out of hours response</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All local authorities should have in place some form of emergency accommodation. This should not be a police cell unless the young person is under arrest. <p>Guidance section: 1.5 Link to National Indicator 71 requirement: 4</p>

Chapter 2

Children who run away and go missing from home

“I stormed out of the house and didn’t go back. I slept in a lorry all night – there were noises and it was cold. I went back next afternoon. I’d had nothing to eat. My parents just ignored me. They started arguing and just blamed me for everything.”

Sian, 13, Dorset

- 1) This section provides local authorities with information on how they should support young people at risk of running away or going missing from home.
- 2) This chapter is also relevant to children who run away or are missing and are living in private fostering arrangements. Children¹² are privately fostered when they are cared for by adults, who are not their parents or a close relative¹³, for a period of 28 days or more. More information about private fostering can be found at: www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/socialcare/safeguarding/privatefostering/

2.1 Working together

- 3) Running away should be seen as an indicator of underlying problems which may need further intervention. Some young people who run away from home will be ‘children in need’ and therefore entitled to services provided by the local authority or local voluntary agencies. These might include advice, guidance and counselling for the young person and for their families.
- 4) The police and other partner organisations should have agreed protocols and processes for referring children to the local authority for an assessment of their needs. Agencies working with young runaways will need to be familiar with the *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need*.
- 5) All inter-agency protocols should be consistent with the Framework and demonstrate an understanding of the information that a local authority needs to decide whether it is appropriate to make an initial assessment. Local RMFHC protocols and processes should agree a threshold for referrals to social care. For further information see *Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children* www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/resources-and-practice/IG00060/

12. Children under 16 (or 18 if disabled).

13. A close relative is defined as grandparent, brother, sister, step parent or uncle (brother of one’s father or mother, an aunt’s husband) or aunt (sister of one’s father or mother, an uncle’s wife).

2.2 Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) protocols

“It’s nice to have someone you can talk to who actually listens, who doesn’t think – he’s just a kid who doesn’t know anything.”

Ben, 15, Dorset

Missing from home

- 6) Every local authority should develop protocols with partner agencies covering children who run away and go missing from home. It is vital that RMFHC protocols agreed between children’s services, the police, other agencies and relevant voluntary sector agencies define roles and responsibilities when a child goes missing and when they return.
- 7) RMFHC protocols should include:
 - an agreed definition of a missing or runaway child or young person;
 - an agreed inter-agency framework for classifying the degree of risk when a child goes missing from home or when a missing young person comes to agency notice;
 - guidance on the threshold for referrals to social care;
 - details of who should carry out a common assessment (CAF) and how this information should be shared;
 - the basis on which agencies offer ‘Return Interviews’ for children who have run away from home;
 - details of preventative approaches.
- 8) RMFHC protocols should be signed-off by the LSCB with a process agreed for ongoing monitoring and regular review, and should be agreed between all agencies operating within the area. There should also be a named manager within children’s services’ departments whose responsibility it is to monitor policies and performance relating to children who go missing or run away.
- 9) Protocols should agree a threshold for when referrals should be made to children’s services’ social care, for example when:
 - evidence exists that the child has developed a repeated pattern of running;
 - the child has, or is likely to, experience significant harm;
 - the parent appears unable, or unwilling, to work to support and meet the needs of the child.

Link to National Indicator 71 requirements: 3, 5

22 Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care

Examples of Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) protocols:

- Pan-London Protocol for Young People Missing from Home and Care
www.londonscb.gov.uk/procedures/supplementary_procedures/safeguarding_children_missing_from_home_and_care/
- Lancashire Joint Protocol for Young People Missing from Home and Care
- Merseyside Protocols for Young People Missing from Home and Care
- Birmingham Processes for Young People Missing from Home and Care
www.lscbbirmingham.org.uk
- Manchester Protocol for Young People Missing from Home and Care
www.manchesterscb.org.uk/prof-specific.asp

2.3 Assessment of need

“I ran away ‘cos I was so wound up. I felt if I went back I would lash out and hit someone and end up in trouble.”

Billy, 14, Surrey

Common Assessment Framework (CAF)

- 10) The CAF is a consent-based tool for assessing a child in a holistic way to identify their additional needs. There is no need to assess every child using the CAF – and the pre-CAF checklist may be a useful way of determining whether a CAF is necessary. A CAF is particularly useful if the child’s needs are not immediately obvious or if the child has additional needs. In these cases, the CAF can help identify other services that should be involved with the child/parent. The CAF form does not need to be followed robotically because the form is a way recording conversation(s) between the practitioner and the child or young person. The level of detail in each part will vary according to the child’s needs and circumstances.
- 11) If the child has complex needs, they should be referred to the appropriate agency for a more specialist assessment. This specialist assessment will build on the work undertaken in completing the CAF. If there is any protection risk, the usual safeguarding route should be taken immediately.
- 12) The use of the CAF as a means of analysing the child’s needs will enable practitioners to combine their assessment with that of any other professional who might already be working with a child or have completed a specialist assessment for them. With consent from the child (where it is considered they are competent to do so), and in most cases their parents, practitioners from different agencies will be able to share information about a child’s needs, enabling them to work more effectively together, build up a holistic picture and develop a better co-ordinated response.

Lead Professional

- 13) Where it is decided that a child needs support from several agencies, having a Lead Professional should help ensure full co-ordination of the actions identified in the assessment process. The Lead Professional will provide a main point of contact for the child and, where appropriate, their family; and

will help the young person and their family to access services. It is essential that the Lead Professional is able to build up the trust and support necessary to facilitate the delivery of services for the young person.

Information about the CAF and Lead Professional, including examples of emerging good practice can be found at: www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/deliveringservices/integratedworking/

National Indicator 71 requirement: 1

Plymouth Young Runaways Project

Plymouth Young Runaways Project was set up with Neighbourhood Renewal Funding in 2006 as a one-year pilot initially covering two areas of the city. Following success in reducing the number of repeat missing persons (30 per cent reduction since set-up) through undertaking return interviews and ongoing one-to-one work, the project was funded by the local police force and children's services and rolled out across the entire city.

The team is made up of two police officers, one social worker, one education welfare officer, one voluntary sector drug & alcohol worker and one office manager with support from a half-time police sergeant, who also represents the project on the Children's Trust Executive.

The project has evolved a successful model of integrated working that delivers a range of well-co-ordinated services to children and young people based on the CAF and pre-CAF assessments. The project is housed in a children's services office alongside the local Youth Offending Service (YOS) team.

The team undertake joint visits to young runaways and their families and the young people view them as different from the regular police officers and social workers they may otherwise come into contact with. This perceived difference, has a big impact on the level of engagement with the service and the team's ability to build positive relationships with young people. The time invested in problem-solving the issue with the young person and their guardians is key to successful outcomes and positive feedback.

2.4 Risk assessment

- 14) Where an individual needs-assessment indicates the child may be at risk of harm, a referral should be made to children's social care. An evaluation of whether the child is likely to run away from home in the future will be one of the factors that informs the level of risk posed to the child, and the decision as to whether a referral to children's social care is appropriate. The assessment of whether a young person might run away again should be based on information about their:
- individual circumstances, including family circumstances in which the child has gone missing;
 - motivation for running;
 - possible destination; and
 - recent pattern of absences (if any).

24 Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care

- 15) When young people missing from home are located but have not been reported missing to the police by their families, further investigation might be warranted. It may be necessary to inquire into whether there are any continuing safeguarding concerns, or whether the young person and their family should be offered family support services.
- 16) 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.

Links to National Indicator 71 requirement: 3

2.5 Police Safe and Well Check and Return Interviews

“I’ve run away more than 50 times, first when I was 9, I remember I just wanted to hide from it all.”

Ayesha, 14, Surrey

- 17) Interviewing a child or young person on their return from a missing episode is necessary to understand why the person went missing or ran away in the first place. There are two stages to the process, the Safe and Well Check and the Return Interview. These are known by a variety of names, but for the purpose of this guidance and to achieve some standardisation, will be referred to as such.

Police Safe and Well Check

- 18) This is carried out by the police as soon as possible after the person has returned. Its purpose is to check for any indications that the young person has suffered harm; where and with whom they have been; and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by, or against, them.
- 19) Where a person goes missing frequently, it may not be practicable to see them every time they return. In these cases, a reasonable decision should be taken with regard to the frequency of such checks. This will mainly apply to young people missing from care who are likely to have other people responsible for their welfare to check this. Every effort should be made to visit those young people missing from home on every occasion.

Return Interview

- 20) This is a more in-depth interview and is usually best carried out by an independent person who is trained to carry out these interviews and is able to follow-up any actions that emerge. Many young people who run away or go missing need to build up trust with somebody before they will discuss in depth the reasons why they decided to run away. 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 Safe and Well Check (his/her medical condition should be discussed and any need for medical attention assessed).

- understand and try to address the reasons why the child or young person ran away.
 - try to prevent it happening again.
- 21) It is good practice that this interview takes place within 72 hours of the young person being located or returning from absence. It is especially important that a Return Interview takes place when a child:
- has been missing for over 24 hours;
 - has been missing on two or more occasions;
 - has engaged (or is believed to have engaged) in criminal activities during their absence;
 - has been hurt or harmed whilst they have been missing (or this is believed to have been the case);
 - has known mental health issues;
 - is at known risk of sexual exploitation; and/or
 - has contact with persons posing risk to children.

Links to National Indicator 71 requirement: 3

SCARPA Project, Newcastle

In Newcastle, Return Interviews are undertaken by SCARPA Intensive Support Workers. Having specialised staff who have a dedicated remit to carry out this work means they have the time and capacity to respond when needed, and are able to see the young person every day, or two or three times a day if necessary. It can take multiple visits to undertake one Return Interview thoroughly enough to inform a needs-assessment such as CAF.

SCARPA have developed a self-assessment tool for their young people so that they feel part of the process and don't feel that something is being 'done to them.' This self-assessment is done as part of the CAF process (which is consent-based and fully involves the child), or where cases include complex needs and beyond the scope of CAF, part of what the project call a CAF Plus. This needs-assessment forms the basis of an Action Plan which is reviewed on a regular basis with the young person. Casework usually ends when the young person has achieved the goals detailed in the Action Plan.

In addition to Intensive Support Workers the project has a Family Support Worker and a Sexual Exploitation Worker available for specialist support. Often working as the Lead Professional, the project also works closely with a wide range of other agencies in the city to ensure that all the needs of the young person are met.

The service manager, police, and children's services representatives meet on a regular basis to share intelligence and collectively work out a list of young people to be prioritised for casework based on a range of factors including known history, other agency involvement, number of missing episodes, age and known association with risky addresses or individuals.

2.6 Support for 16- and 17-year-olds

- 22) 16- and 17-year-olds who run away or go missing are not necessarily any less vulnerable than younger children and are equally at risk of not achieving the five Every Child Matters outcomes. They are likely to need just as much support to get their lives on track and make a successful transition into adulthood. However, 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.
- 23) Local authorities 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)). Any child who is provided with accommodation in these circumstances is a ‘looked-after’ child.
- 24) The homelessness legislation (Part 7 of the *Housing Act 1996*), provides a safety net for the very small number of 16- and 17-year-olds who do not meet the criteria for accommodation as children in need under section 20 of the 1989 Act. By virtue of the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002, these young people have a priority need for accommodation unless they are ‘relevant children’ (care leavers aged 16-17) or children in need owed a duty under s20 of the Children Act 1989. This means that a local housing authority must secure suitable accommodation for them if they are eligible for assistance and have become homeless through no fault of their own. However, in many cases, children who have run away or been forced to leave home will be children-in-need, and authorities should assume that they will require accommodation under s20 of the 1989 Act unless they are able to return home. Local authority children’s services must not seek to pass responsibility to housing authorities and the recent House of Lords decision in the case of *R(G) v London Borough of Southwark* confirmed the earlier decision in the case of *R(M) v London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham* that “local children’s services’ authorities cannot avoid their responsibilities by passing [16- and 17-year-olds] over to the local housing authority”.
- 25) Many authorities are developing protocols for working between housing and children’s services to tackle youth homelessness. Joint guidance published by the DCLG and the DCSF can be accessed at: www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/goodpracticeguide. This guidance highlights the importance of joint-working, underpinned by clear protocols between housing and children’s services and builds on the s10 duty in the Children Act 2004 for local authorities and their regular partners to co-operate to improve children’s wellbeing. These protocols should be linked with any RMFHC protocols for young runaways to ensure a joined-up approach to supporting vulnerable children and young people. Children’s services’ authorities can use the power in s27 of the Children Act 1989 to seek the help of any housing authority in the exercise of their functions, including their duty to provide accommodation under s20 of the Children Act 1989. In these circumstances, the housing authority must provide the help requested if it is compatible with their own duties, and does not unduly prejudice the discharge of their other functions.

2.7 Young people missing from home process flowchart

Identify child/young person is missing

Parents/carer/responsible adult identify time by which the child should be at the address. Parents/carer/responsible adult should make enquiries to locate the missing young person with relatives/friends. This should include searches of the residence and local area if the child or young person is not located.

Report to police

Parents/carer/responsible adult should telephone police with details of the missing person. **Details required:** child's name/DOB/where, when and who missing with?/what child was last wearing/description of young person/recent photo/medical history/time and location last seen/circumstances of going missing/details of friends and associates.

Officers conduct a risk-assessment forming the basis for resulting proportionate actions

Enquiries are then on-going. Sharing of information between the police, parents and other agencies as appropriate.

Young person is located or returns to home address

When a missing child is located by family or friends etc, it is their responsibility to return the child to the home address. Where a risk is present, a police officer may accompany the family or the police may be requested to collect and return the child/young person to the place of residence only if it is safe to do so. Parents must inform the police when a child returns of their own accord.

The police should conduct an interview known as a Safe and Well Check to establish the young person's well-being and safety, and to establish whether they were the victim of crime or abuse whilst missing.

If warranted, police should refer child or young person to Children's Services via normal safeguarding channels.

Children's Services or runaway/missing person service to carry out a Return Interview and Assessment of Need

Information established from interview to support assessment of need, to be carried out using the CAF (check whether CAF already exists.) Lead Professional to be appointed.

Young person offered relevant support by either statutory or voluntary services depending on what is available in the local area, CAF to be updated regularly. In some cases, specialist assessment may be required should it appear that the child or young person has complex needs.

2.8 Actions-to-take checklist

Issue	Action
Formal RMFHC protocols	<p>Local Safeguarding Children Boards should develop a set of RMFHC protocols clearly defining roles and responsibilities. Protocols should include a named person responsible for children and young people who go missing or run away and details of preventative measures.</p> <p>Guidance section: 2.2 National Indicator 71 requirements: 3, 5</p>
Assessment of need	<p>Make sure young people who go missing are provided with an Assessment of Need. This should conform to the requirements of the <i>Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need</i>. In many cases, a CAF will be the most appropriate assessment.</p> <p>Guidance section: 2.3 National Indicator 71 requirement: 1</p>
Risk assessment	<p>Where a child is identified as at risk of significant harm, a referral should be made. Children’s social care and RMFHC protocols and procedures should agree a threshold for this referral.</p> <p>Guidance section: 2.4 National Indicator 71 requirement: 3</p>
Return interviews	<p>As well as a police Safe and Well Check, young people who have run away should have access to a Return Interview, ideally with an independent person or someone the young person trusts.</p> <p>Guidance section: 2.6 National Indicator 71 requirement: 3</p>

Chapter 3

Children who run away and go missing from local authority care

3.1 Introduction

“Since being in care I don’t run away anymore as I have people to talk to in the unit who listen and help me.”

Ben, 12, London

- 1) Looked-after children¹⁴ depend on the local authority to act as their ‘corporate parent’. The local authority must assess their needs and ensure they receive appropriate services and support. The local authority should have the same interest in the progress and attainments of looked-after children as a reasonable parent would have for their own children.
- 2) Provision of the most suitable placement based on the needs of the individual child is likely to be the most effective way of minimising the likelihood that a child or young person would be motivated to run away. However, it is important to recognise that given the vulnerability of some individual looked-after children, it may be necessary to take additional measures to ensure that they are effectively safeguarded and protected from exploitation.
- 3) Where young people are missing from their care placements, it is essential that the professionals concerned work closely together to respond to the incident in a timely way, and follow the procedures agreed in the RMFHC protocol for the area in which the child is placed, to locate the child as quickly as possible (see section 3.3). Once the child has been located, it will be essential to assess their needs so that they can be referred for appropriate services – which might include independent advocacy and support. It may also be necessary to convene a statutory review chaired by their Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).¹⁵
- 4) Local authorities, in tandem with police forces and other partner agencies, must analyse missing-from-care incidents and, if they identify trends – for example, patterns of going missing from particular children’s homes or patterns across the local authority – then they must take all necessary steps to minimise the likelihood of children going missing in future.

14. Children who are provided with accommodation under s20 and s21 of the Children’s Act 1989, or who are the subject of a care order or an interim care order, or an emergency protection order, are ‘looked after’ by the local authority within the meaning of s22 of that Act.

15. The Care Matters White Paper includes the commitment that to support the strengthening of the IRO function introduced by the Children and Young Persons Act 2008, a requirement will be introduced so that every looked-after child has a specific named IRO to be responsible for reviewing their care plan.

3.2 Strategy and procedure

“If I have a good reason to run away nothing will stop me, but if I feel bad as I have good relationship with staff and don’t want to upset or distress them, this makes me contact them and come back sooner as I know they care and are worried.”

Gracie, 13, London

- 5) A strategic approach is essential to complement high-quality care planning in individual cases, so that looked-after children are effectively safeguarded by minimising the likelihood of missing-from-care incidents.
- 6) The local authority’s approach to managing missing-from-care episodes should be a key element of the authority’s wider strategy to ensure that it is a responsible corporate parent and enables all the children that it looks after to achieve the best possible outcomes.
- 7) A senior manager in the authority’s children’s services department should be responsible for taking the lead in working with partner agencies so that across the authority there is a systematic response whenever a looked-after child goes missing from their care placement.
- 8) The senior manager accountable for the performance of the local authority’s looked-after children’s services must ensure that adequate records are kept. Records should include up-to-date chronologies, which will assist in identifying any concerns about children’s care and any patterns of absence in situations where individual children persistently go missing from their care placement(s).

3.3 Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) protocols

Missing from care

- 9) The authority’s strategy for managing missing-from-care incidents should be set down in RMFHC protocols agreed with the local police and other partner agencies, including any local voluntary services.
- 10) These RMFHC protocols should cover a range of joint-working procedures and systems which will include:
 - agreed categories of absence and definition of missing from local authority care;
 - appropriate responses to children and young people who go missing from care, including arrangements for making missing persons reports to the police;
 - escalating the approach to intervention with individual children to reduce the likelihood of a child repeatedly going missing;
 - agreed reporting and recording systems for local authorities;
 - effective reporting and information-sharing between the local authority, the police and other agencies;

- prompt follow-up interviews with young people who go missing; and
 - joint-assessment information which should be used to revise and amend care plans and placement information records (see section on Care Planning). This information should also be made available to Ofsted inspectors.
- 11) RMFHC protocols should also set out arrangements for all partner agencies to monitor outcomes and analyse patterns of young people who go missing from care on a regular basis. Issues to be addressed in strategic monitoring reports will include:
- incidence of missing person's episodes;
 - location – are children more likely to be absent from some placements than others;
 - safeguarding implications;
 - actions when children are located (are children generally returned to the placements from which they have run away or gone missing?); and
 - professional practice and procedural issues.
- 12) The RMFHC protocol must also include the details of senior management posts in the local authority and in the police force that will be accountable for ensuring that all the processes agreed as part of the RMFHC protocol are followed.
- 13) Data about children who go missing from their care placements should be included in regular reports to council members, especially to the Lead Member for children's services and in reports by the local authority to Local Children's Safeguarding Boards. These reports should also be made available to Ofsted during inspection or on request. These reports should include information about the numbers of children who were missing from their care placements for more than 24 hours with details as to the child's needs and the circumstances in which they went missing. They must also include information about the measures being taken by the authority to safeguard looked-after children and reduce missing-from-care incidents.

Examples of Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) protocols:

- Pan-London Protocol for Young People Missing from Home and Care www.londonscb.gov.uk/procedures/supplementary_procedures/safeguarding_children_missing_from_home_and_care/
- Lancashire Joint Protocol for Young People Missing from Home and Care
- Merseyside Protocols for Young People Missing from Home and Care
- Birmingham Processes for Young People Missing from Home and Care www.lscbbirmingham.org.uk
- Manchester Protocol for Young People Missing from Home and Care www.manchesterscb.org.uk/prof-specific.asp

Links to National Indicator 71 requirement: 3,5

3.4 Care planning

- 14) Every looked-after child must have 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 should inform the decision as to which placement (eg, foster care or children's home) will be most suited to meeting the child's needs.¹⁶
- 15) All care plans must be kept under review. The review meeting, chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), should consider the plan for the welfare of the child, monitor the progress of the plan, and make decisions to amend it as necessary in light of changed knowledge and circumstances.
- 16) Where children have gone missing from their placements, then their statutory review will provide an opportunity to check that their care plan has been appropriately amended to address the reasons why the child was absent and includes a strategy to prevent re-occurrence should the child go missing in future. For example, where a child goes missing from their placement to have more contact with their family, then the review provides an opportunity to consider the child's views about how contact might be managed in future. Similarly, where there is evidence that a child is vulnerable to sexual exploitation, it may be necessary to convene a review to consider whether the placement is able to put in place a strategy to minimise any risk to the child, or whether it may be necessary to look for an alternative placement in order to keep the child safe.
- 17) Alongside the care plan, a Placement Information Record (PIR)¹⁷ should be completed between the responsible local authority and the provider of the child's placement. The expectations as to how they will meet the child's needs should be set out in the PIR¹⁸, which must describe how the provider will maintain the child's positive routines as part of their commitment to enable the child to experience a constructive placement, supporting them to achieve their potential.
- 18) It will be particularly important that the PIR includes details about:
 - any specific behaviour-management strategies that the provider is expected to follow;
 - the provider's role in meeting the child's health needs;
 - the provider's role in supporting the child's education; and
 - the provider's role in supporting contact with the child's family, including information about any restrictions of contact.
- 19) The National Minimum Standards (NMS) for fostering services and for children's homes, and the statutory regulations relating to these, require providers to have explicit policies and procedures in place which must be followed whenever a child is missing from their care placement without authority.¹⁹

16. The Integrated Children's System provides a conceptual framework, a method of practice and a business process to support practitioners and managers in undertaking the key tasks of assessment, planning, intervention and review so that they make effective care plans for every looked-after child. For more details www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/socialcare/integratedchildrenssystem/resources/exemplars/

17. The Placement Information Record exemplar is available at: www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/socialcare/integratedchildrenssystem/resources/exemplars/?asset=document&id=33983

18. See also Children's Homes Regulations 2001 – 12.

19. Children's Homes Regulations 2001 – 16 and 30; and Fostering Services Regulations 2002-2013.

- 20) This policy must be compatible with the RMFHC protocols established by the police and the local authority that operate in the area where the foster placement or children's home is located. The NMS are in the process of being revised at the time of writing this guidance (2009) and the requirement that the missing-from-care policies operated by children's homes and by fostering services must be compatible with local police RMFHC protocols will be incorporated into these future revised NMS.

Links to National Indicator 71 requirement: 3

Lancashire Street Safe Project, Preston

Lancashire Street Safe Project provides Return Interviews and ongoing support work to young people missing from care. The Return Interviews are undertaken by project staff who work in partnership with police colleagues. The police are able to get timely, updated information about the episodes of missing-from-home, and the project staff can respond immediately to this. The information gathered in the Return Interview informs the development of an Intervention Plan.

The Runaways Project Worker acts as an advocate for the young person to ensure that they are fully involved in their Intervention Plans, getting the young person on board at an early stage so they feel empowered. Young people are advised that their information is vital to ensuring the best services are put into place.

If the young person continues to go missing and five episodes are reached, more senior personnel meet so that relevant interventions and decisions can be agreed and put into place immediately. If the missing episodes reach nine, senior officers in the police and children's services come together to determine further strategies for working with the child/young person. If the child/young person continues to go missing, these senior staff meetings continue to occur.

Tactical meetings are also held within Lancashire County bringing agencies together (police, children's services, health, Street Safe and other partners) to ensure that vulnerable young people are identified, and support provided at an early stage. Cases are discussed at tactical and strategic levels to ensure that remedies are found to reduce episodes of children/young people going missing.

3.5 Placement matters

- 21) The NMS for children's homes and fostering services set out basic expectations about how providers should take into account the needs of the children who rely on their services. Standards concerned with protecting children from abuse and neglect, countering bullying, promotion of leisure opportunities, privacy and confidentiality, access to advocacy, and maintenance of familial contact are likely to be particularly relevant to creating a constructive caring environment in which each child feels individually valued to minimise the likelihood that they might wish to go missing from their placements.

34 Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care

- 22) Some children will need to be placed who already have an established pattern of running away. In these circumstances, it will be essential that the assessment of the child's needs takes into account the factors that led to their running away and that the care plan includes a strategy to minimise the likelihood of the child going missing in the future. It will be extremely beneficial for relevant information about the children to be recorded in preparation for filling in a missing person report form. Annex 2 includes information which should be considered in assessing the risk of a child going missing from their care placement.
- 23) This strategy should be discussed and as far as possible agreed with the child concerned. The strategy should include detailed information about the responsibilities of all parties (the child's social worker and other staff in the responsible authority, the placement provider, the child, their parents and other adults involved in the child's family network and other agencies), so that the child is safeguarded and does not run away or go missing in future. It should also set out a consistent plan to be followed with explicit roles and responsibilities assigned to the professionals involved in caring for the child should the child run away again.

Communication

- 24) Whenever a child goes missing from a children's home or foster home, the foster carer or the manager on duty in the children's home must ensure that the following individuals and agencies are informed within the timescales set out in the local RMFHC protocol:
 - the local police;
 - the authority responsible for the child's placement – if they have not already been notified prior to the police being informed that the child is absent. Notification is likely to be by phone in the first instance followed up by email/written confirmation. It will not be enough just to notify the child's social worker. The registered manager of the children's home or the fostering service must be responsible for ensuring that the accountable manager in the local authority has received the notification that a looked-after child is missing and has initiated the appropriate actions; and
 - Parents and any other persons with parental responsibility must be informed as soon as possible that their child is missing unless there are good reasons connected with the child's welfare for this to be inappropriate. At the point where the responsible authority is informed, agreement must be reached as to which professional will be responsible for informing the child's parents – this will usually be the child's social worker. A record must be made as to when parents have been informed, and what information has been given to them.

Out of Local Area placements

- 25) For some children, an appropriate placement may be one out of their local authority area. In these cases, the authority responsible for their placement should make sure that they will have access to all the services they need. Providers of care for children living outside their home area have a similar responsibility for making sure that the children they care for are able to make

use of appropriate local services. Information about these services must be recorded in the placement plan²⁰ which should match the information about the child's needs included in their care plan.

- 26) It will be particularly important that the PIR is as detailed as possible in circumstances where children are placed away from their responsible local authority.
- 27) Where children placed out of their local authority go missing, the placement provider will be responsible for following the local RMFHC protocol, but they will also need to ensure that they comply with any other processes that are specified in the RMFHC policy of the local authority which placed the child (also known as the 'placing' or 'responsible' authority). It is possible that the child will return to their home area, so it is essential that the necessary liaison between the police and professionals in the area of placement, and in the responsible authority, is well managed and co-ordinated, so that issues of logistics and/or distance do not delay or interfere in the actions of planning to locate the child. Notification should be made of the placement to the 'host' local authority (where appropriate) and to the local police force.

3.6 Risk assessment

- 28) Where a child goes missing from care, it will be necessary to undertake a risk-assessment and to have in place an agreed procedure for actions to be taken that reflect the level of risk identified. Locally-agreed protocols and procedures will determine when it is appropriate to refer the missing child to the out-of-hours/emergency duty team and to the police. It is good practice to ensure that any local authority risk-assessment tool is agreed and co-ordinated with partners, specifically the police, to streamline information-sharing and decision making.

Annex 1 includes information which should be considered in assessing the risk of a child going missing from their care placement.

3.7 Planning for the return

"Sit and talk to them and ask them why they ran away and investigate it."

Kellie 12, Newcastle

- 29) Where a child has been missing from their care placement, the responsible authority should 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 in the responsible authority will need to consider whether it is appropriate to apply to the court for a recovery order.

- 30) Where issues external to the placement are trigger factors in a young person going missing, care staff or foster carers will need to continue to offer them warm and consistent care when they return. In this instance, it will be counter-productive and detrimental to the young person's wellbeing to use their absence as a reason for terminating their placement.
- 31) The need for safe and reliable care may well be particularly significant for a young person who faces pressure to leave their placement as a result of circumstances beyond the control of their carers. In these circumstances, it will be even more important that the child's care plan is kept up-to-date and includes a very clear strategy to reduce the pressure on the child to leave – with explicit actions for professionals to take in situations where they are absent from their placements.
- 32) When the child or young person has been located, the local authority will be responsible for making the decision about whether they should be returned to their placement. This decision is likely to involve consultation with other professionals about the factors that led to the child running away or going missing from their placement. If the assessment is that it will be in the child's interests to be returned to their previous placement, then it will be necessary to make the practical arrangements to return the child. Arrangements should also be made for the child or young person to have an interview on their return.
- 33) Following missing incidents, especially if they lead to moves that will result in significant changes to the child's care plan, a statutory review of the child's care plan should be considered. The police and other relevant agencies should be given the opportunity to contribute to the review, in particular to indicate whether they have any concerns about the quality of care provided to the child and whether this could have influenced the child's decision to run away. As with all other statutory reviews, the child's parents should usually be included in this meeting.
- 34) The responsible local authority must ensure that they have taken full account of the circumstances that led to the child running from their placement to avoid the child being returned to an abusive environment.

Multi-agency meetings

- 36) Where young people run away persistently and/or engage in other risky behaviour, such as frequently leaving their placement to associate with unfamiliar or inappropriate adults, the care provider – in consultation with the authority responsible for them – should convene a multi-agency risk management meeting. The purpose of this will be to develop a strategy with all relevant agencies for managing the identified risks to young people. This strategy should be recorded in detail in the child's care plan.
- 37) This is particularly important where groups of young people run away from their care placement together and are involved in substance misuse, (including alcohol abuse) are being sexually exploited, or are committing offences. The care provider should ensure that risk-management meetings take place regularly to review the strategy until the agencies concerned reach agreement that it has been effective in tackling the targeted concerns.

- 38) The trigger for convening a multi-agency risk management meeting should be agreed locally and specified in the local RMFHC protocol.

Police Safe and Well Check

- 39) A Police Safe and Well Check is carried out as soon as possible after the person has returned. Its purpose is to check for any indications that the young person has suffered harm, where and with whom they have been, and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them.
- 40) Where a person goes missing frequently, it may not be practicable to see them every time they return. In these cases a reasonable decision should be taken with regard to the frequency of such checks. This will mainly apply to young people missing from care who are likely to have other key people responsible for their welfare to check this. Every effort should be made to visit those young people missing from home on every occasion.

Return Interview

- 41) The authority responsible for the child's or young person's care should make sure that they have the opportunity of a Return Interview. This is a more in-depth interview that should be carried out by a professional independent of the placement. Where a service is available, the Return Interview might be best provided by a professional from a voluntary agency (which could be an independent advocacy service or specialised runaways project), who is trained to carry out these interviews and is able to follow-up any actions that emerge with the authority responsible for the child's care. Many young people who run away or go missing need to build up trust with somebody before they will respond to an interview and discuss the reasons why they decided to run away. 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 Safe and Well Check (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; and
 - try to prevent it happening again.
- 42) It is good practice that this interview takes place within 72 hours of the young person being located or returning from absence. It is especially important that a Return Interview takes place when a child:
- has been missing for over 24 hours;
 - has been missing on two or more occasions;
 - has been engaged (or is believed to have engaged) in criminal activities during their absence;
 - has been hurt or harmed whilst they have been missing (or this is believed to have been the case);
 - has known mental health issues;
 - is at known risk of sexual exploitation; and/or
 - has contact with persons posing risk to children.

Links to National Indicator 71 requirement: 3

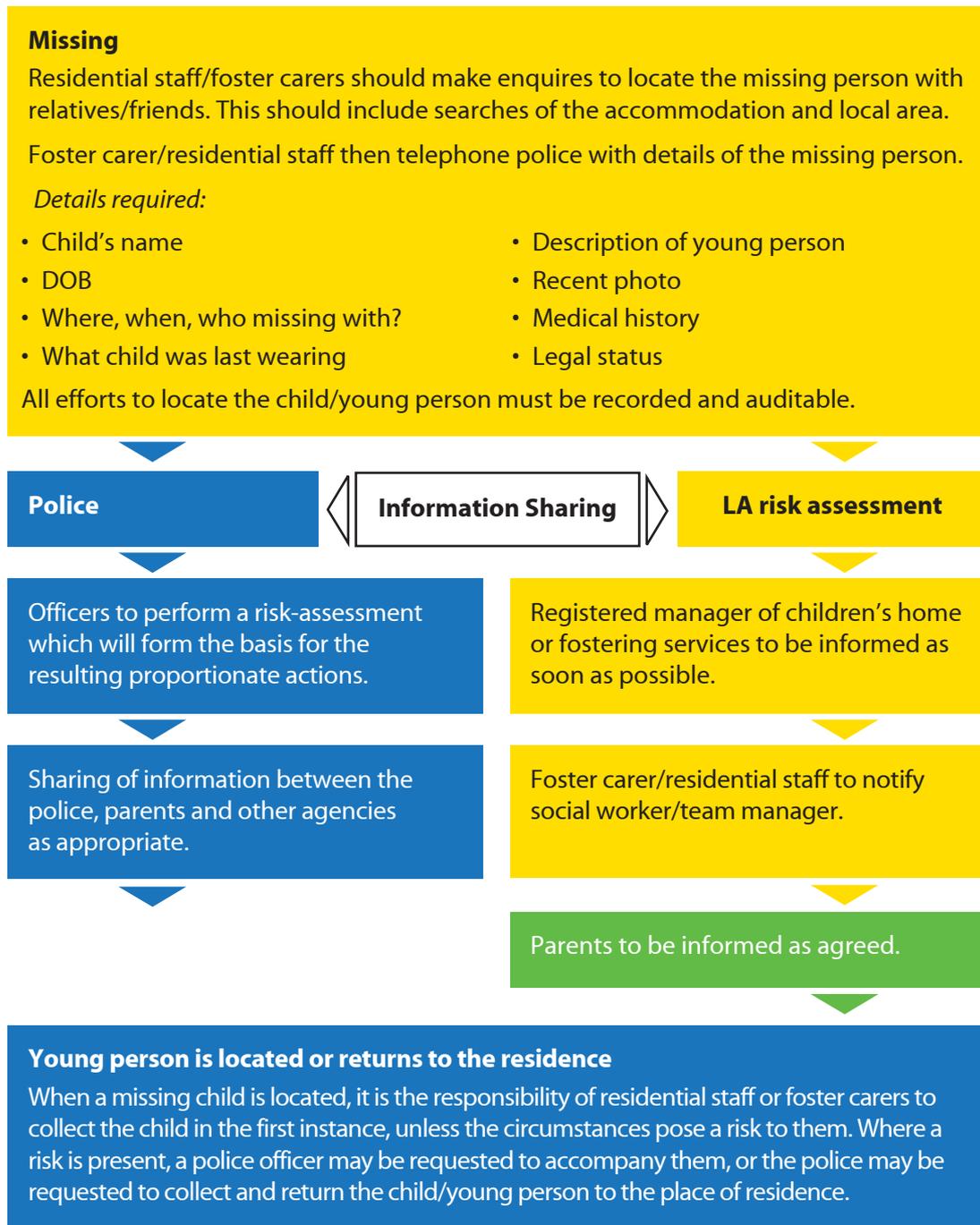
3.8 Looked-after children trafficked from abroad

- 43) Some of the children that a local authority looks after may be unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), and some of this group may have been trafficked into the UK and are likely to remain under the influence of their traffickers, even whilst they are looked after.
- 44) The assessment of need to inform the care plan will be particularly critical in these circumstances. The assessment must seek to establish:
 - relevant details about the child's background before they came to the UK;
 - an understanding of the reasons that the child came to the UK; and
 - an analysis of the child's vulnerability to remaining under the influence of traffickers.
- 45) In conducting this assessment it will be necessary for the local authority to work in close co-operation with staff in the UK Border Agency (UKBA) who may be familiar with patterns of trafficking into the UK. UKBA staff should be able to advise on whether information about the individual child suggests that they fit the profile of a potentially trafficked child.
- 46) The care plan should include a risk-assessment as to the likelihood of a UASC going missing in the same way that the care plan might for any other child believed to be at risk of going missing from their care placement. Given the circumstances in which potentially trafficked young people present to local authorities, the process of assessment and related risk-assessments will need to be sensitively managed. Provision may need to be made for the child to be in a safe place before any assessment takes place and for the possibility that they may not be able to disclose full information about their circumstances immediately. The location of the child should not be divulged to any enquirer until their identity and relationship with the child has been established, if necessary with the help of police and immigration services. In these situations the roles and responsibilities of care providers must be fully understood and recorded in the PIR.
- 47) The Government ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings on 17 December 2008, and the Convention came into force in the United Kingdom on 1 April 2009. As part of our improved services for trafficked children under the Convention, the Government has introduced a national referral mechanism, which provides improved procedures for local agencies to earlier identify, refer and support child victims of trafficking, and to prevent them from going missing.
- 48) It will be essential that the local authority continues to share information with the police and UKBA which emerges during the placement of a looked-after child who may have been trafficked, concerning potential crimes against the child, the risk to other children, or other relevant immigration matters. Further information about safeguarding trafficked children is available at: <http://publications.everychildmatters.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=HMG-00994-2007&>

3.9 Support for care staff

- 49) It is important that managers of children's homes and fostering services ensure that those caring for vulnerable young people are offered the support necessary so that they are equipped to deal with the challenges that face them when a child in their care runs away.
- 50) Staff teams in children's homes should be developed so that they can offer a consistent approach to young people's care, including being proactive about strategies to divert young people from running away. All staff must understand the procedures that must be followed if a young person goes missing.
- 51) Supervision and management of foster carers should include information about the fostering services' RMFHC protocols. Social workers will need to provide the foster carers they supervise with support to enable carers to develop the skills to anticipate the possibility of a young person running away, and if possible to divert them from this course of action.
- 52) Children's home staff must also be trained on their services' RMFHC protocol. This might be included in general training about safeguards for looked-after children. The competence and support-needs of care staff in managing missing from care issues should be considered during routine management appraisal and supervision.

3.10 Young people missing from care process flowchart





The police will conduct a Safe and Well Check to establish the missing person's well-being, and to establish whether they were the victim of crime or abuse whilst missing.



Foster carer/residential staff to:

- provide positive non-judgemental return;
- check young person's medical condition and make necessary arrangements.



Placement staff to inform the social worker and team manager of the young person's return.



Arrangements for Return Interview to be agreed in consultation with the child.
Care plan to be updated.



Consider whether to:

- convene a multi-agency strategy meeting;
- arrange an early looked-after child review;
- review any prevention/support work currently being undertaken with the child.

3.11 Actions-to-take checklist

Issue	Action
<p>RMFHC protocols</p>	<p>Children’s services must work with the police and other partner agencies to draw up procedures and protocols about action to take when children in care go missing.</p> <p>These procedures must be formally agreed by the lead member for children’s services and by the council committee responsible for ‘corporate parenting’.</p> <p>There should be a named person in the local authority responsible for children and young people who go missing or run away.</p> <p>Guidance section: 3.3 National Indicator 71 requirement: 3,5</p>
<p>Recording and sharing information</p>	<p>Reports about patterns of absence must be made available to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • senior managers responsible for the quality of fostering and children’s homes services; • commissioning managers in placing authorities; • social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers for looked-after children and their managers; • Ofsted inspectors during the inspection or on request. <p>Missing-from-care incidents must be carefully recorded and highlighted on individual case records and files so that care plans can be revised whenever necessary; and so that, should it be necessary, evidential information can be shared with the police to support criminal investigations.</p> <p>Guidance section: 3.6 National Indicator 71 requirement: 1</p>
<p>Care planning</p>	<p>Where children have established a pattern of going absent from placements, their care plan should include a strategy to minimise the likelihood of the child going missing in future, and provide review meetings to check that the placement remains suitable for meeting the child’s needs.</p> <p>Alongside the care plan, a Placement Information Record (PIR) should be completed.</p> <p>Guidance section: 3.4 National Indicator 71 requirement: 3</p>

<p>Multi-agency meetings</p>	<p>Where a young person persistently goes missing, the manager responsible for the children’s home or fostering service should convene a multi-agency risk management meeting. The trigger for such a meeting should be agreed and specified within the local RMFHC protocol.</p> <p>Guidance section: 3.6 National Indicator 71 requirement: 3</p>
<p>Return Interview</p>	<p>As well as a Police Safe and Well Check, young people who have run away should have access to a Return Interview, ideally with an independent person or someone the young person trusts.</p> <p>Guidance section: 3.7 National Indicator 71 requirement: 3</p>
<p>Staff support</p>	<p>Children’s home staff and foster carers must be offered support, supervision and training so that they understand the importance of following the prescribed RMFHC procedures, and to develop skills to enable them to discourage young people from going missing.</p> <p>Guidance section: 3.8</p>

Conclusion

- 1) The Government recognises that children who run away from home and care are at risk of being hurt, and in many cases resort to crime in order to survive.
- 2) Regardless of whether a child is living with their family, are in a local authority children's home or in foster care, running away should be seen as a sign that something is wrong in their lives. All instances of running away brought to the attention of local authorities must be taken seriously and acted on.
- 3) Early intervention is the best way of preventing young people from running away. Good Targeted Youth Support (TYS) arrangements will help identify cases of running early, and provide the opportunity to address these issues and prevent escalation. However, in some cases even with early intervention support, children will still run away and therefore services and procedures will always be required.
- 4) The 'Actions to Take' sections within the guidance provide local authorities with an indication of the procedures they should put in place to safeguard children who run away from home or care.
- 5) Multi-agency working must be at the core of all procedures and RMFHC protocols. Strong partnerships between children's services, the police, and the voluntary sector – and in the case of looked-after children, care and fostering services – are vital to minimising the chances of children and young people running away again and preventing them coming to harm in the future. The introduction of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and Lead Professional, help support better joined-up working. A prompt response by an appropriate agency has the potential to prevent a problem turning into a crisis.
- 6) A new national indicator specifically about young people who run away from home or care (NI71) was introduced into the National Indicator Set in April 2009. Collecting the right data at local level is essential to improving services for young people who run away.
- 7) This new, updated, guidance puts a much stronger emphasis on the importance of return interviews and highlights the difference between the Police Safe and Well Check and the Return Interview. Once a young person is found or returns to their family home or care placement, local authorities should ensure they have the opportunity to talk about the reasons why they ran away – ideally with an independent person, who understands and tries to address the reasons why the child ran away to prevent it happening again.
- 8) Looked-after children are particularly vulnerable and may be targeted by those wishing to abuse and exploit them. These children depend on the local authority to act as their 'corporate parent'. A care-placement where the child or young person feels safe and secure, and where their concerns are taken seriously, is likely to be the most effective way of reducing the likelihood that they will be motivated to run away. However, it may be necessary to take extra measures to make sure that they are effectively safeguarded and protected from exploitation.

The law concerning missing or runaway children

The legal framework

- The law does not generally regard young people under the age of 16 as being able to live independently away from home.
- Where a child/young person under 16 (or 18 if disabled) stays with a person (other than a person with parental responsibility or a close relative), for 28 days or more, the person caring for them is acting as a 'private foster carer' within the meaning of s66 of the Children Act 1989 and therefore they must notify the local authority that they are privately fostering the child/young person. 'Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005' SI 2005/1533. Failure to notify the local authority may be an offence.
- Anyone who has care of a child without parental responsibility may do what *is reasonable* in all the circumstances to safeguard and promote the child's welfare (Children Act 1989 s3 (5)). It is likely to be 'reasonable' to inform the police, or children's services departments, and, if appropriate, their parents, of the child/young person's safety and whereabouts.
- Anyone who 'takes or detains' a runaway under 16 without lawful authority may be prosecuted under s2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984. The enforcement of this provision might be problematic, however, if the young person has chosen to stay with another adult of his or her own free will.
- Where a young person who has run away is likely to be a child in need within the meaning of s17 of the Children Act 1989, the local authority should consider whether it should provide any services for the child, and in particular, whether the child meets the criteria in s20(1) of the 1989 for accommodation. This will almost always entail undertaking at least an initial assessment of need in accordance with the *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* and, in most cases, a full core assessment will be required.
- If the local authority has reasonable cause to suspect the child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, they should also undertake appropriate enquiries to enable them to decide what, if any, action they should take to safeguard or promote the child's welfare. Those enquiries must be started as soon as possible and in any event within 48 hours.
- A court may make a recovery order concerning a child who is the subject of a care order or an emergency-protection order; or who is the subject of police protection under s46 of the Children Act 1989 Order if there are grounds to believe that he has been unlawfully taken away from the person responsible for his care, or if he has run away or has been missing from care (s50 of the Children Act 1989). The Order acts as a direction for the child to be produced or for disclosure of his whereabouts. It also has the effect of permitting a police officer to enter named premises to search for the child using reasonable force if necessary.
- A person who unlawfully removes, keeps away, assists or otherwise encourages a child to run away or stay away from their care placement may be guilty of an offence and liable to prosecution (s49 of the Children Act 1989.)

- Where it is inappropriate or not immediately possible to seek parental consent, s51 of the Children Act 1989 exempts agencies which provide refuges from charges under s2 of the Abduction Act, referred to previously, and from other charges relating to children missing from care. Young people may only be accommodated under this Section if they appear to be at risk of harm. They may stay in refuge provision for a continuous period of up to 14 days, and for no more than 21 days in a three-month period.

Signposting – other useful information

The following information and guidance may be useful in helping to support children who run away or go missing from home and care:

- The **Young Runaways Action Plan** published in June 2008 outlines the Government's commitments to improving services for young runaways and can be found at: www.dcsf.gov.uk/publications/runaways/
- The *English Coalition for Runaway Children* is open to all those with an interest in the issues of runaway children. More information can be obtained from the organisation's Chairman, Andy McCullough, email: A.McCullough@railwaychildren.org.uk
- In April 2009, a new indicator was introduced into the **National Indicator Set (NIS)** specifically about young people who run away from home or care. The criteria for this indicator can be found in annex 3 of this guidance.
- The **ACPO Guidance on Missing People** can be found at: www.acpo.police.uk/asp/policies/Data/missing_persons_2005_24x02x05.pdf
- The Department for Children Schools and Families, in conjunction with The Children's Society, has produced a free resource pack for use in schools and youth groups which will be available from September 2009.
- **The Staying Safe Action Plan (2008)** provides more detail on what the Government will do to ensure children and young people are safe, and feel safe. It can be found at: www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/stayingsafe/
- **Working Together to Safeguard Children (2006)** is the main inter-agency guidance on procedures for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people. www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/resources-and-practice/IG00060/
- The Government published an action plan, setting out detailed responses to the recommendations in Lord Laming's report, **The protection of children in England: A progress report (March 2009)**. This can be found at: www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/socialcare/safeguarding/
- The **Stepping Up report** from The Children's Society was the pre-cursor to the *Young Runaways Action Plan*. It is the most up-to-date research on the subject of missing and runaway children. www.childrensociety.org.uk

- The NPIA **Missing Persons Bureau** (MPB) works alongside the police and related organisations to improve the services provided to missing persons investigations: www.npia.police.uk/missingpersons
- **Online grooming** – In April 2006, the Government launched the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) as a national law-enforcement agency focusing on tackling the sexual abuse of children, especially in relation to the internet. CEOP's principal aim is to identify, locate and safeguard children and young people from harm. Further details of about CEOP and their ThinkUknow educational programme can be found here: www.ceop.gov.uk/. CEOP also has a dedicated Child Trafficking Unit focusing on strategic knowledge and awareness-building of the problem in the UK. All reports may be found on the CEOP website.
- **Child trafficking** – Guidance for practitioners on what to do if they encounter a child who may have been trafficked can be found here: <http://publications.everychildmatters.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=HMG-00994-2007&>
Further background information relating to child trafficking can be found here: www.ceop.gov.uk/about/child_trafficking.asp
- **The NSPCC National Child Trafficking Advice and Information Line** (CTAIL) is a new service for anyone with concerns about human trafficking. CTAIL is funded by the Home Office and Comic Relief. The line is based at the NSPCC working in partnership with the Child Exploitation Online Protection Centre (CEOP) and ECPAT UK (End Child Prostitution, Pornography and Trafficking). Call free on 0800 107 7057 (lines are open from 9.30am-4.30pm on weekdays) or email ctail@nspcc.org.uk
- Young runaways are particularly vulnerable to drug or alcohol misuse. *Working Together to Safeguard Children* recognises the threat to children of living in households where drugs and alcohol are misused. A number of actions are outlined in the **Drug Strategy (2008)** committing the Government to a new support package for families, including safeguarding children of substance misusing parents www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/health/substancemisuse/
- Joint guidance published by the Department of Communities and Local Government and the Department of Children, Schools and Families in May 2008 *Joint working between Housing and Children's Services: Preventing homelessness and tackling its effects on children and young people* (www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/goodpracticeguide) highlights the importance of developing joint-protocols and working practices to support young homeless people including those who are homeless through running away. This guidance has an emphasis on care leavers and 16- 17-year-olds who are considered some of the most vulnerable groups of young people who are made homeless.

Helplines

Missing People

Missing People provides support for missing children, vulnerable adults and families left in limbo.

Through the **Runaway Helpline**, the charity provides crisis-support to any young person who has run away from home or care, or been forced to leave. The service is 24/7, free, confidential and can be contacted via Freefone 0808 800 7070, by emailing runaway@missingpeople.org.uk and also by texting 80234.

Missing People also helps local authorities to find young people missing from home or care. The charity can provide liaison and publicity opportunities, including national media partners, to aid the safe return of a child.

Missing People accepts referrals from any agency or carer involved with a missing child as long as the case has already been reported to police. A straightforward media consent form will need to be signed by whoever has parental responsibility. To contact Missing People about a missing child, email services@missingpeople.org.uk or call 0871 222 50 55.

Childline

Childline is a free confidential telephone helpline providing counselling service for children and young people run by the NSPCC. The phone number is 0800 1111.

Get Connected

Get Connected is a free, national helpline for any young person under 25 facing any issue, giving each young person the emotional support they need to work out what they want to do about their situation, and the information they need to choose the most appropriate help.

Get Connected holds details of over 13,000 different services and allows the young person to make their own decisions at their own pace. They then connect them, free, to their chosen service.

In the case of a young person who has run away or been thrown out of home, they can explore their accommodation options, including friends, family, social services, refuges/hostels or returning home. If the young person wants to find help with any other issues, Get Connected can also put them in touch with services such as counselling, advice, drop-in centres and practical help.

www.getconnected.org.uk/charity

Phone: 0808 808 4994 (1pm-11pm every day)

Email: help@getconnected.org.uk

Webchat: www.getconnected.org.uk (7pm-10pm every day)

FRANK

FRANK telephone line and website (www.talktofrank.com) is the joint DCSF, Department of Health and Home Office drugs advice and information campaign for young people: 0800 77 66 00.

Annex 1: assessing the risks that looked-after children may go missing

- 1) When children become looked-after, the views and experiences of parents or carers should be taken into consideration during the core assessment of the child's needs. In particular, parents or carers should be asked whether the child has ever run away or stayed in unknown, possibly unsafe, places.
- 2) Where children do run away from their care placement, their needs should be re-assessed and their care plan updated to incorporate a risk-management strategy to minimise missing-from-care incidents.
- 3) The duration of absences should not be taken as the primary indicator of risk. Absences of short duration may be as risky as lengthier ones. Factors to be taken into consideration when a young person goes missing from their placement include:
 - previously-assessed levels of vulnerability;
 - age of child;
 - time of day/night;
 - information specific to the child (eg, previous history of going missing; whether contact issues or family conflict might have influenced them to go missing from their placement);
 - whether or not the child has any physical/learning difficulties or serious health problems (eg, diabetes or epilepsy);
 - the emotional health of the child (eg, whether they have a history of harm or self-injurious behaviour); and
 - suspected associations when the child is missing along with possible areas in which the child might be located.
- 4) Risk assessments should be completed in consultation with parents and those with professional knowledge of the child. Local authorities should consult with the police about the information that would be most helpful in assisting them to locate the child and investigate any possible offences by adults involved in encouraging the child to go missing from their placement. It will be important that data about young people who go missing in one agency is compatible with that used by other agencies with a responsibility for the welfare of missing children.

Annex 2: glossary of terms

ACPO	Association of Chief Police Officers
CAF	Common Assessment Framework
CAMHS	Children & Adolescent Mental Health Services
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
EDS	Emergency Duty Services
LSCB	Local Safeguarding Children Board
Looked-after	See 'Definitions' section
Missing	See 'Definitions' section
Runaway	See 'Definitions' section
RMFHC	Runaway and Missing from Home and Care protocol
NPIA	National Police Improvement Agency
TYS	Targeted Youth Support
CEOP	Child Exploitation and Online Protection centre
SI	Statutory Instrument
DCLG	Department of Communities and Local Government
PIR	Placement Information Record
IRO	Independent Reviewing Officer
CTAIL	National Child Trafficking Advice and Information Line
NMS	National Minimum Standards
FIP	Family Intervention Programmes
UASC	Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children
NI	National Indicator
UKBA	UK Border Agency

Annex 3: National Indicator 71 – Missing from Home and Care criteria

Introduction

- 1) The terms ‘young runaway’ and ‘missing’ in this context refer to children and young people up to the age of 18 who have run away from their home or care placement, have been forced to leave, or whose whereabouts is unknown.
- 2) These young people face a particular range of risks from having to find alternative places to stay and means to survive. Often, they are extremely vulnerable: we know that 1 in 6 of these young people will sleep rough, and that 1 in 12 will be hurt or harmed whilst away.
- 3) Therefore, this indicator has been introduced to raise local-area awareness to create a focus on the provision of services to this vulnerable group of young people. The indicator will support joint-working between the police and children’s services and other relevant bodies, to support local strategic partnerships and children’s trusts in establishing the scale of running away in their local area, and to put services in place to respond accordingly and effectively.
- 4) The indicator asks local areas to assess whether appropriate systems, procedures and protocols are in place to identify the levels of running in their area, and whether the response to instances of running is appropriate to the needs of young people who run away. The intention is not to ask local areas to provide information about the level of running, or the detail of their service provision, but to provide a picture of the extent to which appropriate services are provided. This information should also be used to assist local Safeguarding Children’s Boards and Children’s Trusts to improve local service provision for runaways, and support them in achieving the five Every Child Matters outcomes.
- 5) It is recognised that this indicator is focused on service provision rather than outcomes for young people. At present, the recording and sharing of data at a local level can be so patchy, that it would be impossible to have an indicator based on this data (as a proxy for outcomes). It is hoped that the improvements in processes and service provision that this indicator will bring about will allow a move to a more outcome-focused indicator in 2011.
- 6) Local areas will have the opportunity to explain why they have given themselves a particular score in the “comment” box. Whilst using this box is not compulsory, local areas may wish to use it to explain why they have given themselves a particular score, especially where failure to meet one or two points in the criteria has prevented them achieving a higher score, where the majority of their provision is at a higher level. They also may wish to use it to set out how they plan to improve their services, and therefore improve their score in the future. This will help DCSF to understand the provision available in the area, and identify how they can support the local area to improve that provision, and consequently their indicator score. Existing inspection procedures will monitor whether evidence supports the awarding of such scores.

- 7) For the purposes of these criteria, we have used the term 'missing' when referring to actions that need to happen to help ensure the immediate safety of a child, when their whereabouts are still unknown, and the reason for the episode of 'missing' may not yet be known. We have used the term 'runaway' when referring to actions that need to happen once a child has been located and returned to a place of safety, and it has been established that they have run away from their home or care placement, or feel they have been forced to leave.
- 8) In some instances, we have indicated where a different response to children missing from home when compared to children missing from care is acceptable to achieve a certain score. Where this has not been made explicit in the criteria, the expectation applies to all children and young people. In these instances you should judge yourselves against the provision in place for children missing from home.

1) Local information about running is gathered

To score 0:

- A notification is not sent by the police to children's services or a representative agent for **all** children missing from home; or in the case of children missing from care, it is not sent to an identified receiving point. No expectation that this will change within the following three months.
- Aggregate data in relation to runaway and missing children is not collated or only collated from certain groups of missing children, and there are no plans in place to change this within the following three months.
- Local area, through the local Safeguarding Children's Board, or the Children's Trust Board is not able to identify the number²¹ of:
 - incidences of running;
 - individuals who have run; and
 - individuals who have run on two or more occasions;and there is no expectation that this will change in the following three months.

To score 1:

- A notification²² is sent by the police to children's services or an appropriate representative agent for **all** children missing from home, and to an identified receiving point for children missing from care. Although there is no written protocol for the timescales of such reports in place.
- Aggregate data about the profile of running in the area is collated and shared on a regular basis between police and children's services.
- Local area, through the local Safeguarding Children's Board, or the Children's Trust Board is able to identify (or will be able to identify in the next three months) the number of:
 - incidences of running;
 - individuals who have run; and

1. This refers to all instances of running and individuals who have run, not just the relatively small number of children who will have been formally referred to children's social care.

2. Different police forces may already have a system in place, known by one of various guises. Alternative names include a juvenile referral form or a child welfare referral. However, all police forces should have a mechanism in place to alert local authorities when a young person in their area (whether they are looked-after or not) comes to the police's attention. This should be seen as a notification, and IS NOT necessarily a formal referral to children's social care, although in some circumstances it may be appropriate for such a referral to take place.

- individuals who have run on two or more occasions;
but this is not necessarily able to be broken down by the child's age, gender and ethnicity, and whether the child is running from home or care.

Local areas may award themselves a 1 if they meet all but one of the criteria above, and have a clear action plan in place setting out how they will fulfil the remaining criterion within the following three months.

To score 2:

- A notification is sent by the police to children's services or an appropriate representative agent for **all** children missing from home, and to an identified receiving point for children missing from care and there is a written protocol in place setting out the required timescales for such reports to be made enabling services to co-ordinate and act quickly to secure the location and safeguard the child.
- Information is shared, on a regular basis, between the police and children's services enabling them to identify the following patterns where a child has:
 - gone missing or run away on two or more occasions;
 - been missing or run away for more than **48** hours;
 - been involved as a victim or perpetrator of criminal behaviour whilst missing or having run away.
- Referrals from the police are supplemented by information from other statutory partners. Relevant information-sharing protocols are in place to support this.
- Aggregate data about the profile of running in the area is collated between police and children's services and shared.
- From this data the local area, through the local Safeguarding Children's Board, or the Children's Trust Board is able to identify the number of :
 - incidences of running;
 - individuals who have run; and
 - individuals who have run on two or more occasions;This information can be broken down by the child's age and gender, and whether the child is running from home or care.
- Local area, through the local Safeguarding Children's Board, or the Children's Trust Board is able to identify:
 - children's homes that have particularly high levels of 'missing' reports in relation to other homes in the area;
 - the proportion of young people who are hurt or harmed whilst they are away; and
 - the proportion of young people who have committed an offence whilst they are away.

Local areas may award themselves a 2 if they meet all but one of the criteria above, and have a clear action plan in place setting out how they will fulfil the remaining criterion within the following three months.

To score 3:

- A notification is sent by the police to children's services or an appropriate representative agent (where there is an identified receiving point) for **all** children missing from home or care and there is a written protocol in place setting out the required timescales for such reports to be made enabling services to co-ordinate and act quickly to secure the location and safeguard the child.
- Information is shared, on a regular basis, between the police and children's services enabling them to identify the following patterns where a child has:
 - gone missing or has run away on two or more occasions;
 - been missing or has run away for more than **24** hours;
 - been involved as a victim or perpetrator of criminal behaviour whilst missing or having run away;
 - known mental health issues;
 - known risk of sexual exploitation;
 - known risk of contact with persons posing risk to children; or
 - incidents that have generated assessment of needs via Common Assessment Framework, s47 or s17 of the Children Act 1989.
- Police information is supplemented by information from other statutory partners, and where appropriate, the voluntary sector. Relevant information-sharing protocols are in place to support this.
- Aggregate data about the profile of running in the area is collated between police, children's services and **other partner** agencies and shared at least every three months.
- From this data, the local area, through the local Safeguarding Children's Board, or the Children's Trust Board is able to identify:
 - incidences of running;
 - individuals who have run;
 - individuals who have run on two or more occasions;
 - incidents that have generated a case conference; or professionals meeting.

This information can be broken down by the child's age, gender **and ethnicity**, whether the child is running from home or care, and – in the case of children running from care – whether the child is in an out-of-area placement.

- Local area, through the local Safeguarding Children's Board, or the Children's Trust Board is able to identify:
 - children's homes that have particularly high levels of 'missing' reports in relation to other homes in the area;
 - areas where missing young people or runaways are frequently located;
 - the proportion of young people who are hurt or harmed whilst they are away; and
 - the proportion of young people who have committed an offence whilst they are away.

2) Local needs analysis-based information gathered about levels or causes of running are in place.

To score 0:

- No procedure is in place for the collecting, sharing, and analysis of data collected by the police and other statutory partners in relation to young people who run away from home or care, and no action is taken as a result.

To score 1:

- Procedure is in place for the collecting and sharing of data collected by the police and children's services (or will be in place in three months), **but** the data is not frequently analysed and reviewed by the local safeguarding children board, or the local Children's Trust Board. This collection and analysis of data may only cover particular wards or areas within the local authority.

To score 2:

- Procedure is in place for the collecting and sharing of data collected by the police, children's services and other partners; the data is frequently analysed and reviewed by this group, informing patterns and trends in practice, but not frequently analysed and reviewed by the local safeguarding children board, or the local Children's Trust Board. This collection and analysis of data covers the whole of the local authority area.

To score 3:

- Procedure is in place for the collecting and sharing of data collected by the police, children's services and other partners; it is frequently analysed and reviewed by the local safeguarding children board, or the local Children's Trust Board, and it is used to inform a proactive response to running and patterns of running in the local area. This collection and analysis of data covers the whole of the local authority area.

3) Local procedures to meet the needs of runaways agreed

To score 0:

- No agreed protocols for responding to all instances of running, and no existing multi-agency response to the needs of runaways in place. No evidence that this will change within the following six months.
- Welfare Return Interviews not offered and a child's welfare assessment is limited to the Police Safe and Well Check. No plans to implement systematic Return Interviews within the following six months
- There is no risk-assessment in place for children who are missing or who have run away from home or care and, as such, all incidents are given the same response.

To score 1:

- Runaways' services are in place, but not necessarily informed by a local needs analysis.
- Risk-assessment tool is not in place, but is planned within the next three months which will enable each incident of running to be assessed, and an appropriate response planned and carried out.

- Procedures for responses to all instances of running are under development with clear plans for them to be reviewed frequently, with outcomes of the review acted upon.
- The protocols and procedures will be reviewed and updated at least every two years.
- Return Interviews (as opposed to Police Safe and Well Checks) are offered for every instance of running where a child has:
 - been missing for over 24 hours;
 - been missing or has runaway on two or more occasions; or
 - engaged (or is believed to have engaged) in criminal activities during their absence.

A score of 1 may be awarded where there is clear evidence that this will happen within the following six months.

- Information gathered as part of Return Interviews is shared with children's services, police and other professionals working with the child. A score of 1 may be awarded where there is clear evidence that this will happen within the following six months.

Local areas may award themselves a 1 if they meet all but one of the criteria above, and have a clear action plan in place setting out how they will fulfil the remaining criterion within the following three months.

To score 2:

- Runaways' services are informed by a local-needs analysis.
- Risk-assessment tool is in place, which enables each incident of running to be assessed, and an appropriate response planned and carried out.
- Procedures for responses to instances of running are in place, implemented and reviewed, with outcomes of the review acted upon.
- The protocols and procedures are reviewed and updated at least every two years.
- Return Interviews (as opposed to Police Safe and Well Checks) are offered for every instance of running where a child has:
 - been missing for over **24** hours;
 - been missing or has run away on two or more occasions; or
 - engaged (or is believed to have engaged) in criminal activities during their absence.
- Information gathered as part of Return Interviews is shared with children's services, police and other professional working with the child. Relevant information-sharing protocols are in place to support this.
- Where the young person has run from local authority care, this information is shared with the independent reviewing officer and is used to inform care planning.

Local areas may award themselves a 2 if they meet all but one of the criteria above, and have a clear action plan in place setting out how they will fulfil the remaining criterion within the following three months.

To score 3:

- Runaways' services are informed by a local-needs analysis.
- Risk-assessment tool is in place, which enables each incident of running to be assessed, and an appropriate response planned and carried out. This risk-assessment is a joint tool for police and children's services.
- Procedures for responses to instances of running are in place, implemented and reviewed, with outcomes of the review acted upon. The protocols and procedures are reviewed and updated at least every two years.
- Return Interviews are offered, where appropriate by independent organisation, for every instance of running where a child has:
 - been missing for over 24 hours;
 - been missing or has runaway on two or more occasions;
 - engaged (or is believed to have engaged) in criminal activities during their absence;
 - been hurt or harmed whilst they have been missing (or this is believed to have been the case);
 - known mental health issues; or
 - known risk of sexual exploitation or contact with persons posing risk to children.
- Information gathered as part of Return Interviews is shared with children's services, police and other professionals working with the child. Relevant information-sharing protocols are in place to support this.
- Where there are multiple incidents of running involving a young person, an action plan to bring about behaviour change is put in place and implemented, and is regularly reviewed for its effectiveness.
- In cases where the area has a child running from an out-of-authority placement, the area (as the home authority) calls a professionals' meeting involving the relevant organisations from the host authority, to determine action, and to ensure change.
- When a child who has a history of running is put in an out-of-authority placement, the host authority is informed of the risk, and as part of the placement agreement, appropriate details are shared to support the home authority to manage that risk and inform care planning for the individual child.

4) Protocols for responding to urgent/out-of-hours referrals from the police or other agencies are in place

Out-of-hours referrals, made from the police or other agency to children's services because a child or young person who has run away has been found, or has presented themselves, should be considered to be any referral that takes place outside normal working hours. (So in most cases, referrals that take place before 9am or after 5pm Monday to Friday, and referrals that take place over the weekend.)

To score 0:

- Out-of-hours referrals are not made, or are not made in every instance of a young person being found (or presenting themselves) out of hours, and there is any reason to believe that their home or care setting may not be an appropriate place for them to be returned to.

58 Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care

- No protocols for out-of-hours referrals are in place, or under development, and there are no plans to develop them.
- The number of out-of-hours referrals is not monitored and recorded.
- No assessment of suitability of the emergency accommodation in which young people are placed.
- No onward referral procedures are in place.

To score 1:

- Out-of-hours referrals are made **whenever** any missing young person is found or presents themselves, and there is any reason to believe that their home or care setting may not be an appropriate place for them to be returned to.
- Multi-agency protocols are under development and will be in place within the following three months. These protocols will include a system for monitoring whether each out-of-hours referral is handled in line with the protocols.
- The number of out-of-hours referrals is monitored and recorded, or there are clear plans to do so within three months.
- Young people who need emergency accommodation are placed appropriately, and the location of each placement is recorded. Onward referral procedures are in place.

To score 2:

- Out-of-hours referrals are made **whenever** any missing young person is found or presents themselves, and there is any reason to believe that their home or care setting may not be an appropriate place for them to be returned to.
- Multi-agency protocols for out-of-hours referrals are in place. These protocols include a system for monitoring whether each out-of-hours referral is handled in line with the protocols.
- The number of out-of-hours referrals is monitored and recorded, or there are clear plans to do so within three months.
- Young people who need emergency accommodation are placed appropriately, and the location of each placement is recorded. Onward referral procedures are in place.

To score 3:

- Out-of-hours referrals are made **whenever** any missing young person is found or presents themselves, and there is any reason to believe that their home or care setting may not be an appropriate place for them to be returned to.
- Multi-agency protocols for out-of-hours referrals are in place. These protocols include a system for monitoring whether each out-of-hours referral is handled in line with the protocols, and a way of ensuring that remedial action is instituted following the identification that the protocols have not been followed.
- The number of out-of-hours referrals is monitored and recorded.

- Young people who need emergency accommodation are placed appropriately, and the location of each placement is recorded. Onward referral procedures are in place.

5) Local procedures to support effective prevention and early intervention work

To score 0:

- No prevention or early intervention service in place, and no demonstrable plans for this to change.

To score 1:

- A prevention or early-intervention service is under development that facilitates early intervention working with those young people who have already run, in order to prevent the continuation and escalation of running behaviour.

To score 2:

- A prevention or early-intervention service in place that facilitates prevention of running – working with those young people identified as of risk of running, but who have not run yet; and early intervention working with those young people who have already run, in order to prevent the continuation and escalation of running behaviour. This service will draw on local voluntary-sector expertise.
- A service in place so that those working with young people can refer those who they believe are at risk of running, and this service is well-publicised, known, and available to all those working with young people.
- Clear escalation protocols in place, including referrals into local assessment procedures.
- Young person's family and/or carers are engaged in and, where possible, agree any prevention or early-intervention strategy.

To score 3:

- A service in place that facilitates prevention of running – working with those young people identified as of risk of running, but who have not run yet; and early intervention working with those young people who have already run, to prevent the continuation and escalation of running behaviour. This draws on local-voluntary sector expertise.
- There is a specific referral point to where all those working with young people can make referrals when they believe a young person is likely to run.
- Service is well-publicised, known, and available to all those working with young people.
- Clear escalation protocols in place, including referrals into local assessment procedures.
- Young person's family and/or carers are engaged in and, where possible, agree any prevention or early-intervention strategy.
- Prevention and early-intervention service is reviewed, and effectiveness evaluated every year, gaps identified, and plans made to fill any gaps.

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