

CHILDREN'S SERVICES AUTHORITIES IN THAMES VALLEY AND THAMES VALLEY POLICE

Joint protocol concerning children and young people who run away or go missing from home or care-to include reports of absences from April 29th 2014.

This should be read in conjunction with *Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care (January 2014)* which details the responsibilities of those involved with 'looked after' children.

Police missing and absent definition from April 29th 2014

MISSING - "Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another"

ABSENT – "A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be"

Thames Valley Policy will not categorise the following as absent –they will always be subject of a missing person investigation:-

- *All children 14 and under*
- *All registered sex offenders*
- *All children 15 and over who have a CSE warning marker, CSE intelligence or are named in a child abduction warning notice*

1. The Police Enquiry Centre (PEC) receives a report that a child is missing and records them as missing or absent dependent on the answers to 10 standard risk assessment questions.

- *What is the specific concern that has caused you to call the police?*
- *What has been done so far to trace the individual?*
- *Is this significantly out of character?*
- *Do they need urgent medical attention or essential medication that is not likely to be available to them?*
- *If under 18 are they currently at risk of child abuse including child sexual exploitation?*
- *Are they likely to be subjected to any other crime?*
- *Are they likely to be the victim of any other form abuse?*
- *Are they likely to attempt suicide?*
- *Do they pose a danger to other people?*
- *Is there any other information relevant to their absence?*

2. The person reporting this to the police should provide the police with up-to-date information to inform the above, as well as details of enquiries the caller has made to trace the missing child. A control room supervisor will authorise the status as missing or absent.
 3. In cases where the report initially goes to Children's Social Care (CSC) in the relevant Council, the case should still be referred by CSC to the Police Enquiry Centre (PEC) on 101.
 4. If a child is risk assessed to be recorded as 'absent' their details will be added to the Police National Computer (PNC) and an appropriate call-back time agreed with the caller. When that time is reached the police will call back the reporting person and review the ten questions. If at that time, or earlier if further information comes to light, the 'absent' child is deemed by the Police to be at risk, their status will be changed to 'missing' and officers deployed to liaise with the reporting person to commence a missing person investigation.
 5. Once the location of an absent child is established it will be the responsibility of the reporting person to collect the child and establish the reasons behind their absence. The police will not conduct a safe and well check unless crimes or other safeguarding issues are suspected.
 6. Police will record and monitor absent occurrences alongside missing, will share information with partners in the same way as missing, and will refer appropriate cases of absent children to missing person panels.
 7. When the answer to any of the initial 10 questions is yes, the child is recorded as missing. A police officer will visit the reporting person and commence a missing person investigation. They will conduct a further risk assessment to establish potential risk as high or medium. Missing children under 18 will never be categorised as low risk by the police.
 8. The police duty supervisor is informed and he/she will manage the police response. All high risk cases will be led by a senior officer.
 9. Police officers will :
 - Search the premises and surrounding grounds accepting this action should already have been completed by the reporting person. Police are searching both for the missing child, and also evidence of 'push/pull' factors behind the child going missing.
 - Obtain full details concerning the child's disappearance
 - Complete a full risk assessment asking the initial 10 questions again to ensure nothing is missed, together with 8 further questions.
- *Is the person detainable under any Mental health legislation-if so what is the legislation?*
 - *Is the person vulnerable due to other factors?*
 - *Is the person particularly at risk of harm due to physical disability, frailty or memory loss?*

- *Does the person lack the ability to interact safely with others in an unknown environment (mental illness, learning disability and/or sensory impairment?)*
 - *Has the person been involved in a violent, homophobic or racist incident immediately prior to disappearance*
 - *Any child safeguarding concerns (subject to child protection plan, known to social care/pvp and/or specific PNC warning flag triggered?)*
 - *Is the person suffering from a drug or alcohol dependency?*
 - *Any social concerns? (family/relationship/employment/financial/school/college)*
- Obtain a detailed description of the child's clothing, together with a recent photograph
 - Obtain consent to release the photograph to the press (if required) and pass details to partner agencies assisting with the search
 - Add the child's details to the missing person records management system,
- Add the child's detail to the Police National Computer (PNC)
10. Police will undertake a secondary investigation to identify any incidents or issues which may inform the risk assessment or help locate the child more quickly e.g. Domestic abuse, child protection reports, the child is in care, potentially at risk from CSE or other crime or particularly vulnerable for any reason. In addition to daily information share reports (detailed at 13) Police should consider contacting CSC in the relevant Local Authority for any information they may hold and the risk assessment must be continually reviewed.
11. Police are responsible for liaising with family as well as with other agencies and force areas. If the child is in care, it may be more appropriate for CSC to undertake enquiries with the family and other agencies and report their findings back to the police. This approach should be decided on a case by case basis.
12. The local Police Missing Person Co-ordinator is the single point of contact for all agencies. Out of week day office hours the local Duty Inspector is the contact.
13. A daily information sharing report will be sent to every CSC from their respective missing person co-ordinator containing details of ALL children under 18 reported missing and absent in the previous 24 hours, together with all returns. The information will contain full name, date of birth, home address and contact details for the missing/absent person. It will include a summary of the circumstances of the missing/absent episode together with 'location missing from' and risk factors. The return information will include a summary of the safe & well check by Police which should cover if ascertained, the reason for going missing, a summary of the circumstances whilst the child was missing/absent, location found and all other information obtained by the police. Reports covering weekends will be sent on Monday mornings. The

missing person co-ordinator will also send reports of children missing/absent 3 x in 90 days, longer than 24 hours and longer than 5 days as those deadlines are reached.

14. All high and medium risk missing persons are reviewed at the beginning and end of every shift by the Duty Inspector. Any child who is in care or who is particularly vulnerable will be reviewed within 24 hrs by CSC. Where there are concerns about a child's vulnerability or that the child may be at risk of significant harm a referral should be made to CSC as soon as this becomes evident. The referral will contain all details as previously stated at 13.
15. If the child has been missing for more than 24 hours, the case will be reviewed at the police daily management meeting.
16. In all high risk cases or once a child has been missing over 24 hours, the police, in consultation with partner agencies, must consider a media strategy.
17. When a child deemed to be medium risk has been missing for more than 48 hours, the case will be reviewed by a Detective Inspector.
18. When a child has been missing over 5 days CSC will convene a strategy meeting. CSC will call a strategy meeting sooner if they consider the child is likely to suffer significant harm. Subsequent strategy meetings should be held as frequently as required to progress the joint investigation, but at no less than 5 working day intervals for the first 4 weeks and then at a frequency agreed between the senior responsible police officer and the DCS or his/her delegated representative.
19. All missing persons are notified to the Police National Missing Persons Bureau (National Crime Agency) after 48 hours or earlier if the child is at high risk of harm.
20. If the child has been missing for more than 10 weeks, the missing person co-ordinator will ask for the PNC entry to remain in place for up to a year.
21. Within 24 hours of the child's return, the police undertake a 'safe & well' check. Police missing person co-ordinators will pass details of the safe & well check to CSC within 24 hours weekdays or every Monday following week-end returns.
22. In cases where a child goes missing repeatedly, or if there are other concerns about the child, the police will make a referral to CSC irrespective of the duration of time the child has been missing. If outside office hours, police Sergeants must inform the relevant EDT (out of hours CSC)
23. In cases where a child discloses a child protection issue, a referral will be made to the referral centre or MASH who will liaise with CSC in order to determine if there is need for joint agency investigation. If so, a strategy meeting will be convened.
24. Panel meetings must take place regularly (according to local need) in each area to respond to information provided by the police to review cases. All

relevant agencies and partners will be invited to attend as judged necessary to achieve an appropriate problem solving response.

25. Data on missing and absent children will be sent by the Police quarterly to the performance data section in each Local Authority's Children's services.

26. Out of hours arrangements

If a child goes missing out of office hours, the police should consider informing the emergency duty/social work team (EDT) which covers that area both to refer the case and to seek relevant information that agency might hold on the child relevant to their missing episode.

27. Out of area arrangements

There may be occasions when a child goes missing and they are placed in care in a different Local Authority area or police area. In these circumstances CSC should report the child missing to the Police force in which the child is residing and to Thames Valley police as the child may have returned to his/her home area. During office hours direct contact with the relevant missing person co-ordinator may assist the investigation.

This protocol was agreed in July 2014 between Thames Valley police and Children's Social Care representatives from Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, West Berkshire, Reading, Wokingham, Slough, Windsor and Maidenhead, and Bracknell Forest Councils.

Effective August 2014