

# Bolton Missing Strategy 2020 – 2023

## *Meeting the requirements in accordance with Missing procedures*

### 1. Introduction

1.1 This document details the Children's Safeguarding Partnership approach to the management of young people who go missing within Bolton. The Strategy is in accordance with the requirements to comply with *the 'Statutory Guidance on Children who Run Away or go Missing from Home or Care'* and *'Greater Manchester Standardised Approach to dealing with Missing and Absent Children and Young People across Greater Manchester.'* Which is embedded in the relevant procedures for missing children as defined in Social Care Tri-X procedures.

1.2 How those requirements are fulfilled are defined in an open process for reporting and completing statutory tasks. However, to address need it is all the named partner agency responsibilities to utilise services, in order to provide, an appropriate and proportionate response.

1.3 The partnership recognises that when a child goes missing or runs away, the risks to that child is enhanced and therefore requires a response that aims to safeguard those children and young people who are at increased vulnerability. When missing, children may experience physical and / or emotional abuse, or may take part in risk taking and self-harming behaviour. They may feel fear and loneliness or put themselves in dangerous situations using coping strategies such as sleeping rough or committing crime in order to survive. Family and social relationships may suffer, education may be affected with the result that life chances become at risk of being adversely affected. Children who go missing can be vulnerable to trafficking, violent crime, drug and alcohol misuse and exploitation, including sexual exploitation. The aim is to minimise such circumstances occurring and reduce numbers of children and young people in Bolton who feel going missing is the only option.

1.4 Children missing education are similarly at risk and could be identified as some of the most vulnerable children – particularly as they are unlikely to have access to or be visible to practitioners who could safeguard them.

1.5 Bolton partners recognise that there are opportunities to work together to understand the reasons why children go missing, prevent this where possible and reduce or prevent the impact of missing on individual children. The previous strategy held in respect of missing by the partnership identified key indicators which impact on a child as a reason for going missing which continue to be relevant.

### Push Factors

- **Problems at home** – including long-term abuse or maltreatment or living in neglectful situations
- **Family break-up** – young people being drawn into their parents' conflicts
- **Mental and emotional health problems** – a disproportionate number of young people who run away from home have a mental health problems
- **Problems at school** - including relationships with teachers or other pupils or ceasing to attend due to exclusion or withdrawal by parent or removal from roll with no named destination
- **Bullying** – children who are being bullied are more likely to run away
- **Teenage pregnancy** – some young women run away or are forced to leave home because they become pregnant (or fear that they may be pregnant).



### Pull Factors

- **Running to be near friends or family** – especially when a child is in care and there are problems in contact arrangements with family and friends
- **Grooming for potential sexual exploitation or child trafficking** – a child may be coerced to go missing by someone who has power or control over them and seeks to exploit them
- **Criminality/ Exploitation** – This includes the enticement of material gain as well as threats to themselves or family members.
- **Stage of Development** – This includes at times a young persons desire for autonomy or understanding of risk and awareness of consequences

1.6 The Missing Strategy looks to the Partnership to contribute to a response in a coordinated fashion to identify the event of going missing, generate an understanding where possible, the factors affecting the young person leading to them going missing and look to ways of linking that young person and family, to appropriate services within the partnership. The aim therefore is to work to mitigate the causes, consider how best to keep the environment for children and young people as safe as possible, and work in partnership with children and families to address concerns leading to a missing episode. The strategy recognises that the range of services available and in place across the children's partnership is extensive and therefore the focus is upon accessing those resources, proportionate to the identified need.

# Bolton Missing Strategy 2020 -2023

Working Together to safeguard children who go missing from home, care or education

## Prevention and Increasing Awareness

- An agreed approach across all agencies to a missing episode by a child or young person is understood by all of the Children's Workforce.
- There is a process of Data Collection and regular analysis for the partnership.
- A process of periodic awareness raising as to the potential and actual risks to children who go missing
- Ensure children have access to support and information
- Consider implications from new policy legislation, research and guidance

## Protecting

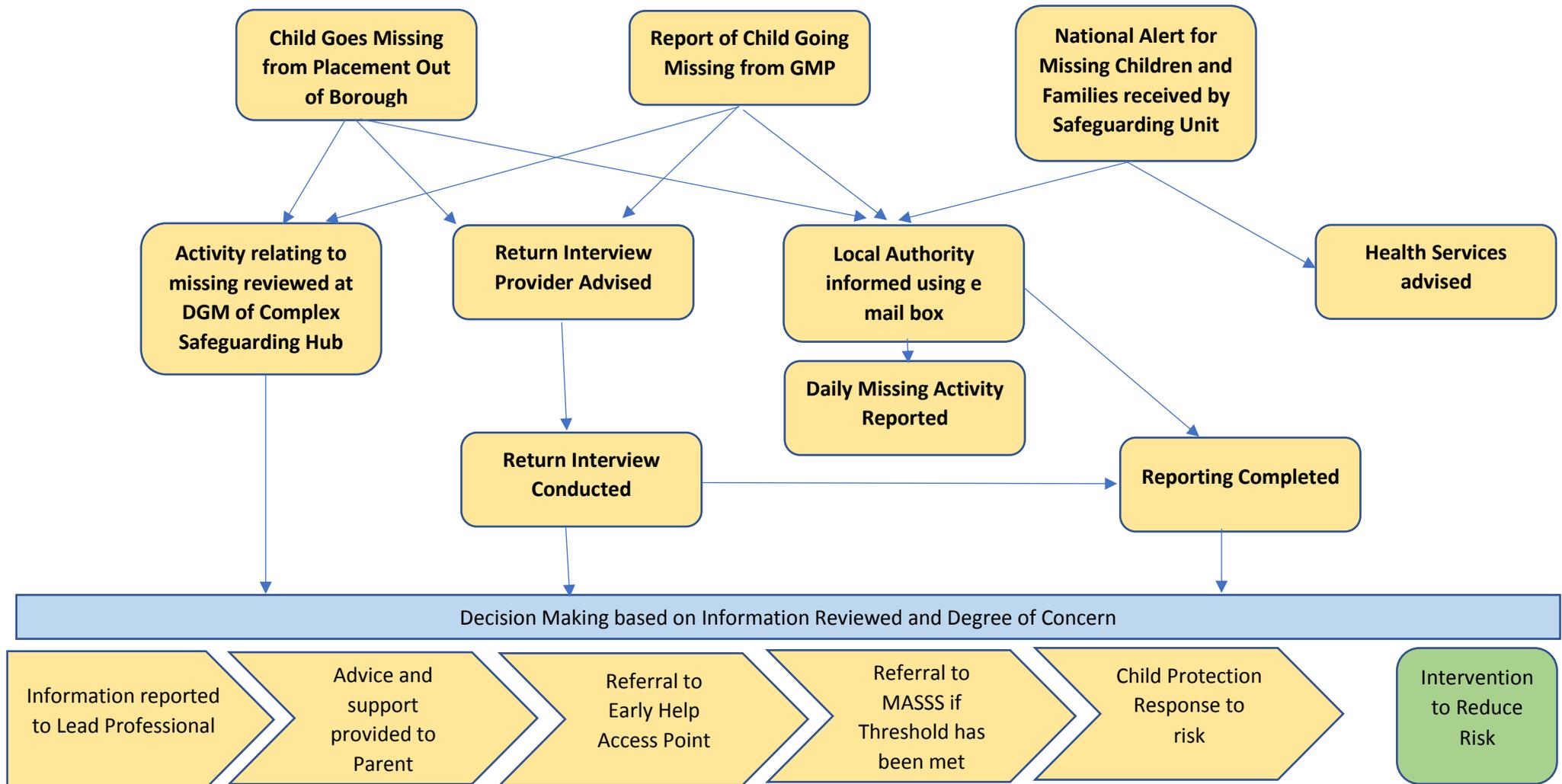
- Offer all children who go missing and Independent Return Interview
- Provide a multi-agency response to perceived risk, proportionate to the needs seen as contributing to a child becoming missing
- That there is a response to children who are known to be missing from education
- Contribute to standardising Greater Manchester approaches to missing and respond to cross border cases
- Ensure Out of Borough arrangements for Children Looked After leads to review and consideration
- Consider implications from new policy legislation, research and guidance

## Provision

- Provision of an Independent Review Interview Programme for all children who go missing.
  - Ensure multi – agency plans are in place and child focused dependent upon the degree of risk and need identified.
  - Ensure children missing from Education are supported to access provision
  - Provide information, system clarity and awareness of all agency's responsibilities to address identified need
  - Ensure procedures, commissioning and Protocols are in place to inform Practice
- And
- Ensure delivery of effective service where agencies will work from the earliest opportunity to address need and minimise risk.

## 2. How the Process Supporting those Children Who Go Missing is supported

2.1 The management of episodes of children going missing is supported by a pathway developed to support and ensure compliance with the national guidance and Greater Manchester Procedural Guidance which is reflected in Bolton's own procedural manual in Tri-Ex. The processes are reflected in the following flowchart.



2.2 The delivery of activity and the systems developed are based on three distinct elements that partners work to when responding to children going missing.

### **3. Rapid Dissemination of Information**

3.1 The partnership recognises the importance of a rapid sharing of information in circumstances when a child goes missing. Therefore, there is a commitment by professionals working with children and families to recognise the need to use the agreed method to report directly or where children are at home encourage parents to file reports to the Police when children go missing.

3.2 Whilst the Police evaluate and undertake procedures in finding the child or young person upon notification. Professionals involved should within their duties continue to also make efforts to find the young person coordinating with the Police. Activity and information from Police enquiries are then submitted to the Local Authority to log and track to ensure all actions linked to an episode is completed in accordance with the process. This relates to:

- Children and families who are subject to National Alerts having gone missing from their place of origin, health partners are advised and records are centrally held for reference should newly arrived families to Bolton be referred for a service
- That Lead Professionals, Police and the provider of Return Interviews receive up to date information in a timely fashion.
- Risks whilst missing can be considered to inform responses proportionate and timely, which can involve media alerts, changes in the patterns of searching based on new information, consideration of implementing child protection procedures where necessary.
- That additional information is sought, and risk is evaluated and attempts are made to understand repeating patterns of behaviour. Utilising timely independent Return Interviews, which informs the most appropriate intervention to address need and minimise a reoccurrence.
- That those who are most vulnerable who are looked after in placements away from Bolton receive the same level of oversight as that of those who are closer to the Local Authority.

### **4. A Timely and Proportionate Response**

4.1 A rapid dissemination and sharing of information is the base upon which safe and timely decision making can be undertaken. As stated, there are a series of steps that can be undertaken whilst the young person is missing. Past behaviour patterns and risks as well as vulnerabilities already identified for the young person may impact upon the perception of the presenting information. That is why at all times

where a child has a Lead Professional, they should be advised of activity to inform planning and linking previous concerns and knowledge to the current missing episode. This communication is essential in decision making and may lead to the Police heightening the perceived level of threat to a child or should the missing episode extend to a number of days, lead to initiating child protection processes and the holding of a Strategy meeting, informing future enquiries and also consider the use of the media to advertise the disappearance.

4.2 Where there is no Lead Professional involved, information will remain under review both through the missing process and through the review of overnight reports by the Complex Safeguarding Team who will review should there be concerning elements of possible exploitation linked to the missing episode. These incidents will be discussed at the Daily Governance Meeting within the Complex Safeguarding Hub where information is reviewed against the current known intelligence and known threats and may lead to providing additional information to support the search or make recommendations with regards to the presenting situation.

4.3 For the majority of episodes the period of absence is usually a few hours and largely less than 24 hours. Regardless, upon return, the 'Missing From Home' e mail box is issued an update that the young person has been found. This is completed by the Police who also provides the notification to the provider who conducts Return Interviews. The provider is required to make contact and attempt to complete a discussion with the young person with 72 hours. Where possible achieving a better understanding of the reasons why the young person went missing, which will then inform the most appropriate way forward to prevent further missing episodes where necessary. The completion of this will be shared with the Lead Professional if identified and the 'Missing From Home' e mail account to record the episode as being ended.

4.4 The provider, in the event of no Lead Professional, will triage based upon the issues leading to the missing episode and identified need in order to prevent a repeat, this is in accordance with the Bolton Threshold Document informing who and how best to access the right service to address need.

4.5 The provider will therefore consider if support is required and in the future be unlikely to be a single event or if there is a request for help. They will look to refer to the relevant agency to provide support for the family and resolve the issue. For more complex or challenging issues a referral should be made to the Early Help Access Point for consideration and involvement of services to work with the young person and their family.

4.6 Such decisions will be based on perceived risk and the impact of circumstances affecting the child decision to run. Where there are significant concerns being generated that could impair or present as having significant safeguarding concerns, a referral should be made through to MASSS and consideration be given as to the best way forward. This will involve offering advice and guidance or to accept the referral under Child in Need or Child Protection Processes. These will then be followed to coordinate intervention and indeed recognise the risk in the situation to the child.

4.7 It is noted that for children who are looked after by the local authority the same processes in respect of disseminating information and management of searches are applied. However it is recognised there is a challenge for children and young people placed 5 miles or further outside the boundary of Bolton. In such circumstances the provider of Return Interviews will be unable to complete the process, a variation to the process is applied and can be seen in the '*Children Looked After who go missing from placement protocol*' and is available separately.

## **5. Recognition that Missing is a Serious Concern**

5.1 The process and compliance with the procedures as drafted in Bolton's procedural manual provides the basis upon which decision making and the planning of intervention is made. The partnership recognises that such events place children at risk and should be treated with the utmost seriousness and therefore the factors affecting a child leading to missing episodes need to be fully explored as part of any assessment and Care Plan. Steps should be built in to support the family and child sufficiently that a missing episode is no longer felt necessary or is a less attractive option. How best to address this should be openly discussed with both the child and the family.

5.2 In considering the supports that should be put in place to minimise the number of missing episodes, the family should be seen as a whole, this can mean challenging perceptions that the young person is doing it to themselves and therefore their actions is not contributed by the actions of those around them. Therefore all agencies and Lead Professionals should review their intervention and address the need leading to a missing episode from a holistic perspective based on the child's lived experience, which is essential in understanding the reasoning and inform where to target intervention.

5.3 There are clearly however, external influences that can impact on behaviour patterns and must therefore understand that neither a child nor a family exist in self isolation. The partnership recognising the importance of contextual safeguarding responsibilities that cannot be resolved by just individual care planning. Therefore to fully maximise the opportunities to reduce risk how information and oversight of young people's experiences are approached in different ways as well as individual intervention;

- Police activity and findings in respect of Missing are reviewed daily and where appropriate discussed at the Daily Governance Meeting within the Complex Safeguarding Team
- Trends and themes are linked through Police Intelligence processes to understand trends to the threats and geographical locations within the community that are locations that those who go missing gravitate to. This will be provided on a quarterly basis to the Community Safety Partnership for awareness in respect of disruption and intervention by community planning.
- Activity reports provide statistical analysis on a monthly and quarterly basis and shared within social care to ensure oversight of activity and where possible identify early trends and changes in activity that would be worthy of scrutiny.

5.4 Performance data will be subject to review and improvements over time.

## **6. System Support**

6.1 To support the oversight and smooth running of the service the Local Authority has the following resource investment in the strategy specific to the application of the missing process.

- Financial provision to commission a provider to complete independent Return Interviews and signposting to services to address needs identified
- The provision of Business Support to facilitate the uploading of information onto the Information Systems
- Missing Coordinator to maintain oversight and health of the system, offer challenge and ensure information is shared.