Children Missing from Home and Care- A standardised Approach to Dealing with Missing and Absent Children and Young People In Oldham

Definitions and Explanations of Terms

- **Missing**- Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character, or the context suggests the person may be the 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.
- **Looked After**- A child is “looked after” by a local authority if he/she is “in care” by reason of a court order, or if he/she is provided with accommodation for more than 24 hours by agreement with her/his parents or with the child if he/she is ages 16 or more.
- **Accommodated**- A child is accommodated if he/she is looked after by the Local Authority with the voluntary agreement of his/her parent, or with the child if he/she is over 16 years old.

**Child**- A young person under the age of eighteen years

**Missing Person Safeguarding Officer**- An officer of GMP’s Public Protection Division with the specific interest for High and Medium risk missing person investigations across 4 of GMP’s 12 territorial divisions.

Agreements around rules for staying overnight at friends houses or going on trips. This is frequently cited as a major issue by young people who wish to behave like their peers who are not looked after. As stated in Delegation of Authority Guidance, decisions on overnight stays should normally be delegated to foster carers and residential care staff. Arrangements for such decisions should be written into the Placement Plan or equivalent. There is no statutory duty for Disclosure and Barring Service (DSB) checks to be carried out on adults in a private household where a child/young person may stay overnight and so
restrictions should only be placed on looked after Children if there are exceptional reason.

**Before contacting Police**

When a child or young person is identified as not being at a location they are expected to be at, the reporting individual (care provider/ foster carer/ social worker ect) must take proactive steps to trace the child’s whereabouts prior to contacting the police. Such steps include:

- Physical check 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 (twitter/facebook ect);
- Contacting the missing person’s family and friends;
- Make reference to any risk assessments, placement plans or action plans that allow for some leeway with curfews for ‘boundary testing’.

**Reporting to the Police**

If the child/young person is not located, the reporting individual should contact Greater Manchester Police by dialling 101 to report them as being away from their address.

It is the responsibility of the care provider to inform the family and social worker of a child being reported missing, in accordance with local arrangements. It is good practice for the care provider to record all incidents of absence in order to build a picture of behaviour.

It should be recognised that police powers to return an individual to a care address are limited unless they are on a care order or Police Protection Powers are considered necessary, Children/Young people must not be reported missing as a behaviour managements tool. Police protection must not be considered merely as a tool to return an individual.
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<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Been a victim of a serious crime; or the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>The risk posed is likely to place the subject in danger, or they are a threat to themselves or others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>There is no apparent risk of danger to either the subject or the public.</td>
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**Location and Return of the ‘missing’ person**

Statutory guidance states that when a missing child is located, it is the responsibility of the residential staff or foster carers to collect the child, unless the circumstances pose a risk to them. In such circumstances only, the Police may be requested to assist in the returning the individual but it must be recognised that the Police only have power as to return a young person to care if they are subject to a Care Order or circumstances are such that Police Protection is required.

**Recording**

Phoenix Children’s Social Care team will also be looking at MFH episodes on framework i.e. Positive Steps who complete all independent return interviews, will ensure copies of written accounts are sent to the team. Phoenix CSC will ensure that allocated fieldwork social workers are correctly recording episodes on FWI, it is important that all MFH are recorded on FWI in episodes to collate accurate data and aid decisions on any plans, strategy discussions that need to take place. On occasions when children's homes record MFH episodes are FWI this episode should not be finished (save and Close) as the allocated Social worker holds responsibility and record next action as appropriate. The return interview completed by Positive Steps needs to be inputted into the MFH episode.

Phoenix police and social care will be involved in any MFH were there are concerns in relation to CSE and attend any relevant meetings, police will also update any trigger plans on police systems. MFH should be discussed as part of
core groups, CP conferences/reviews and LAC meetings. If a young person is MFH for 24 hours are more then a strategy discussion needs to be completed.

**Escalation of concern**

Phoenix have a daily governance that is sent to all relevant SWs, this info will include any MFH and should be imputed on FWI, police will undertake safe and well visits for all young people who have a CSE flag. Fortnightly meeting in respect of all MFH persons is held chaired by Phoenix team manager and has multi agency partners, any plans/actions from these meetings will be sent to allocated SWs for information and implementation.

Where concerns are raised or procedures are not followed case should be escalated to team manager.

**Children from Other Local Authorities, placed in Oldham**

Positive steps complete all MFH return interviews, this information will be shared with allocated SW, Phoenix CSC staff and any children’s units. In relation to COLAs, (Children from Other Local Authorities, placed in Oldham) Positive Steps will complete return interviews and ensure the correct Local Authority SW and care establishment gain the information.

**Oldham Looked After Children placed out of borough**

Looked after children placed out of borough by Oldham Council, will have a service from Positive Steps if they are placed within a 25 mile radius of Oldham. Were any young person is placed outside the 25 mile radius plans need to be in place as to who will provide a service in relation to return interviews, this needs to be part of the 72 hour placement agreement. Where there is no provision offered discussions need to take place with Saul Ainsworth or Glynis Williams, Heads of Service in relation to who will be commissioned to complete this.

Justine Hughes
Phoenix Team Manager

13.10.15