



# **Children who go Missing from Home and Care: Joint protocol – November 2024**

Between: North Yorkshire Council, City  
of York Council and North Yorkshire  
Police

Endorsed by: North Yorkshire and City  
of York Safeguarding Children  
Partnership

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## Contents

1. Introduction.....	4
1.1 Risks faced by young people who go missing.....	5
1.2 The over-arching aims, purpose and legal background of the protocol .....	6
2. Key Roles .....	7
3. When a child or young person goes missing .....	9
3.1 Responsibilities of the reporting individual.....	9
3.2 Responsibilities of North Yorkshire Police.....	11
3.3 Notification to the relevant Local Authority for the child or young person.....	13
4. When children and young people are found – Location and Return.....	16
4.1 The Police Prevention Interview check.....	18
4.2 The Return Interview .....	20
5. Additional Processes.....	24
5.1 Additional Procedures – Care Homes / Foster Homes .....	27
5.2 Children missing from residential school.....	28
5.3 Missing during external activities .....	28
6. Other risk factors .....	29
7. Information Sharing.....	30
8. Training.....	31
Appendix 1 .....	31
Appendix 2.....	34
Appendix 3a: NYC Notification of Missing Child/Young Person Form.....	35
Appendix 3b: City of York Notification of Missing Child/Young Person Form .....	38
Appendix 4a: Missing from Home Flowchart.....	42
Appendix 4b: Missing from Home Flowchart Description. ....	43

## 1. Introduction

We all have a responsibility to safeguard the young and vulnerable.

When a child or young person goes missing or runs away from home, they are at risk. This protocol ensures that a consistent approach is taken across all agencies and adheres to the Department for Education's Statutory Guidance (2014) - Children who run away or go missing from care or home.

The College of Policing (2017) Missing People Authorised Professional Practice (APP) defines a missing episode as:

'Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located and their well-being or otherwise confirmed. All reports of missing people sit within a continuum of risk from 'very low risk(absent)' through to high-risk cases that require immediate, intensive action.'

This protocol relates to all children and young people in North Yorkshire and the City of York who run away and go missing from home or care. This includes children and young people looked after by another Local Authority (LA) (also known as children in care within North Yorkshire) and placed in foster care or residential homes or schools within North Yorkshire and the City of York. Additionally, the protocol applies in parts, to children and young people looked after by North Yorkshire Council (NYC) and the City of York Council (CoYC) and placed in foster care or residential homes or schools outside of North Yorkshire and the City of York.

The protocol does not cover situations where a child has been abducted or forcibly removed from their place of residence. These are "crimes in action" and should be reported to the Police immediately.

This document is for guidance only, it cannot anticipate every situation. Police, Children's Social Care and foster carers should use their professional judgment and take any action necessary to protect the safety of the child.

## **1.1 Risks faced by young people who go missing.**

All agencies in contact with children and young people need to be aware of the potential risks young people face when they go missing, whether from home or care.

Children may run away from a problem such as abuse, neglect, being challenged at home or they may run away to somewhere they want to be and/or someone they want to be with. In some cases, they may have been coerced into running away by someone else and there are clear links between children running away/going missing and child sexual and child criminal exploitation.

The risks faced by young people are the same regardless of how often they have run away from home. However, younger children and those who run away or go missing often may be more likely to face serious, long-term problems.

The immediate risks associated with running away/going missing, include:

- No means of support or legitimate income – leading to high risk activities;
- Possible involvement in criminal activities;
- Becoming a victim of crime, for example through sexual assault and exploitation;
- Alcohol and substance misuse;
- Deterioration of physical and mental/emotional health;
- Loss of education and training;
- Inappropriate/manipulative/exploitive relationships; and
- Being drawn into County lines/criminal exploitation

Longer-term risks include:

- Substance dependency;
- Involvement in crime;
- Involvement in sexual / criminal exploitation into adulthood;

- Homelessness.

It is vital that the missing episode itself is not seen as an isolated incident but as a symptom of other ongoing issues. Whilst it is important to locate the missing child and ensure there is a Prevention Interview Check, it should not stop there; as ongoing work to identify the causes of the missing incident/s and preventing them reoccurring is as critical.

Any organisation working with children or young people must consider the need to flag or highlight information about a child they are working with, who has gone missing, on their respective information management systems to ensure information is up to date and that services work together to keep them safe should they run away or go missing again.

Children with mental or emotional health needs and / or learning and physical disabilities are particularly vulnerable when they go missing. They may have communication difficulties and fewer opportunities to disclose their reasons for running away. Their increased vulnerability also makes them more susceptible to sexual and criminal exploitation.

## **1.2 The over-arching aims, purpose and legal background of the protocol**

There are 5 main aims to which all agencies, statutory or voluntary sector, should work collectively to deliver, these are:

- **Prevent** – reducing the number of children and young people who go missing – through prevention strategies, education work and early intervention in cases of repeated missing episodes and patterns.
- **Protect** – reducing the risk of harm to those who go missing – by ensuring local agencies provide a tailored, risk-based response and work together to find the person, to investigate cases and causes, sharing key information.
- **Prepare** – providing missing children and young people and their families/carers with support and guidance – by referring promptly to

other agencies (if appropriate) and ensuring they understand how and where to access help and support.

- **Pursue** – investigating each episode of missing to understand the causes and to establish reasons for it. Where criminality is identified, ensuring that investigation and disruption, of the criminal activity takes place.

**Partnerships** – multi-agency organisations working together to safeguard children, reduce the risk of harm, sharing information and intelligence.

### **Legal Issues:**

Professionals should refer to the following for guidance in relation to missing children and young people:

- Department for Education Statutory Guidance on Children Who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care (2014) [www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-who-run-away-or-go-missing-from-home-or-care](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-who-run-away-or-go-missing-from-home-or-care)
- [Department for Education Statutory Guidance on Roles and responsibilities when a child goes missing from care: organisational flowchart \(2014\) Flowchart showing roles and responsibilities when a child goes missing from care \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](http://publishing.service.gov.uk)
- Working Together to Safeguard Children and related statutory guidance (2023) [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/669e7501ab418ab055592a7b/Working\\_together\\_to\\_safeguard\\_children\\_2023.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/669e7501ab418ab055592a7b/Working_together_to_safeguard_children_2023.pdf)
- Child Sexual Exploitation – definition and guide for practitioners Department for Education (2017) [www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-sexual-exploitation-definition-and-guide-for-practitioners](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-sexual-exploitation-definition-and-guide-for-practitioners)

## 2. Key Roles

The Local Authority Designated Managers for missing children are:

- Zoe Fryer, Acting Head of Safeguarding, Children and Families Service, North Yorkshire County Council

[Zoe.Fryer@northyorks.gov.uk](mailto:Zoe.Fryer@northyorks.gov.uk)

Tel. No. 01609 533181

- Exploitation Team Manager, City of York Council  
[SeniorAdminMASH.Exploitation@york.gov.uk](mailto:SeniorAdminMASH.Exploitation@york.gov.uk)

Tel. No 01904 555545

The Designated managers for missing children are responsible for:

- Managing the local authority "missing from care" protocols and procedures
- Reporting information about missing from home themes/trends to the Director of Children's Services (NYC & CYC) and the respective elected members responsible for "corporate parenting"
- Monitoring policies and data relating to children missing from home or care including the facilitation of return interviews.

The North Yorkshire Police Lead for missing children is:

- D/Supt Graeme Wright, North Yorkshire Police, Head of Safeguarding

[Graeme.wright@northyorkshire.police.uk](mailto:Graeme.wright@northyorkshire.police.uk)

Tel. 101

Together, the North Yorkshire Police Vulnerability Assessment Team (VAT), NYC's Safeguarding Unit & Children and Families Service (CFS) and the City of York MASH, have responsibility for:

- Maintaining and improving links with local services for missing children and young people
- Informing Children's Social Care of reported cases of missing
- Developing specialist skills and knowledge about children and young people who run away
- Providing a consistent and efficient response
- Recording notifications on their respective databases and exchanging information in a timely and efficient manner

### 3. When a child or young person goes missing

#### 3.1 Responsibilities of the reporting individual

**Before contacting the Police, proactive attempts to locate the child or young person must be made.**

When a child or young person is not at a location they are expected to be at, the reporting individual must take proactive steps to trace the child or young person's whereabouts prior to contacting the Police and keep a record of the enquiries that they've made.

#### **Joint responsibility Parents and Carers**

The College of Policing guidance states "the police are entitled to expect parents and carers, including staff acting in a parenting role in care homes, to accept normal parenting responsibilities and undertake reasonable actions to try and establish the whereabouts of the individual."

A person will therefore not be recorded as missing until the carer / reporting person has undertaken all reasonable actions to ascertain the whereabouts of the reported person UNLESS there is a genuine and immediate risk of harm that justifies police intervention.

Individuals whose whereabouts are known will not be considered as missing but may require other police activity in order to ensure their welfare.

Proactive attempts to locate the child or young person should include:

- Physical checks of the residence, including the child's bedroom and any other location the child may be hiding within the house/building.
- Physical checks of any garden, garage, sheds, grounds and surrounding area(s).
- Attempting to contact the missing person directly, via mobile phone, text, or social networking sites (e.g. Twitter/Facebook/WhatsApp etc.).

- Contacting the missing child or young person's wider family and friends to ascertain if the child or young person is with them or has made contact.

Where such enquiries do not establish the whereabouts of the child or young person, the reporting individual should report the incident to the Police at the point where concern for the child develops. Premature reporting can lead to unnecessary contact between the child and the police that is not in the child's best interests.

When reporting a missing child in the care of the Local Authority to the police, the reporting person should also:

- Make reference to any risk assessments, care plans, placement plans or any other planning documents that refer to the needs of the child and in particular, those documents that detail the risk management, should the child or young person go missing.

It is important for partners, alongside parents and family members, to determine the level of concern in relation to each individual child who goes missing. That will determine the level of intervention required in response to that particular missing episode, taking into consideration the current level of support in place, the history of patterns and behaviour and the current safety plan in place around the child.

Below is a link to the Children Missing from Care Framework (National Police Chiefs' Council, 2022) that shows a table (pages 7-10) that includes details around each level of concern and the intervention required from parents and agencies to support practitioners when determining next steps.

<https://www.npcc.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/publications/publications-log/national-crime-coordination-committee/2023/children-who-go-missing-from-care-framework.pdf>

Where NYC or CYC become aware that one of their looked after children placed in another Local Authority area has gone missing, they are to report that missing episode to the Police force that covers that Local Authority area.

Where a missing episode involving a looked after child does not necessitate a report to the police, details of the incident should be

recorded in full and managed as part of the Childs' existing care plan and any other social care policies should be followed.

### **Notifying relevant others of the incident**

Where a child or young person in the care of the local authority goes missing, the reporting individual i.e. foster carer or the residential home should notify the following:

- The Local Authority responsible for the child's placement.
- If appropriate, adults with parental responsibility for the child or young person

### **'Concern for Welfare'**

Where a child is not where they are expected to be but their location is known, they should not be reported as missing. However, where the child's location places them at risk of harm, it may be appropriate to report the child to the police as being "at risk of harm" but the reporting individual still has a responsibility to remove the child from harm themselves, where it is safe to do so.

## **3.2 Responsibilities of North Yorkshire Police**

### **The priorities of North Yorkshire Police are:**

- To locate the child as SAFELY and as quickly as possible;
- To ensure that every report of a missing person is risk assessed so that those who may be vulnerable or are at a high risk of harm are immediately identified;
- To investigate reports of missing persons;
- To adopt a pro-active multi agency approach in dealing with missing persons;
- To support the needs of the family, those close to the missing person, and the community.

## **North Yorkshire Police Risk Assessment**

As per the College of Policing APP guidelines, all reports of missing people sit within a continuum of Risk, from 'very low risk,' through to high-risk cases that require immediate, intensive action.

However, within North Yorkshire and York, it is agreed, that a missing child will ordinarily be assessed as being at MEDIUM risk of harm or above. Occasionally a child may be assessed as being at LOW risk following a review by an Inspector or above but only after a thorough National Decision Model (NDM) risk assessment has been conducted and detailed rationale recorded.

A missing child will NOT be assessed and recorded as "VERY LOW RISK" by North Yorkshire Police.

When assessing the risk posed to a missing child, the Force Incident Manager (FIM) will consider:

- The antecedents of the child including any partnership information available;
- The presenting circumstances and any reasonably foreseeable risks
- Any mental or physical impairments which might impact on the child's level of development, functioning, understanding or appreciation of risk

The outcome of this risk assessment will guide the police response and the nature of the enquiries undertaken.

### **Missing person's investigation**

North Yorkshire Police will conduct a reasonable and proportionate investigation into the whereabouts of a missing child. The nature, scale and pace of any investigation will be consistent with the risk assessment (see below table) and will adhere to the North Yorkshire Police "Missing

Persons Policy” which in turn is guided by the College of Policing “Missing Persons” APP and National best practice.

**The risk assessment framework used by North Police will be as follows (very low risk removed):**

**LOW RISK:** The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as possible but minimal.

- Proportionate enquiries should be carried out to ensure that the individual has not come to harm.

**MEDIUM RISK:** The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as likely but not serious.

- This category requires an active and measured response by the police and other agencies in order to trace the missing person and support the person reporting.

**HIGH RISK:** The risk of serious harm to the subject or the public is assessed as very likely.

- This category almost always requires the immediate deployment of police resources – action may be delayed in exceptional circumstances, such as searching water or forested areas during hours of darkness. A member of the senior management team must be involved in the examination of initial lines of enquiry and approval of appropriate staffing levels. Such cases should lead to the appointment of an investigating officer (IO) and possibly an SIO, and a police search adviser (PoISA).
- There should be a press/media strategy and/or close contact with outside agencies. Family support should be put in place where appropriate. The MPB (Missing person bureau) should be notified of the case without undue delay. Children’s services must also be notified immediately if the person is under 18.

3.3 Notification to the relevant Local Authority for the child or young person

North Yorkshire Police will notify NYC and CYC of all children/young persons reported missing to them, irrespective as to their “looked after” status as per the below notification pathways below.

### **North Yorkshire Council Notification Pathway**

For a child or young person living within the Local Authority area of NYC.

For a child or young person ‘looked after’ by NYCC and placed in another Local Authority area.

Contact details:

- Name of Department: NYC Safeguarding Unit
- Email: [safeguardingunit@northyorks.gov.uk](mailto:safeguardingunit@northyorks.gov.uk)
- Telephone Number: 01609 532477

### **City of York Notification Pathway**

For a child or young person living within the Local Authority area of CYC.

For a child or young person ‘looked after’ by City of York Council and placed in another Local Authority area

- Name of Department: CYC safeguarding
- Email: [MASHBusinessSupport@york.gov.uk](mailto:MASHBusinessSupport@york.gov.uk)

Where a child is placed into North Yorkshire or the City of York by another LA, it is the responsibility of the foster carer or care home provider to notify the Responsible Authority of the missing incident. There should be communication between the Responsible Authority and North Yorkshire Police to facilitate the location of the child where necessary. In turn, the Responsible Authority should notify the Host Authority (either NYC or CYC) as per the DfE Statutory Guidance below.

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-who-run-away-or-go-missing-from-home-or-care](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-who-run-away-or-go-missing-from-home-or-care)

### **Notification to other Agency Partners**

Once notified by North Yorkshire Police, it is the responsibility of NYC and CYC to notify any other partners (including education facilities) that might need to know of the child's missing from home episode.

### **Notification to the Media**

Where necessary it will be North Yorkshire Polices' responsibility to advise the media and request their assistance during any missing episode but only after appropriate consultation with parents/guardians and/or the Local Authority).

### **Media Strategy**

In some cases, where a missing child is particularly vulnerable or has been missing for a long period, it may be necessary to publicise the case via the media. Such a decision is not routine but is usually a response to very serious concerns for the child's safety. Either carers or the police may suggest such an approach. Normally, such decisions to publicise will be made jointly and, where appropriate, in consultation with parents and Children's Services. The decision to publicise a child/young person who is Looked After or known to Children's Services must be made by the Head of Service, based on a full briefing and in liaison with the police. Where agreement over publicity cannot be reached between Police and the Local Authority, the ultimate decision on publicity is that of the Police. However, the Police must have clear reasons to publicise against the wishes of the Local Authority and these reasons must be recorded. This must also be escalated to HOS to ensure media team /director/lead member is aware.

Please refer to appendix 4 at the end of this document to see a flowchart showing the North Yorkshire Police missing from home process for children and young people.

## **4. When children and young people are found – Location and Return**

Once a missing child is found it is important to understand why they went missing, protect them from harm and prevent future missing episodes.

The approach taken by professionals towards a missing child or young person can have a significant impact on how the child or young person engages with any subsequent investigations and protection planning. However, “streetwise” they may appear, they are children and may be extremely vulnerable to multiple risks. A supportive approach, actively listening and responding to a child or young person’s needs, will have a greater chance of preventing the child or young person from going missing again and safeguarding them against other risks.

### **Location and Return of a ‘MISSING’ child or young person**

When a reported child or young person returns home or is located and returned to a safe place other than by the Police, the Police must be notified as soon as possible by the parent or carer. At this point, the Childs’ parents or carers will be asked if there is anything the Police need to know about or act on immediately. If there is, e.g. the child has been the victim of a crime whilst missing, the police will prioritise their attendance, if not, the Police will arrange for a ‘prevention interview to be conducted as soon as possible but within 24 hours.

If a child or young person who is in the care of the Local Authority is found by police or others, it is the responsibility of the residential care home or foster carers to collect and return the child or young person to a place of safety (unless the circumstances pose a risk to them or to the child or young person). The Police only have powers to return a young person to care if the circumstances are such that a child needs to be taken in to Police Protection.

Where there is no risk to a parent or carer collecting a child or young person but the logistics make it difficult or impossible for them to do so, the responsible Local Authority for the child or young person must be contacted to assist.

### **Voice of the Child**

It is important for professionals to listen to the voice of the child. Listening to their views and concerns will help those working with children and young people to ensure that their views and opinions are always taken into account when it comes to responding to, supporting and delivering services that affect them and their families.

## **The use of Police Protection Powers**

Where a Police Officer locates a missing child or young person and has reasonable cause to believe that the child or young person would otherwise be likely to suffer significant harm, the Officer may take the child into Police Protection (Sect. 46 Children Act 1989) and return them to a place of safety.

When a child or young person is found, the child or young person should be returned to their home/placement unless it would be unsafe to do so. If it is unsafe, discussions with the Local Authority will determine an alternative and immediate course of action.

Police have NO POWERS to use force in order to return a missing child unless:

1. They are taking out a Police Protection Order (s46 Children's act 1989)
2. They are executing a recovery order (s50 Children's act 1989))
3. They are acting in the best interests of a child (16-17) who lacks mental capacity (Mental Capacity Act 2005)
4. They are detaining the child under s136 of the Mental Health Act 1983
5. They are acting under S3 Criminal Law Act 1967 to prevent a person becoming subject of a crime.

Transport of the child or young person back to their home (or place of safety) is dependent on individual circumstances, but the default preferred option will be for the parents/care givers to collect and transport the child whenever possible.

- If physically located by North Yorkshire Police, the parents/carers should be contacted to see if it is feasible for them to collect the child. If this is not possible, NYP should return the child to the placement (or place of safety)

- If physically located by another statutory agency (Social Worker/EDT/care provider [including foster carer]), the locating agency/individual must return the child or young person to their placement (or place of safety)
- If physically located by family/friends, the carers are to advise them that the missing child or young person should be returned to their placement (place of safety) at the earliest opportunity and assist them in doing so if necessary.
- If located by other means (e.g. telephone) the responsible Local Authority should facilitate the collection and return of the missing child or young person to their placement (or place of safety).

Where a child or young person is located by an agency or individual other than the police, the following action should be taken:

- Immediately notify the carer of where the child or young person has been located.
- Provide details of any concerns to the carer.
- Agree with the carer an immediate action plan to safeguard the child or young person until such time as the carer can arrange for the child or young person to be collected.
- Notify the police of the individual's location and any concerns they may have in order that the police can consider use of Police Protection powers and complete a 'Prevention Interview Check'.

#### **4.1 The Police Prevention Interview check**

##### **Prevention Interview checks for Missing Children and Young People**

When a child or young person has been located following a 'Missing' episode, statutory guidance requires that:

'The police will undertake a Prevention Interview check to establish whether there are any indications that the child has suffered harm, where and with whom they have been, and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them'.

North Yorkshire Police will carry out a Prevention Interview check within 24 hours for all located missing children and young people. The details of the Prevention Interview check will be recorded on the Missing Person, Management of Return (MOR) occurrence report and emailed via an automated Niche functionality to the relevant Local Authority by the police officer completing the MOR report.

### **Objectives of a North Yorkshire Police Prevention Interview Check**

A Prevention Interview check requires a Police Officer to physically see and speak to the missing child or young person as soon as possible after they are found. The police should also speak to the child or young person's parents or carers to satisfy themselves that the child or young person is safe.

The objectives of a Prevention Interview Check are:

- To determine the reasons why the child or young person went missing and in particular, if they have been subject to violence, exploitation, abuse or bullying;
- To establish if they have been the victim of, or committed, any crime whilst missing;
- To discover where and by whom they have been harboured;
- To obtain information which may lead to their early location should they disappear again;
- To put in place any support and preventative measures to avoid a further missing episode;
- To inform the child or young person and their parents and carers, if appropriate, that:
  - (a) the relevant Local Authority Children's Social Care has been notified of the missing episode
  - (b) they will be contacted by the Local Authority and offered an Independent Return Interview.

As a minimum standard the management of return should include the actual address or area where the child was found and who they were with. It should detail any addresses or places visited whilst missing and any person they visited, were in company with or contacted whilst

missing. Details of why they went missing and any factors that were significant to the episode should also be included.

Experience shows that the child is often unwilling to engage with Police and will refuse to provide details. In these cases, the MINIMUM information to be recorded is the child's demeanour, appearance and attitude. Were they well presented, tired, hungry, angry, under the influence of alcohol or drugs, smelly, unkempt, dishevelled, fearful etc? Was their attitude aggressive, withdrawn, secretive? If they refuse to engage then the views of the parent/carer should be obtained.

If there are safeguarding concerns then a PPN will be submitted.

## **4.2 The Return Interview**

Statutory guidance requires that whenever a missing child is located and returned, they must be offered an independent return interview by the responsible Local Authority. Independent return interviews provide an opportunity to uncover information that can help protect children and young people from all the associated risks of a repeat missing episode. This process is distinct from a police Prevention Interview check (which is not designed nor best placed to explore the causes of the child's disappearance). The Return interview is offered within 72 hours of the child returning to their home or care setting.

The interview should be held in a neutral place where the child or young person feels safe, comfortable and able to talk openly. When the child or young person is in the care of the Local Authority, the Independent Return Interview should take place before they return to their placement wherever possible.

### **Purpose of the Independent Return Interview**

The interview should:

- Identify and deal with any harm the child or young person has suffered – including harm that might not have already been disclosed as part of the 'Prevention Interview check' – either before they ran away or whilst missing;

- Appropriately challenge any inconsistencies between the account provided by the child, parent/carer during the police Prevention Interview check and the account provided in the Return Interview
- Understand, and try to address, the reasons why the child or young person went missing;
- Help the child or young person feel safe and understand that they have options to prevent repeat instances of them running away;
- Provide them with information on how to stay safe if they choose to go missing again, including helpline numbers and safe places, with a focus on reducing harm should the young person go missing again. Recording a list of actions and outcome focused family and multi-agency plan to prevent future missing incidents.

### **Who should undertake the Independent Return Interview?**

The Independent Return Interview should be carried out by someone who is trained to carry out these interviews and is able to follow-up any actions that emerge. All Local Authorities are obliged to ensure that the interviewer is independent of the care of the child and, for children in care, the placement, save where a child or young person has a strong relationship with a carer or social worker and has expressed a preference to talk to them, rather than an independent person. Additionally, all children and young people who are looked after should be offered the option of speaking to an independent advocate.

### **NYC Independent Return Interview Arrangements**

Circumstances of Child or Young Person:

- For a child or young person living within the Local Authority area of North Yorkshire County Council and not an open case to Children's Social Care

Return Interviewer:

- NYC Early Help Service will undertake this interview.

Circumstances of Child or Young Person:

- Children In Need, Children Protection

Return Interviewer:

- The interview will be conducted by a qualified Social Worker who is not the allocated worker in order to offer some Independence to

the assessment unless there is a suitable professional that the child would prefer.

Circumstances of Child or Young Person:

- For a child or young person 'looked after' by NYC, even where a child or young person is placed in another Local Authority area

Return Interviewer:

- The interview will be conducted by a qualified Social Worker who is not the allocated worker in order to offer some Independence to the assessment unless there is a suitable professional that the child would prefer. All Looked After Children will be offered a representative from the independent advocacy service. A NYAS advocate's role is to represent the child entirely and therefore where a young person requests to speak with an independent advocate present, this will be supported.

NYAS details are as follows:

- <https://www.nyas.net>
- Tel: 0808 808 1001

Circumstances of Child or Young Person:

- Looked After Children placed in North Yorkshire by another Authority

Return Interviewer:

- The home Authority will be responsible for making arrangements for the return interview.

### **City of York Independent Return Interview Arrangements**

Circumstances of Child or Young Person

- For a child or young person living within the Local Authority area of City of York and is not open to Children's Social Care

Return Interviewer:

- Return Interview will be undertaken by Exploitation Team Worker

Circumstances of Child or Young Person:

- Early Help, Children In Need, Children Protection, Children in Our Care (even if placed in another Local Authority area)

#### Return Interviewer:

- All Looked After Children will be offered an interview by trained representative from the Volunteer Service this could be a member of the Volunteer Team or an Independent Visitor. The Volunteer Service will speak to the child independently and feed this back to Children's Social Care. The child will be contacted with 72 hours and offered an independent return interview and if they accept will go and meet with them to conduct the interview.

The Volunteer Service details are:

Alison Cammiss, Volunteer Manager

City of York Council

West Offices

Station Rise

York

[volunteer@york.gov.uk](mailto:volunteer@york.gov.uk)

Tel. No. 01904 552444/07901813436

#### Circumstances of Child or Young Person:

- Looked After Children placed in City of York by another Authority

#### Return Interviewer:

- The home Authority will be responsible for making arrangements for the return interview.

### **When a child refuses an offer of an Independent Return Interview or refuses to engage in an Interview**

Where a child declines the offer of return interview by an Independent Worker, a record of the offer and reasons for refusal should be recorded. Parents and carers should be offered the opportunity to provide any relevant information and intelligence of which they may be aware. This should help to prevent further instances of the child going missing and identify early the support needed for them.

### **Record of the Independent Return Interview**

A record of the Independent Return interview should be made using the relevant LA pro forma.

### **Information sharing following an Independent Return Interview**

At the start of the Independent Return Interview, the child or young person and their parents or carers should be told that any information obtained will be shared with relevant professionals unless there are reasons not to do so. If the child or young person, parent or carer refuses to consent to the information being shared, the interview should not progress.

Consent to share information is not required if there is a sufficient safeguarding concern for the child or young person even if consent is withdrawn at the end of the interview.

- Any crimes disclosed by the child during a “return interview” must be reported to North Yorkshire police via established crime reporting procedures
- Any immediate safeguarding concerns must be addressed via established child protection processes.
- Any information or intelligence gleaned that might keep the child safe during a future missing episode should be submitted to North Yorkshire Police via a partnership information sharing form.
- The Return Interview itself must be sent by e-mail to North Yorkshire Police: [missingfromhome@northyorkshire.pnn.police.uk](mailto:missingfromhome@northyorkshire.pnn.police.uk)

It is important that any refusal by the young person and/or their carers either to having a return interview or to the sharing of information with other agencies should be recorded.

Any personal or confidential information which indicates that support for the young person may be helpful should be noted and an appropriate referral made e.g. a referral to sexual health services.

## **5. Additional Processes**

### **Where a child or young person is missing for over 24 hours**

Where a NYC or CYC looked after child goes missing for more than 24 hours, a Social Worker must notify the NYC Head of Safeguarding and Assistant Director responsible for Children and Families Service using the Notification form (see Appendix 3a for North Yorkshire and Appendix 3b for City of York).

For any child who is missing for a period of more than 24 hours an Officer of at least the rank of Inspector will conduct a comprehensive review of the investigation and risk surrounding the child and the missing episode.

### **Where a child or young person is missing for over 48 hours**

If the child or young person has not been located within 48 hours, a multi-agency Strategy Discussion must be considered by the responsible Local Authority.

Where the child is placed by a home Local Authority in another local authority area (host), it will be for the responsible home Local Authority to make a safeguarding referral to the host Local Authority Children's Social Care requesting a Strategy Discussion.

For any child missing for a period of more than 48 hours a Detective Inspector will conduct a comprehensive review of the investigation and the risk surrounding the child and the missing episode.

### **Additional Multi agency responses**

In addition to the above processes, NYC and CYC are able to:

- Hold local meetings to share information with multi-agency partners and form a plan to locate the young person
- Utilise the expertise of Specialist Social Workers for Missing and Exploitation (NYC) and the exploitation Team (CoY).
- Review cases in North Yorkshire within monthly Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) and contextual Safeguarding meetings and explore themes, trends and community responses.
- Review cases within City of York within the Child Exploitation Disruption Meeting (CEDM).
- Weekly missing meetings held between NYP and NYC to identify any safeguarding issues resulting from missing children and young people that week.

### **Monthly meeting between Missing From Home North Yorkshire Police, Children and Families Service (Senior Social Workers, Social Workers, General Managers and Hosting Local Authority), and the relevant health authority for the area. (NYC)**

The meeting considers monthly performance to enable an understanding of patterns and trends, ensure appropriate actions are agreed to

address. An agenda is compiled of young people who have gone missing 5 times in 30 days and those young people of concern which any partner can raise. These young people will be discussed and agreed whether they should be granted status of:

Adopted - bespoke missing from home and care plan completed within the weekly meeting (between NYP and CFS) and status reviewed weekly and monthly meetings

Monitored – reviewed within monthly meeting, without a current risk plan.

The specialist social worker for the area where the young person has gone missing and North Yorkshire Police will present the case, including analysis gathered from the return interview and wider themes and trends within the geographic region, including concerns of a contextual safeguarding nature. All agencies will share information held for that young person and actions will be determined by the group and recorded updated within relevant missing from home and care plan.

A summary of the discussion will be recorded on the young person's case file. If any immediate safeguarding concern is identified in these discussions, they should be raised immediately with the social work team manager or MAST in North Yorkshire.

### **Weekly meeting between MFH NYP officers and SSW (NYC)**

The weekly meeting completes a missing from home and care plan for young people who have been agreed as "adopted" within the monthly MFHC meeting. The missing from home and care plan is completed by North Yorkshire Police (NYP) and the Children and Families Service (CFS). The assessment contains brief NYP and CFS involvement and a guide for NYP on how best to respond when the named young person is reported missing, to the control room. This allows NYP to make best decisions around risk assessment and action when the missing episode is reported to NYP control room. The risk assessment should mirror the child's plan as recorded on the relevant social care databases/system. Any concerns, including concerns of a contextual safeguarding nature, will be addressed and shared within MACE level 2 where appropriate.

All agencies will share information held for that young person and actions will be determined by the group. A summary of the discussion will be recorded on the young person's case file (NYC) and on NICHE (NYP)

## **Weekly meeting between MFH NYP officers and CSC (CYC)**

Children who are 'adopted/priority' (where there is a risk of exploitation and/or the young person has been adopted by North Yorkshire Police as a priority missing (either level of concern or 5 episodes in 30 days). by North Yorkshire police are discussed weekly in the Child Exploitation Risk Assessment Meetings (CERAM) so that a multi-agency approach to missing episodes is considered. Case discussions are recorded on file and used to ensure Philomena Protocols or Trigger plans are updated and attached to relevant systems for CSC and NYP. This also allows for early identification of need for an exploitation risk assessment if there are exploitation concerns resulting from missing episodes.

### **5.1 Additional Procedures – Care Homes / Foster Homes**

Care homes and foster homes, irrespective of whether they are Local Authority or privately owned, must notify the host Authority and the North Yorkshire Police Vulnerability Assessment Team ([vatenuquiries@northyorkshire.police.uk](mailto:vatenuquiries@northyorkshire.police.uk)) of all new, out of area placements. This notification should include an accurate, up to date risk assessment.

### **Initial risk assessment for children and young people in the care of the Local Authority**

If the child or young person appears likely to go missing run away, their care plan should incorporate what should happen should the child/young person go missing from their home.

This should be completed:

- by a member of staff within a residential home
- by the child's Social Worker within a foster placement

The risk assessment should consider:

- Parents/previous carers advice on what action should be taken if the child goes missing;
- Nature and level of risk if he/she goes missing;

A risk assessment should always take place (if not already completed) after the first incidence of missing and should subsequently be reviewed and updated by the Social Worker over time.

Each Children's Home (including private residential units) must have written procedures that are to be followed when a child goes missing. These procedures must be compatible with the protocols in place between North Yorkshire Police and the Hosting Authority i.e. CYC or NYC.

The child or young person should be told what will happen if they run away, and preventative work should be considered from first placement. They should be given information leaflets and contact details of advocacy services or other services they can access or that can be accessed on their behalf.

## **5.2 Children missing from residential school**

The processes for children in the care of the Local Authority are applicable to all children and young people who are missing from residential school. This is regardless of whether it is believed the young person is making their way to their family home, as the distances involved may place that child or young person in danger.

## **5.3 Missing during external activities**

Children or young people who go missing while on a holiday or during out-of-placement activities must be reported as missing by the senior member of staff who is responsible at that time for the child or young person, in order to:

- Arrange a search in the area where the child went missing
- Notify the police (who will notify police in the home area if needed);
- Notify the registered manager of the children's home/senior management;
- Notify the Youth Justice Service if the child or young person is on remand;
- Notify the Emergency Duty Team if out of hours.

The registered manager/senior manager of the children's home will be responsible for ensuring the general procedures in relation to a missing

child are followed. The registered manager/senior manager of the children's home will decide within 24 hours of the absence whether the other members of the group should return. Ongoing communications between the home and the police covering the area where the absence occurred will be maintained through the period of absence.

## **6. Other risk factors**

Guidance can be located for these areas via the following links:

### **Child Sexual Exploitation**

- <https://www.saferchildrenyork.org.uk/resources/cyscp-documents-resources/2>
- [www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/NYSCP-CSE-Practice\\_Guidancecv3.1-Nov-19.pdf](http://www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/NYSCP-CSE-Practice_Guidancecv3.1-Nov-19.pdf)

### **Child Exploitation/County Lines**

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/criminal-exploitation-of-children-and-vulnerable-adults-county-lines>
- <https://www.saferchildrenyork.org.uk/resources/cyscp-documents-resources/2>

### **Harbourers / Trafficking**

- <https://www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk/professionals/procedure-s-practice-guidance-and-one-minute-guides/#Procedures>
- <https://www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/NYP-MSHT-Toolkit-Reference-Guide-1.6.23.docx>

### **National Referral Mechanism Guidance and Forms**

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-trafficking-victims-referral-and-assessment-forms/guidance-on-the-national-referral-mechanism-for-potential-adult-victims-of-modern-slavery-england-and-wales>
- <https://www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk/professionals/procedure-s-practice-guidance-and-one-minute-guides/submitting-a-referral-to-the-national-referral-mechanism-nrm-for-a-child-2/>

- <https://www.saferchildrenyork.org.uk/resources/cyscp-documents-resources/4#nrm>

### **Forced Marriage and Honor Based Violence**

- <https://www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk/professionals/procedures-practice-guidance-and-one-minute-guides/forced-marriage/>
- <https://www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk/professionals/procedures-practice-guidance-and-one-minute-guides/female-genital-mutilation-fgm/>

### **Channel – Protecting vulnerable people from being drawn into terrorism**

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/channel-and-prevent-multi-agency-panel-pmap-guidance>
- [www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk/professionals/practice-guidance/](http://www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk/professionals/practice-guidance/)
- <https://www.saferchildrenyork.org.uk/safeguarding-information/prevent-counter-terrorism>

## **7. Information Sharing**

Collecting the right data at a local level is essential to driving improvements in services. Early and effective sharing of information between professionals and local agencies is essential for the identification of patterns of behaviour and to identify risks in the area, such as exploitation, gangs or crime-related activity that might not previously have been apparent. This may be used to identify areas of concern for an individual child, or to identify ‘hotspots’ of activity in the local area. It will also help identify trends, for example, whether children are going missing from a particular children’s home or other patterns across the locality.

Data about children and young people who go missing from home or care are reported to the NYSCP Practice Development Subgroup and the City of York Safeguarding Children Partnership Exploitation subgroup on a quarterly basis, themes and trends are identified within the strategic monthly missing meeting. NYC also discuss themes and trends at the monthly Multi Agency Child Exploitation and Contextual Safeguarding Locality Level 2 meeting. In addition, reports are tabled at

the Looked after children members meeting (Corporate Parenting Board) which includes the Lead Member for Children's Services.

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;
- Disruption actions where children are located; and
- Professional practice and procedural implications.

Senior managers within the police and Local Authority are accountable for ensuring the processes agreed as part of this protocol are followed.

## **8. Training**

Training is essential for all practitioners who work with children and young people to enable them to use the protocol effectively. Workforce development services for North Yorkshire County Council, City of York Council and North Yorkshire Police will ensure that appropriate and effective training is offered, particularly in regard to risk assessment and managing the return interview. Multi agency briefings and training guidance can be provided by the Local Child Safeguarding Partnerships.

North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership:

[www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk/training-north-yorkshire/training-courses](http://www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk/training-north-yorkshire/training-courses)

North Yorkshire Learning Zone:

Webinar mandatory MFHC training

City of York Safeguarding Children Partnership:

<https://www.saferchildrenyork.org.uk/learning-development/learning-development-1/2>

## **Appendix 1**

**North Yorkshire County Council Customer Service Centre**

01609 780780

**City of York Council**

01904 551900

**North Yorkshire Emergency Duty Team (out of office hours)**

01609 780780

**York Emergency Duty Team (out of office hours)**

0300 131 2131

**North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership**

01609 535123

**City of York Safeguarding Children Partnership**

[CYSCP@york.gov.uk](mailto:CYSCP@york.gov.uk)

**North Yorkshire Police Vulnerabilities Assessment Team**

[Missingfromhome@northyorkshire.police.uk](mailto:Missingfromhome@northyorkshire.police.uk)

101

**North Yorkshire Police**

Emergency 999

Non-Emergency 101

**Bridge House Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC)**

0330 223 0362

**NSPCC Child Protection Helpline**

0808 800 5000

**Childline**

0800 1111

**Missing People Helpline**

[www.missingpeople.org.uk](http://www.missingpeople.org.uk)

116000 (24 hours)

[116000@missingpeople.org.uk](mailto:116000@missingpeople.org.uk)

**Rape and Abuse Line**

0808 800 0123

**NHS Direct Health Advice**

111

**Victim Support**

[www.supportingvictims.org](http://www.supportingvictims.org)

01609643100

**Domestic Abuse Support: IDAS**

[www.idas.org.uk](http://www.idas.org.uk)

03000 110 110

**Drug and Alcohol Advisory Services (FRANK)**

0800 776600

## Appendix 2

This Protocol adopts the definitions proposed by Department for Education (2014) statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care:

**Child:** anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people' throughout this guidance.

**Young runaway:** a child who has run away from their home or care placement or feels they have been forced or lured to leave.

**Missing child:** a child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers.

**Looked after child:** a child who is looked after by a local authority by reason of a care order or being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

**Responsible local authority:** the local authority which is responsible for a looked after child's care and Authority care planning.

**Host local authority:** the local authority in which a child in the care of a local authority is placed when placed outside the responsible local authority's boundaries.

**Care leaver:** an eligible, relevant, or former relevant, child as defined by the Children Act 1989.

**Missing from care:** a child in the care of the local authority who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (e.g. school) and their whereabouts is not known.

**Reporting individual:** the person reporting the child / young person as missing.



## Appendix 3a: NYC Notification of Missing Child/Young Person Form



### NOTIFICATION OF MISSING CHILD/YOUNG PERSON

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Date of Birth</b>	
<b>Legal Status</b>	
<b>Social Worker</b>	
<b>LCS Number</b>	
<b>Placement Address</b>	
<b>Date and time reported</b>	
<b>Date and time returned</b>	
<b>Circumstances of child going missing</b>	
<b>Other Comments</b>	
<b>Risk Analysis</b>	
<b>What are we worried about?</b>	<b>What is working well?</b>
<b>Danger Statement</b>	
<b>Scaling (in relation to the current missing episode)</b>	
On a scale of 0 – 10, 10 being that we are all confident that XX is safe and cared for, and knows who s/he can communicate with if she is feeling unsafe and 0 being that we do not	

know if XX is safe, cared for and does not know how or who to communicate with if she is feeling unsafe.

0 Unsafe

Safe10



**Current position regarding risk (examples of key evidence factors)**

Does the young person have a risk status in relation to exploitation? If so, is this high, medium or low?  High/Medium/Low	Yes No	
What level do the Police currently rate the risk? High/Medium/Low		
Does the young person have a risk status in relation to exploitation? If so, is this high, medium or low		
Is there current evidence that the YP may require emergency medical treatment due to their current alcohol/substance use?		
Does the level of risk warrant a media release? If yes, the LAC/Safeguarding Team Manager to liaise with Police to progress		

Note: If a RAISE hasn't taken place and there are complicating high risk factors around missing – the NWD/LAC/Safeguarding Team Managers to hold a RAISE or Hub meeting

**Chronology of Actions and Outcomes**

Time	Telephone call to Young Person/Police/EDT/Parent/friend. Please log below to whom?	Staff physically checking known addresses/areas	Outcome from telephone call/physical check
Subsequent actions		Timescale	Person responsible


Form to be completed when a child/young person  
has been missing for over 24 hours.

This form should be e-mailed to the locality Group Manager,  
Head of Service and Assistant Director

The form should also be completed every subsequent 24 hours if the  
child/young person is still Missing

**Appendix 3b: City of York Notification of Missing Child/Young Person Form**



**NOTIFICATION OF MISSING CHILD/YOUNG PERSON**

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Date of Birth</b>	
<b>Legal Status</b>	
<b>Social Worker</b>	
<b>Mosaic Number</b>	
<b>Home Address</b>	
<b>Date and time reported that time the child went missing</b>	
<b>Date and time returned</b>	
<b>Circumstances of child / young person going missing</b>	
<b>Strategy meeting held? Brief outcome of the strategy?</b>	
<b>Risk Analysis</b>	
<b>What are we worried about?</b>	<b>What is working well?</b>
<b>Danger Statement – what are you most worried about</b>	

**Scaling (in relation to the current missing episode)**  
**Scaling is used to make a judgement about the impact of a situation on a child/ young person. The scale would usually be based on the worry/danger statement. The scale goes from 0-10.**  
**On a scale of 0 – 10**

**0 Unsafe**  
**Safe10**



**Current position regarding risk (examples of key evidence factors)**

<p><b>Does the young person have a risk status in relation to exploitation?</b>  <b>If so, is this high, medium or low?</b></p>	
---	--

<p><b>What is the current police assessment of the level of risk to the child whilst they are missing?</b>  <b>High/Medium/Low</b></p>	
--	--

<p><b>Is there current evidence that the child / young person may require emergency medical treatment due to their current alcohol/substance use?</b></p>	
---	--

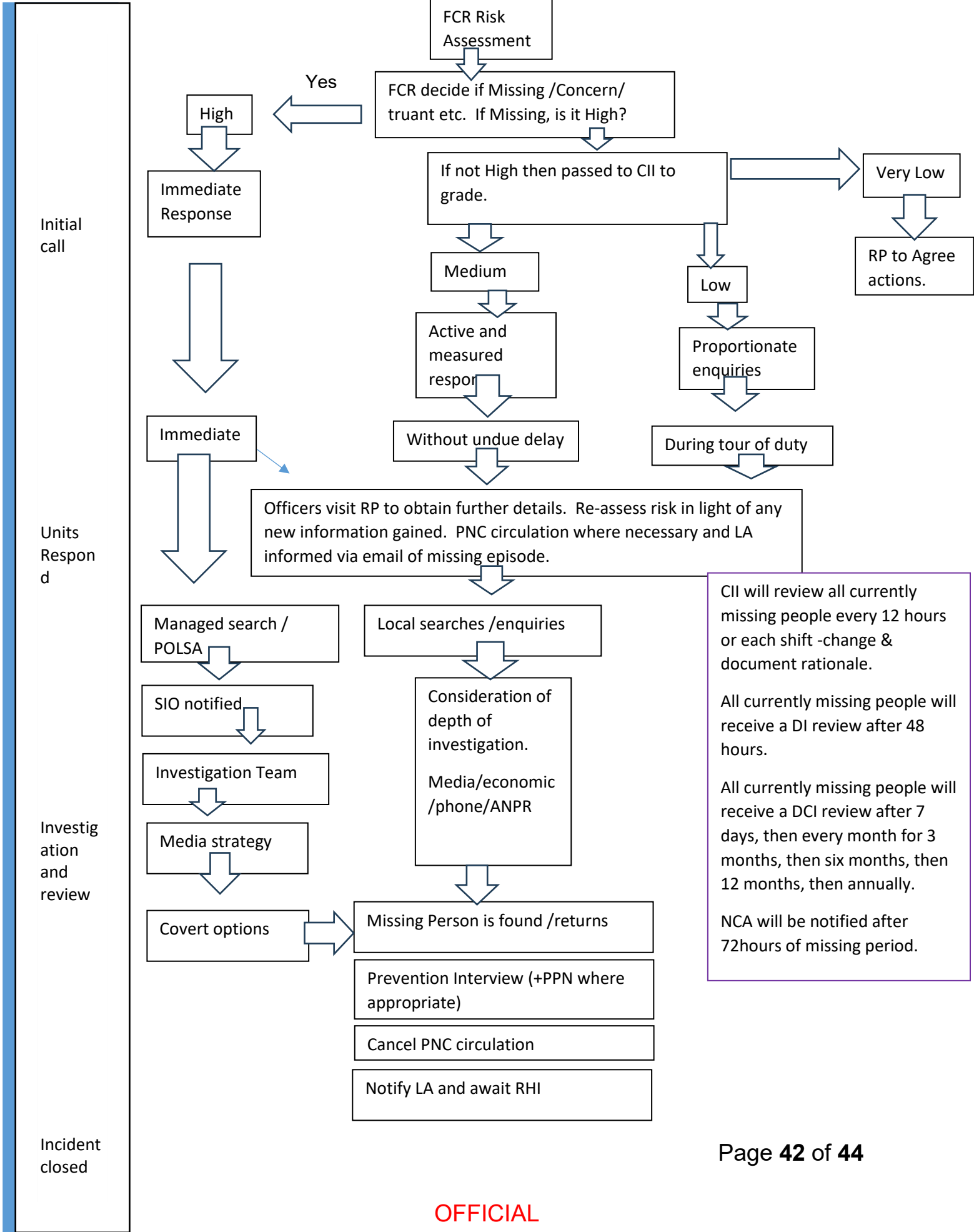
<p><b>Has there been consideration as to whether a media release would support us to find the child more quickly and would be in their interest? If yes, the CYPIC/Safeguarding Team Manager to liaise with Police to progress</b></p>	
--	--

<b>Time</b>	<b>Telephone call to Child/ Young Person/Police/EDT/Parent/friend. Please log below to whom?</b>	<b>Staff physically checking known addresses/areas</b>	<b>Outcome from telephone call/physical check</b>





# Appendix 4a: Missing from Home Flowchart



CII will review all currently missing people every 12 hours or each shift -change & document rationale.

All currently missing people will receive a DI review after 48 hours.

All currently missing people will receive a DCI review after 7 days, then every month for 3 months, then six months, then 12 months, then annually.

NCA will be notified after 72hours of missing period.

## Appendix 4b: Missing from Home Flowchart Description

### 1. Initial Call

- Force Control Room Risk Assessment determines whether the case is classified as missing, a concern, truancy, etc. If missing, is it high-risk?
- If the case is high-risk: Immediate response is required.
- If not high-risk, it is passed to the CII for grading:
  - Medium risk: Active and measured response.
  - Low risk: Proportionate enquiries made.
  - Very low risk: reporting party to agree actions.

### 2a. Units Respond

- High Risk: Officers respond immediately.
- Medium Risk: Active and Measured response is made without undue delay.
- Low Risk: during tour of duty

### 2b. For High, Medium, and Low risk:

- Officers visit the Reporting Party (RP) to obtain further details, reassess risk in light of any new information gained. PNC (Police National Computer) circulation where necessary and local authority informed via email of missing episode.

### 3. Investigation and Review

- High-Risk Cases: Managed searches involving Police Search Advisors (POLSA), notification of the Senior Investigating Officer (SIO), Investigation team deployment and media strategy development. Covert options.
- Medium and Low-Risk Cases: Localized searches and enquiries. Consideration of the depth of investigation, including media/economic/phone/ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) checks.

### 4. Incident Closed (Missing person is found or returns):

- Prevention Interview and issue a Public Protection Notification (PPN) where appropriate.
- Cancel any PNC (Police National Computer) circulation.

- Notify the Local Authority (LA) and await their return to home interview (RHI).

CII will review all currently missing people every 12 hours or each shift - change & document rationale.

All currently missing people will receive a DI review after 48 hours.

All currently missing people will receive a DCI review after 7 days, then every month for 3 months, then six months, then 12 months, then annually.

NCA (National Crime Agency) will be notified after 72hours of missing period.