

# Lancashire Strategy for Children who go Missing

## 1. Introduction

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

1.1 Lancashire is continuing to build a society that enables all young people to have:

- **Supportive relationships** – with parents, families and carers, and access to support for those at risk;
- **Strong outcomes**– being healthy and safe, achieving in education and work, and active in society;
- **Good opportunities** – in education, personal and social development and having a voice in society.

1.2 This strategy has been developed to ensure a consistent approach across all agencies and in response to recent government guidance. It has been agreed between children's social care, health, the police and other partner agencies including voluntary sector agencies. The strategy will be reviewed in August 2013 and thereafter on a regular basis.

It is informed by Lancashire's Children and Young People's Plan 2011-14 and takes into account the 'Working Together in Lancashire' approach to working with families and carers.

We aim to draw together all existing protocols and procedures that relate to children who go missing. This will raise awareness and support the effective collaborative response of all the agencies that are involved in the process of improving the safety and outcomes for children, young people and families.

1.3 The cross government strategy 2011 proposes the following objectives to which all agencies, statutory or voluntary sector, should work collectively to deliver:

- **Prevention – reducing the number of people who go missing** – through prevention strategies, education work and early intervention in cases where children, young people and adults repeatedly go missing.
- **Protection – reducing the risk of harm to those who go missing** – by ensuring local agencies provide a tailored, risk based response to cases of missing children, young people and adults and that they work together to find the person and to close cases as quickly as possible at a local and national level.

- **Provision – providing missing people and their families with support and guidance** – by referring promptly and ensuring that missing people and their families understand how and where to access help and support.

(*Missing Children and Adults – A cross government strategy*, Home Office, p5, 2011).

1.4 The Lancashire Children and Young People's Plan 2011-14, Stay Safe Priority 3 is: "Children and young people are safe and effectively protected from physical and emotional harm and neglect.

- We will make our county a safer place for children and young people.
- We will improve safeguarding outcomes for all vulnerable children and young people."

1.5 To help achieve these outcomes, in relation to children missing or in danger of going missing, it is essential that everyone in Lancashire working with children, young people and families continues to:

- regularly update their knowledge of the LSCB safeguarding procedures;
- follow the missing children guidance, protocols and procedures as they continue to be developed;
- identify and locate children who go missing and liaise with the other services most likely to come into contact with them (*Working Together, 2010*);
- use the reporting mechanisms to report missing children to the police children's social care and the children missing from education team;
- raise awareness of children who are missing with all professionals and others who work with children, young people, families and the general public;
- protect and prevent vulnerable children and adults from going missing and contribute to reducing the number of people going missing;
- provide effective and early intervention and prevention strategies to help reduce the potential of repeat cases of vulnerable children going missing;
- be aware of the name of the lead LSBC person in their own organisations;
- ensure that all new employees must receive safeguarding training that explains the potential vulnerability of all categories of missing children, and the procedures to follow.

1.6 Children with mental health needs, learning and physical disabilities are particularly vulnerable when missing. They may have communication difficulties and fewer opportunities to disclose reasons for running away. All agencies should be alert to the particular needs of disabled children, making sure they know how to raise concerns and receive whatever assistance and support they require.

1.7 A key principle underpinning all our work is that:

"The wishes and feelings of children and young people should be sought and taken into account in reaching any decisions about the provision of services which affect them. However, professionals should be aware that children and young people do not always acknowledge what may be, objectively, a situation of risk, or may not feel comfortable talking honestly about the problems in their lives. The particular needs or sensitivities of girls and boys, children from ethnic communities, or those with physical disabilities or learning difficulties should be reflected in provision of services." (*Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from care*, 2009).

## 2. Children missing:

"A missing person is anyone whose whereabouts are unknown, whatever the circumstances of disappearance. He or she will be considered missing until located and his or her well being, or otherwise, established." (*Association of Chief Police Officers*, 2010).

2.1 By clarifying some of the different terms and forms of children who go missing, it is hoped to provide insights for agencies, to consider their contribution in protecting missing children.

- The term 'children who go missing' refers to children or young people up to the age of 18 and some children up to the age of 19 if looked after or up to 25 if they are the responsibility of the local authority and in receipt of full time education, whose whereabouts is unknown.
- "The terms "young runaway" and "missing" in this context refer to children or young people, who have run away from their home or care placement, have been forced to leave, or whose whereabouts is unknown." (*Statutory guidance on children who are run away and go missing from home or care*, p51, DCSF, 2009).
- If a person is simply not where they should be this does not necessarily mean there "whereabouts is unknown". If you believe that a person is at a known address or location that address or location should be checked by reporting persons prior to reporting to the Police, unless their presence at the location exposes them to risk and requires Police intervention.

- The term "absconder" is used when a child or young person is absent from their placement without permission and who is subject to an order resulting from the criminal justice process such as curfews, tagging etc. Children under the age 16 who have absconded from care will also be treated as missing persons. For children over the age of 16 in the absence of aggravating factors suggesting they are at risk or acting of character, will be treated as a absconders rather than missing from persons.
- The term 'children missing education' refers to: "A compulsory school-age child who is not on the roll of a school, not placed in alternative provision by a local authority, and who is not receiving a suitable education at home." (*Revised statutory guidance for local authorities in England to identify children not receiving an education*, DCSF, 2009).

2.2 In all of the above situations these children or young people are vulnerable and will be considered as missing until they are found and their wellbeing (or otherwise) has been established. The criteria for launching a police child recue alert are strict and are found in the joint protocol.

2.3 Research has shown that children are more likely to go missing than adults. This may place them in risky situations and increasing their vulnerability to drugs, alcohol, homelessness, crime, and sexual exploitation. 'Children and young people who decide to run away are generally unhappy, vulnerable and may be in danger.' (*Missing Children and Adults – a Cross government strategy*, p7, Home Office 2011).

2.3 The main reasons for running away are:

- Problems at home – ranging from arguments with parents and carers to long term abuse or maltreatment
- Family break-up where young people are drawn into their parents conflict
- Mental health problems
- Bullying, racism and racial harassment, homophobia
- Teenage pregnancy
- Wanting to be near friends or family - especially where a young person is in care and there are problems with contact
- Grooming for sexual exploitation - evidence indicates that 90% of children subject to sexual exploitation go missing at some point.

- Child trafficking - young people may go missing when they are being trafficked
- Forced Marriage - some young people may run away because they are at risk of or in a forced marriage.

Information produced by the Children's Society in 2012 states that:

"Every five minutes a child runs away from home or carer in this country. Even more shocking is that a quarter of them, that is 70 each day, are forced out of their homes by parents or carers." (*'Make Runaways Safe'* campaign 2012).

2.4 Missing children and young people are at real risk of harm when missing. Just over half of child sexual exploitation cases involve a young person who has at some time been reported missing. A 2011 CEOP report ('Out of mind, out of sight') found that repeatedly going missing from home is increasingly recognized as key indicator to agencies that a child may be the victim of child sexual exploitation. Young people who run away may also become involved in criminality and homelessness and may suffer mental health problems.

"As well as short term risks to their immediate safety there are longer-term implications. Children and young people who go missing are less likely to fulfil their educational potential and live happy, health and economically productive lives as adults. It is essential, therefore, that everyone concerned with the welfare of children and young people is equipped to respond appropriately when a child or young person goes missing."

(*Statutory Guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care*, DCSF, 2009; *Safeguarding children and Young people from Sexual Exploitation*, HM, 2009)

### 3. Lancashire procedures and protocols

3.1 Lancashire missing children protocols and procedures are continually being improved to remain robust and to include the views of services, partner agencies, children, young people and their families.

The key protocols are:

- Lancashire Safeguarding Procedures
- Joint protocol: Children and young people who run away or go missing from home or care
- Children Missing Education

3.2 It is important that every organisation follows the **Lancashire Safeguarding Procedures** and their own service/agency guidance. Other authorities will usually follow their own procedures where the child is resident in Lancashire.

### 3.3 Lancashire safeguarding procedures

The Lancashire safeguarding procedures must be followed if there are safeguarding concerns about a child or young person. The Safeguarding Procedures can be accessed on-line at: [www.lancashire.gov.uk/safeguardingchildrenboard](http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/safeguardingchildrenboard)

The roles and responsibilities of partner agencies are defined within the Lancashire Safeguarding Procedures. They include:

- an agreed definition of a missing or runaway child or young person
- an agreed inter-agency framework for classifying the degree of risk when a child goes missing from home or when a missing young person comes to agency notice
- guidance on the threshold for referrals to social care
- where CAF would be beneficial and the parents/carers agree, details of who should carry out a CAF and how this information should be shared, where appropriate
- the basis on which agencies offer 'Return interviews' for children who have run away from home; and details of preventative approaches.

Protocols and procedures are regularly reviewed in alignment with the latest government recommendations, guidance, and research.

### 3.4 The Lancashire *'Joint Protocol - Children and young people who run away or go missing from home or care.'*

"Running away can be symptomatic of wider problems in a child or young person's life, but whatever the reason, one thing is very clear: children who decide to run away are unhappy, vulnerable and in danger."

*(Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care, p3, DCSF, 2009)*

Lancashire constabulary has a key role in partnership with other agencies and services that are trying to locate children who are missing and in reducing the instances where the same children go repeatedly missing from home or care in an area.

- A STORM log is opened by the police on all occasions when a child is reported to them as missing. The following questions will be asked of informants when reporting and are actions that should be considered prior to making the report:
  - Have you searched the home address?

- Have you attempted to contact the MFH?
  - Have you contacted family and associates?
  - Have you checked known addresses and places frequented?
  - Have you checked social network sites?
  - Have you contacted local hospitals?
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- A SLEUTH report log is opened and a report is created for all missing children. The submission of the report triggers the Police National Computer (PNC) circulation. The police notify the relevant Children's Services single point of contact via an automated email within 24 hours.
  - Details of associates, behaviours, clothing, risk factors and places frequented are all crucial elements in a Police investigation the accuracy and integrity of the information dictates risk assessments and resourcing. Information on Police systems only paints part of the picture for officers conducting an investigation. Information should be maintained and sought out at the time of reporting, allowing officers the best possible chance of protecting and locating children

The joint protocol applies to the definition set out earlier within the county or Local Authority boundaries (including those aged over 19) for whom Lancashire County Council, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council or Blackpool Council have continuing responsibilities under The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. (*Joint protocol: Children and young people who run away or go missing from home or car, p11, DCSF, 2009*).

### 3.5 Missing from care

From December 2010 the Senior Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) has managed the process in relation to the second stage intervention meetings required for children who are looked after who go missing more than 9 times in a 90 day period. The senior IRO is the named person for contact within Lancashire for the police. This effectively means there is a mechanism in place for young people to be identified at an early stage if they start to go missing from care whilst ensuring that the initial missing from care intervention meetings are followed up along with the action plan following such a meeting.

The missing from care process as outlined above only relates to those missing from care who are looked after by Lancashire, either within Lancashire or placed elsewhere. Where the child is placed within Lancashire and the corporate parent responsibility remains with the placing authority, then the relevant procedures of that authority will dictate the action to be followed. However, the safety and well being of all children and young people is paramount and Lancashire LSCB's procedures will, where appropriate, take precedent.

Bi-monthly meetings will take place with the police compliance officer to discuss any issues that have arisen and also look at specific young people who may be a concern. The return interviews are also followed up. This will facilitate a much closer scrutiny of the missing from care agenda.

### 3.6 Children Missing Education

All local authorities have a statutory duty to identify children missing from education (*Revised Statutory Guidance for local authorities in England to identify children not receiving education* p11, 2009).

Children and young people who are missing from education and not receiving a suitable education are at increased risk of a range of negative outcomes that could have long term damaging consequences for their life chances. They may also be at increased risk of abuse or neglect. Similarly children who are the victims of abuse or neglect may also be more likely to go missing from education.

Lancashire Local Authority has a children missing education team working closely with schools (and school nurses) and other services to check that educational provision is in place and to ensure the safety and welfare of potentially missing children.

In some instances children and young people may become more vulnerable where they have fallen out of the education system and when there is no knowledge of them being in receipt of an education

Where children are identified as not receiving education, the children missing education team will identify if they have been entered on the roll of a new school. If the child is not on a school roll or receiving appropriate education, then support is given to ensure that appropriate education is provided.

Where there are known safeguarding concerns about missing children, and where there are concerns about trafficking or sexual exploitation, the person responsible for identifying these concerns follows the safeguarding procedures and immediately contacts children's social care.

Cross border issues are dealt with within the individual protocols.

## 4. Child sexual exploitation

4.1 Child Sexual exploitation is the abuse of a young person by someone in a position of power or trust who involves them in inappropriate sexual activities often in exchange for some form of payment such as alcohol, drugs, gifts or services. Sexual exploitation of young people is child abuse. Children and young people who become involved in sexual exploitation face huge risks to their physical, emotional and psychological health.



The common issues are because they are extremely vulnerable, have low self-esteem and poor self-image. Young people who run away from home are recognised as being much more at risk of being targeted as a victim of sexual exploitation. Vulnerability is identified and targeted by the abusers, whether the young person is living with their family, looked after away from home or they have run away. The young person may not see themselves as victims and may claim to be acting voluntarily. In reality this is NOT voluntary or consenting behaviour.

The ability to capture information and concerns regarding CSE is crucial and shapes the police response and investigation. For example; details of associates, common behaviours such as social network sites how a child may travel where they would shop.

## **5. Lancashire Children and Young People's Trust and the children's workforce**

5.1 Lancashire Children and Young People's Trust supports the development of new ways of working and promotes strong joint planning and commissioning of services. The District Children's and Young Peoples Trusts lead in the planning and commissioning of local services to meet the needs of the local communities, review district children and young people's plans to ensure they are working in the best interests of children young people and their families.

5.2 Lancashire Children and Young People's Trust are aware that:

- multi-agency working must be at the core of all procedures and protocols with strong partnerships between children's services, youth services, the police, health, schools and early learning and the voluntary sector;
- multi agency working is essential to minimising the chances of child trafficking, sexual exploitation, children running away, or children missing.

## **6. Working Together in Lancashire**

6.1 Key partners: local authority, police, health, local multi-agency structures, voluntary sector.

All agencies and professionals working with children who are missing are expected to follow the relevant procedures to ensure that the correct interventions are in place to improve responses and practice and deliver better outcomes.

At a local level legislation (Children Act, 2004) places responsibilities on a range of local partners including local authorities, the police and health partners to work together in relation to the care and protection of young people under the age of 18. "Local authority children's services in England also have a number of specific duties to organise and plan services and to safeguard and promote the welfare of children

under section 18 of the Children Act 2004." (*Missing Children and Adults – A cross government strategy*, Home Office, 2011).

6.2 As a result of research, serious case reviews and enquiries, (Laming Review 2009; Munro Report, 2011) there is national recognition that there are weaknesses in the way that agencies and individual professionals share pertinent information with each other. It is important that we continue to follow the *'Information Sharing: Guidance for practitioners and managers'*, 2009 and work together when a child or young person is vulnerable or at risk or missing.

The Munro reports have led to a review of partnership working across Lancashire which includes a review of Early Support service pathways and the further development of more specialist pathways.

All agencies have already signed up to key transformation principles: shared locations, shared information, shared ownership, shared pathways and shared commissioning and delivery.

All agencies and professionals will continue to implement the LSCB's protocols to ensure that all employees are aware of the risks to children who are missing.

6.3 The Lancashire *'Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub'* will act as a way in which multi agency information is gathered prior to making a decision regarding referral to Children's Social Care and also a way of using multi agency information to assess risk, assign a lead agency or professional and determine which action should be taken if referral does not meet the threshold for Children's Social Care. It will also act as a way of 'stepping down' suitable cases when statutory involvement is ceasing to ensure that support continues. Agencies and services providing early support and intervention will work closely together in *'District Multi-agency Delivery Hubs'* (*workplaces with facilities for professionals from various services to work alongside one another*). The *'Multi-agency Hub Panels'* and the workforce will provide an effective delivery of early support and intensive work with families.

6.4 The continued strengthening of partnership and implementation of early support arrangements will contribute to the engagement by all agencies to help prevent children going missing and in taking actions to reduce instances where the same children repeatedly go missing.

**Appendix: Procedures & Guidance – including links to the law concerning missing or runaway children.**

The following web sites, guidance and documentation provide information for our continued improvement, shared understanding and ability to work together.

**Lancashire safeguarding procedures**

<http://panlancashirescb.proceduresonline.com/index.htm>

**Joint protocol: Children and young people who run away or go missing from home or care**

This protocol is important for the safeguarding of children and families across Lancashire and has enabled the development of robust responses to running away.

Lancashire	0845 053 0000
Blackpool	01253 477600
Blackburn with Darwen	01254 587547

**Children Missing Education**

Information about children missing education can be found on the Lancashire County Council Web pages

[http://www3.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/atoz/a\\_to\\_z/service.asp?u\\_id=2056&tab=1](http://www3.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/atoz/a_to_z/service.asp?u_id=2056&tab=1)

Further guidance for LCC employees can be found on the intranet pages for children missing from education and in the children's social care procedures for children missing from care.

**National Guidance/Strategy**

Missing Children And Adults – a cross government strategy (2011)  
(<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/police/missing-persons-strategy> )

Safeguarding children who may have been trafficked, HM, (2011)  
(<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-00084-2011>)

Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation: Supplementary guidance to Working Together to Safeguard Children (2011)  
(<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DCSF-00689-2009>)

Out of school Out of mind, Local Government Ombudsman September (2011)  
(<http://www.lgo.org.uk/publications/advice-and-guidance>)

Children missing from education, Ofsted report summary – August (2010)  
(<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/children-missing-education>)

## DRAFT

Working together to Safeguard Children A guide to inter agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (2010)

(<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/Integratedworking/Page1/DCSF-00305-2010>)

Changes to Working Together to Safeguard Children (2010)

(<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/strategy/laupdates/a0071041/changes-to-working-together-to-safeguard-children-statutory-guidance-2010>)

Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care, DCfS, July 2009

(<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DCSF-00670-2009>)

Revised statutory guidance for local authorities in England to identify children not receiving a suitable education (2009)

(<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/STATUTORY-LA-GUIDE>)

### **National Web sites**

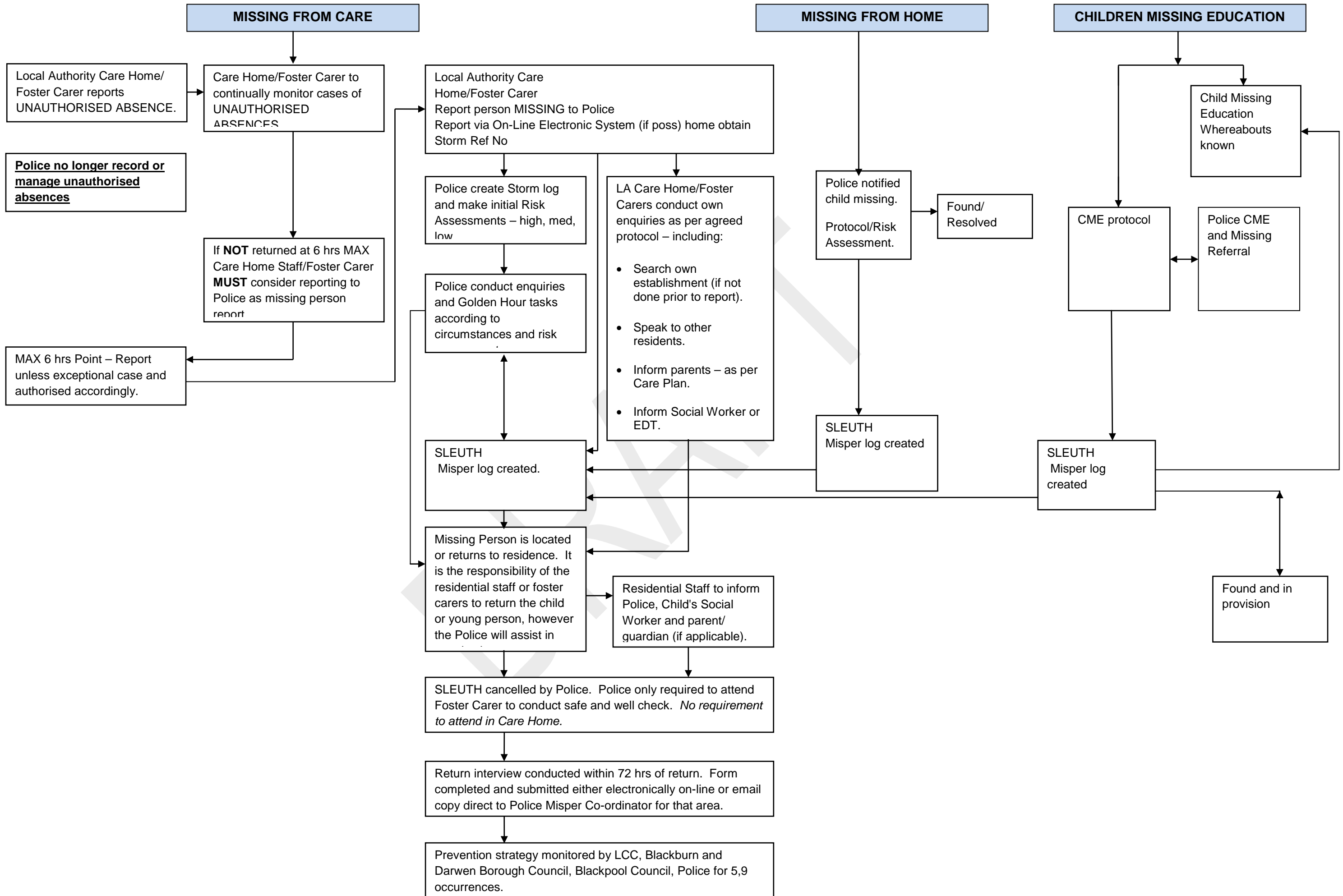
Department for Education Publications - <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/>

Missingkids - <http://uk.missingkids.com/missingkids/servlet/PublicHomeServlet>

Thinkuknow - <http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>

CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre) - <http://ceop.police.uk/>

## CHILDREN MISSING STRATEGY – OVERARCHING FLOWCHART



# Missing Children Strategy

An overarching strategy joining together the various protocols and procedures adhering to children who are missing  
Joining together services that provide safeguarding procedures for children, young people, families and carers when children go missing  
Working together to continually improve safeguarding services for children, young people, families and carers

## Lancashire Safeguarding Procedures

Pan-Lancashire procedure providing clear guidance for all professionals in all aspects of safeguarding children and young people

Informing all practitioners of the action that they need to take to protect children and young people

Improving the standards of safeguarding across Lancashire, Blackpool and Blackburn with Darwin

## Joint protocol for children who go missing or run away from home or from care and supporting documents

Developing robust responses to running away, which mirror the good practice already established across Lancashire

Safeguarding children who are looked after who go missing from homes or runaway

Working together to improve the delivery of services to children and families across Lancashire

## Children Missing Education

A range of cross-cutting procedures and protocols to ensure that there are robust measures to identify quickly when a child is not receiving a suitable education and to follow through with effective tracking and enquiry systems

Raising awareness of Children Missing Education and working with other agencies to improve support

Working together to ensure that Children Missing Education are effectively identified and supported in accessing educational provision