



Bexley Safeguarding Children Board

Children Missing from Home, Education and Care

Multi-agency Protocol for Children Missing from Home and Care and Education

Version 3 November 2015

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1. Introduction

Children running away and going missing from care and home is a key safeguarding issue for the Bexley Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB). This Multi-Agency Protocol is designed to support an effective collaborative safeguarding response from all agencies involved when a child goes missing. It aims to provide guidance for assessing both the risk of the child going missing and the risk to the child when they are missing. The Protocol describes appropriate staff/agency actions to locate the child, to effect their return and to identify the issues which caused, and may continue to cause, the child to go missing.

Running away is usually a sign that a crisis point has been reached. Current research findings estimate that approximately 25 % of children and young people that go missing are at risk of serious harm. There are also particular concerns about the links between children running away and the risks of sexual exploitation. Studies in 2012 by the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), the University of Bedfordshire and the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) found that Child Sexual Exploitation is much more prevalent than previously thought.

This protocol updates and replaces the BSCB Procedure on Safeguarding Children Missing from Home/ Care (2014). It should be used in conjunction with the London Child Protection Procedures (2013) including CSE. This protocol takes account of the DfE Statutory Guidance on 'Children who run away or go missing from home or care', January 2014.

2. Principles

The following principles should be adopted by all agencies in relation to identifying and locating children who go missing:

- The safety and welfare of the child is paramount
- Locating and returning the child to a safe environment is the main objective
- Child Protection Procedures will be initiated whenever there are concerns that a child who is missing may be at risk of significant harm
- The Police will act on **any** report of a child missing on the understanding that a Risk Assessment has been completed.
- Every '**missing**' child who returns should have a 'Safe and Well' check by the police and an Independent Return Interview done by the most appropriate agency. An Independent Return Interview is undertaken by Thriving Families Service (Early Help and Prevention) for those children missing from home.
- Where the child is known to the Children's Social Care or meets the criteria for referral to the Children's Social Care, the Local Authority will ensure that there is a range of service options to address the child's needs when they return.

- Where the child is not open to Children's Social Care and does not meet the criteria for referral to Children's Social Care, the Local Authority will work with the child and their family to offer early help and prevention services to address the child's needs when they return.

3. Definitions

Child:

For the purposes of this document a child is anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday.

Young runaway:

A child or young person under the age of 18 who has run away from their home or 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.

Responsible local authority:

The local authority that is responsible for a looked after child's care and care planning.

Host local authority:

The local authority in which a looked after child is placed when placed out of the responsible local authority's area.

Missing from care:

A looked after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (eg school) and their whereabouts is not known.

Away from placement without authorisation:

A looked after child whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be and the carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the police.

Abduction:

Where a child or young person has been abducted or forcibly removed from their place of residence, you should immediately contact the Police via 999. This includes children and young people known to be at risk of sexual exploitation and who have been taken from their place of residence by unknown adults, even if the child or young person appears to have gone willingly.

DISTINCTION BETWEEN MISSING AND ABSENT

If you have any doubt about whether a child or young person is **missing** or it is an **unauthorised absence**, they should be treated as missing.

Missing:

For the purpose of this Procedure a child (i.e. a young person under the age of 18 years) is to be considered '**missing**' if their whereabouts are unknown, whatever the circumstances of their disappearance. They will be considered missing until they are located and their well-being or otherwise is established.

Unauthorised Absence:

This category is critical to the clarification of roles of the Police and Children's Social Care. Some children absent themselves from home or care for a short period and then return, often their whereabouts are known or may be quickly established through contact with family or friends or are unknown but the children are not considered at risk. Sometimes children stay out longer than agreed as a boundary testing activity which is well within the range of normal teenage behaviour. These children have taken '**unauthorised absence**', and would not usually come within the definition of '**missing**' for this Procedure. If a child's whereabouts are known then they cannot be 'missing'. Unauthorised absences must be carefully monitored as the child may subsequently go missing.

Since April 2013 police forces have been rolling out new definitions of 'missing' and 'absent' in relation to children/ young people and adults reported as missing to the police. These are:

- **Missing:** Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another'; and
- **Absent:** 'A person is not at a place where they are expected or required to be'.

The police classification of a person as 'missing' or 'absent' will be based on on-going risk assessment. Guidance on how police forces will apply new definitions to children was issued by ACPO in April 2013.

CHILDREN MISSING FROM EDUCATION

Children Missing from Education covers a cohort of around 200 children in Bexley at any one time. The local authority has a statutory duty¹ to oversee and address this issue - the local authority must investigate the case and ensure the child is receiving suitable education. A small percentage will also be children who are missing from home or care.

Groups identified by statutory guidance as most at risk are:

¹ Children Missing from Education Statutory guidance, Jan 15 – DfE
Pupils Missing from Education, Nov 13 – Ofsted.

- Pupils at risk of harm/neglect
- Children of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) Families
- Families of Armed Forces
- Missing children/runaways
- Children and young people supervised by the Youth Justice System
- Children who cease to attend a school – there are many reasons why a child stops attending a school. It could be because the parent chooses to home educate their child., the local authority must investigate the case and ensure the child is receiving suitable education.

4. Why Children go missing?

Children and young people run away for a variety of reasons, but whatever the reason, running away is often a sign that something is wrong in the child's or young person's life and a response must be made quickly.

In order to conduct a thorough assessment, it is important to ask the child' or young person the reason why they have run away, as this will inform decisions about the appropriate service intervention or response.

Some of the reasons children and young people may run away are:

Push factors

- Problems at home – ranging from arguments with parents to long-term abuse or maltreatment.
- Family break-up – young people drawn into their parents' conflicts are less likely to do well at school and more likely to truant or to run away from home.
- Mental health problems – a disproportionate number of young people who run away from home have mental health problem.
- Bullying – children who are being severely bullied are more likely to run away from school and home or care.
- Teenage pregnancy – some young women run away or are forced to leave home because they become pregnant (or fear that they may be pregnant). They may also be in denial about their pregnancy, meaning that they are not getting the advice they need about pregnancy options. There is also a greater risk of pregnancy when girls run away, and those working with them will need to ensure they have rapid access to confidential contraception and sexual health services to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

Pull factors

- Children may run to be near friends or family – especially when a young person is in care and there are problems in contact arrangements with family and friends.
- Grooming for potential sexual exploitation or child trafficking – young people may run away or go missing following grooming by adults who will seek to exploit them.

5. Children at Risk – Prevention & Planning

It is the responsibility of all agencies to ensure they have risk assessments processes in place that assist staff in considering the likelihood of:

- A child or young person they are working with going missing and
- Being at significant risk if actually becoming missing.

CHILDREN WHO GO MISSING FROM HOME

Children living in the community are often well known to Accident & Emergency Services, Schools and other Education Establishments or Early Help and Prevention including the Youth Service. Where a staff member has concerns that a child may go missing, the level of concern and support plan for the child should be considered.

TRAFFICKING AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Some of the children who local authorities look after may be unaccompanied asylum seeking children or other migrant children, and some of this group may have been trafficked into the UK and may remain under the influence of their traffickers even while they are looked after. Trafficked children are at high risk of going missing, with most going missing within one week of becoming looked after and many within 48 hours. Unaccompanied migrant or asylum seeking child who goes missing immediately after becoming looked after should be treated as children who may be victims of trafficking.

The assessment of need to inform the care plan will be particularly critical in these circumstances and should be done immediately as the window for intervention is very narrow. The assessment must seek to establish:

- relevant details about the child's background before they came to the UK;

- an understanding of the reasons why the child came to the UK; and
- an analysis of the child's vulnerability to remaining under the influence of traffickers.

Many children, who have been trafficked, will be exploited for sexual purposes and the link to sexual exploitation should be addressed in line with the BSCB Protocol for safeguarding children and young people at risk of or experiencing sexual exploitation.

Where it is suspected that a child has been trafficked, they should be referred by the local authority into the UK's victim identification framework, the Home Office.

For further guidance of trafficked children see The Trafficked Children Toolkit, developed by the London Safeguarding Children Board.

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Research shows that children looked after by the Local Authority are over-represented in the cohort of children who go missing.

Prior to each placement of a looked after child, Children's Social Care staff (placing Social Workers, Residential Workers and Foster Carers), will consider the risks of the child absencing him/herself and record this information in the Placement Plan. Any decision to place a child at distance should be based on an assessment of the child's needs including their need to be effectively safeguarded. Evidence suggests that distance from home, family and friends are a key factor for looked after children running away.

Where there is concern that a child may go missing from Care or home, Appendix 1, the Child Risk Assessment record should be completed. The following issue should be considered:

- Consideration of any external influences which may result in a child's removal without consent (*See also London Safeguarding Trafficked Children Guidance 2011*)

It should be explained to the child what actions will be taken if he/she absents him/herself without permission.

In addition, for care leavers, pathway plans will have Appendix 1 completed and referenced, where a young person may be vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking or going missing.

Information Sharing Form

Where there is a high risk of a child going missing, Residential unit Staff/Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) and Bexley Foster Carers must complete Appendix 2 (Information sharing form) This form should always be provided to the Police at the time of reporting a Looked After Child missing.

SIGNIFICANCE OF CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME & CARE

There is an expectation that parents/ guardians will report their child/ young person is missing. Failure to do so may be raised as a child protection issue and the London Child Protection Procedures must be followed.

In responding to and managing an individual child/ young person's absence from home/Care, agencies should be alert to the potential significance of repeat missing episodes by a child. Often children who repeatedly go missing are viewed as 'a problem' and insufficient consideration is given to the reason why they keep absenting themselves.

THE LOCAL AUTHORITY

Local authorities must ensure that incidents are appropriately risk assessed, and record all incidents of looked after children who are absent without authorisation. All incidents of missing or absence that are reported to the police must also be collected and submitted by the local authority to the Department for Education as part of the annual SSSA903 data collection.

6. Responding to Children Missing from Home

When a young person goes missing from home the police should be informed by the parents or those with a parental responsibility. It is expected that they should have made all appropriate enquiries to locate the child before reporting them to the police as long as it is safe to do so.

Category of Absence

Proper consideration needs to be given to whether the child's circumstances are an '**unauthorised absence**', or whether he/she is '**missing**'.

The agency first alerted to the child's absence should (together with the child's parents, if the child lives at home), decide whether the child is having an '**unauthorised absence**', or whether he/she is '**missing**'. In order to inform this judgement the agency should (together with the child's parents, as appropriate), attempt to locate the child and encourage him/her to return as quickly and safely as possible, ensuring he/she is treated positively on return.

The Missing Child Risk Assessment Record

When an agency becomes aware that a child is missing they should complete the Missing Child Risk Assessment Record in *Appendix 1*.

Practitioners should use their professional judgement when carrying out the risk assessment and should take into consideration any factors, which might have a bearing on the level of risk to the child or to others.

Notifying the Police

The Police should be notified as soon as possible, together with the information from the completed Missing Child Risk Assessment. The Police will conduct an investigation into all reports of 'missing' children.

Information to be Made Available

When reporting a missing child to Police (or other agencies, as appropriate), the person making the referral will complete and provide to the Police the Information Sharing Form in *Appendix 2*.

Working with the Police

Police are the lead agency for the investigation of missing children.

Appropriate application of the risk assessment process by other agencies should allow the Police to be confident that all children reported to them as '**missing**' fit the agreed criteria. Referring professionals should supply the Police with a copy of the Missing Child Risk Assessment Record.

Relevant agencies must provide sufficient information to the Police to enable all the risk factors to be considered. Following this a full investigation should be conducted by the Police.

Until such time as a child is no longer missing, regular liaison and communication should take place between the Police and referring/involved agencies.

The Police will want to search the address at which the missing child was last seen, this should be negotiated so as to cause minimum disruption to the child's family home.

If the Police or other referring agency additionally believes that the circumstances surrounding the child's going missing put the child at risk of significant harm, then they should discuss these concerns with Children's Social Care. Such situations might include:

- If the parents appear to show a lack of concern or inappropriately failed to report their child missing.
- Where a child under five years has a missing from home episode, Police and other practitioners should consider whether the level of supervision afforded to the child is adequate.
- Where a child under ten years has a missing from home episode and it is suspected that parental issues (eg substance abuse, domestic violence) may have been a factor
- Repeated (more than three within 28 days) missing from home episodes, especially where there appears to be a lack of appropriate parental response
- Where a child or young person is vulnerable (e.g. has a learning disability, physical disability, history of self-harm, has a medical condition that makes them vulnerable)

- Where a child runs away to be at an address or with adults who give cause for concern
- Where there are concerns around possible sexual exploitation

Children Missing over 24 hours

Where a child or young person is missing for more than 24 hours a strategy discussion should be held as soon as possible involving Children's Social Care, Thriving Families Service (Service undertaking the Return Home Interviews for Children missing from home) and the police. In cases where a child has been missing more than once Children's Social Care will initiate a single assessment.

Children for whom there is a Child Protection Plan who go Missing

Children who have a Child Protection Plan or who are subject to a Section 47 enquiry, need additional action to that required for other children. This includes:

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- Informing the Children's Social Care Quality Assurance Unit and the Designated Nurse for safeguarding Children who will notify local health agencies.
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- Ensuring that a Strategy discussion is arranged – as soon as practicable and in any event within 7 days, the social worker should arrange a strategy discussion if the child is still missing. Representatives from both the Police Missing Persons Unit and Child Abuse Investigation Team should attend the strategy discussion, as well as other practitioners involved with the child including the Thriving Families Service (undertaking the return home interview).
- Where a child with a Protection Plan has gone missing with/without their family, Children's Social Care must implement the London Notification of Missing Children/Persons Procedure attached as *Appendix 4*.

Children subject to a CP Plan and have been removed from the U.K

Communication

For children in the community and known to local services, the agencies involved will need to decide who should be told.

The child's school should always be informed, they may have valuable information which would assist in establishing his/her whereabouts. Any such information should be passed immediately to the Police.

Informing the Press

For a child who is missing from home, the parents and the police will liaise with the child's parents about informing the press.

Recording

If a child's absence continues beyond a few hours and falls within this Procedure, all agencies should note their discussions, decisions, actions taken and messages received/given; and the child's Social Worker (or other agreed key worker/lead professional) should keep a single agreed record on the child's file.

Longer Absences - Strategy discussions and keeping Cases Open

Where a child remains missing, the police and Children's Social Care should arrange review planning discussions at least every seven days and as appropriate for the case until the child is returned home. The Division Chief Inspector and Assistant Director for Children's Social Care should be kept informed of progress.

Whenever a child is missing for more than 28 days, a Strategy discussion should be held, arranged by Children's Social Care and the Police invited (if the child has a Child Protection Plan, then officers from the Missing Persons Unit and the Child Abuse Investigation Unit or if not then the Missing Persons Unit only). All agencies who attend/are invited to this meeting are responsible for ensuring that there is a clear statement of the actions being taken in respect of the child's absence and should satisfy themselves that all that should be done is being done.

For children known to Children's Social Care, whilst the child remains absent, his/her case should be identified as 'open' on the Children's Social care client database. It is recommended that a senior manager in Children's Social care or equivalent in responsible partner agencies, should formally review all cases where children have been absent for six months or more and should satisfy him/herself on the actions taken to recover the child.

All Police missing person's files will remain 'live' until the child is located and returned to their home, or whose circumstances are considered to be appropriate.

THE POLICE

The police will prioritise all incidents of missing children as medium or high risk. Where a child is recorded as being absent, the details will be recorded by the police, who will also agree review times and any on-going actions with person reporting. (This process is currently under review by the MPS for ratification). Where there has been a report to the police of a child or young person missing twice in the last month and there are no child welfare or child protection concerns the police will now use the ABSENT category, there may be on-going actions agreed by the police with the referrer for any absent reports. Where a child is missing for 24 hours or there are child protection or welfare considerations the report is a missing person report.

High Risk:

"High Risk" is a risk that is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the subject is in danger through their own vulnerability; or may have been the victim of a serious crime; or the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger.

This category requires the immediate deployment of police resources.

ACPO guidance makes clear that a member of the senior management team or similar command level must be involved in the examination of initial enquiry lines and approval of appropriate staffing levels. Such cases should lead to the appointment of an Investigating Officer and possibly a Senior Investigating Officer and a Police Search Advisor (PoISA). There should be a press/media strategy and/or close contact with outside agencies. Family support should be put in place. The UK Missing Persons Bureau should be notified of the case immediately. CEOP and Children's Services should also be notified.

Medium Risk:

In this case the risk posed is likely to place the subject in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others, however this is the minimum level of risk for children and young people under the age of 18 years. This category requires an active and measured response by police and other agencies in order to trace the missing person and support the person reporting. This will involve a proactive investigation and search in accordance with the circumstances to locate the missing child as soon as possible.

7. Responding to Children Missing from Care

Where a child is absent without permission from a residential unit/ IFA or Bexley foster home all reasonable and practical steps should be taken to secure the safe and speedy return of the child. The residential unit Manager/ IFA or Bexley Foster Carer should decide whether the child is missing or if it is an unauthorised absence and complete the Missing Child Risk Assessment (Appendix 1). This form should be sent to the police and the child/young person reported missing.

Bexley Foster Carers should seek advice from their supervising social worker or EDT (Emergency Duty team) if out of hours. They should agree to report the child/young person as missing to the Police and supply them with Appendix 1.

The Missing Child Risk Assessment Record

Practitioners should use their professional judgement when carrying out the risk assessment and should take into consideration any factors, which might have a bearing on the level of risk to the child or to others.

The Risk Assessment is an aid to action, and to information sharing and recording:

Aid to action: As an action tool the purpose of the Risk Assessment is to inform single and multi-agency decision-making and planning to locate a '**missing**' child. The Risk Assessment provides an indication of:

- The urgency of inquiries
- Areas of inquiry e.g. where drugs are available or locations and networks that certain adults frequent, country of origin or country children are trafficked on to etc

Aid for information sharing and recording: At the time that a child goes '**missing**' the completed Risk Assessment should be shared with all agencies working with the child and kept on the child's file in each agency. In cases where new information becomes available and/or the child remains absent for a protracted period, the risks should be re-assessed led by the agency which has current or most recent responsibility for the child. The new risk assessment should be shared with the agencies and kept on the child's file in each agency. The most recently completed Risk Assessment should remain on the child's file in all agencies working with the child.

Unauthorised Absence

Where, initially, the assessment indicates that the child's circumstances are an '**unauthorised absence**', they should take all reasonable and practical steps, which a good parent would take, to secure the safe and speedy return of the child e.g. visiting addresses where the child may be or telephoning around known friends.

Children who fall within the category of '**unauthorised absence**' must be the subject of continuous risk assessment whilst they remain absent. During their absence circumstances may change and the Residential Unit Staff/Foster Carer and Children's Social Care need to be in a position to respond accordingly. The child's parents must be kept informed.

Any unauthorised absence in excess of 48 hours should be reported as missing and the missing child procedures should be followed.

If there are thought to be specific issues of safety or public order difficulties involved in returning the child, then action should be agreed between the Police, the Residential Unit Staff/Foster Carer and Children's Social Care. (If the Local Authority think they know where a looked after child is, they should actively consider approaching the courts for a Recovery Order). These circumstances would not necessarily mean the child should be categorised as '**missing**'.

Missing Children from Care

Where a child is deemed 'missing' it is essential to act promptly so that professionals can work together in order to locate the child as quickly as possible.

The Foster Carer/s or the manager on duty in the residential unit should inform the local Police and report the child as missing. In addition to the Risk Assessment Form, the Information Sharing Form (Appendix 2) should be shared with the Police.

The Police will want to search the address at which the missing child was last seen, this should be negotiated so as to cause minimum disruption to the residential unit/ foster home.

For children placed in a residential unit or with an Independent Foster Carer, the manager on duty in the residential unit or Foster Carer should also inform the Child's Social Worker or out of hours the Emergency Duty Team. Bexley Foster Carers should inform their Supervising Social Worker and the child's Social Worker. Out of hours the Fostering Out-of hours Duty Service should be contacted.

The parents and any other person with parental responsibility should be contacted, unless it is not reasonably practicable or to do so would be inconsistent with the child's welfare.

The child's Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) should also be informed so that missing episodes can be considered at the child's Looked After Children (LAC) Review meetings.

Working with the Police

Police are the lead agency for the investigation of missing children. Where the child is a Looked After Child then Children's Social Care are responsible for children in their care at all times and this responsibility is not absolved when a child is reported missing to the Police.

Children's social care should provide relevant information about the missing child to the police to enable all the risk factors to be considered.

Missing Children placed in Bexley by another authority

If a child from another Local Authority is placed in Bexley this Protocol guidance should be implemented in agreement with the child's Social Worker from the placing authority and with regular communication with them.

Monitoring

Managers of children's residential units and Foster Carers are expected to maintain records of each occasion when a Looked After Child is identified as '**missing**' or having taken '**unauthorised absence**'. These records should be made available for inspection under the Children Act 1989. Foster Carers should record similar information. Appendix 3, Monitoring Form should always be completed.

Communication

Should a child's absence continue, the Residential Unit Manager should make arrangements to inform all children and staff within the unit. Foster carers should talk to any other foster children they may have placed with them.

The child's school should always be informed, they may have valuable information which would assist in establishing his/her whereabouts. Any such information should be passed immediately to the Police.

Informing the Press

For a Looked After Child who is missing a decision to publicise by press and/or television will be made by the Police in consultation with Children's Social Care and approved by CSC Deputy Director. This may be arranged at a local level, by the Borough Commander (or nominee).

Recording

All agencies should note their discussions, decisions, actions taken and messages received/given; and the child's Social Worker should keep a single agreed record on the child's file. Residential Unit Staff and Foster Carers should record the information in the daily log/diary, with a duplicate entry for the child's file (e.g. photocopies).

Longer Absences - Strategy discussions and keeping Cases Open

Where a child is missing more than seven days the police and Children's Social Care should arrange review planning discussions every seven days until the child is returned home, to include the police and health (LAC Nurse). The Division Chief Inspector and Assistant Director for Children's Social Care should be kept informed of progress.

Whenever a child is missing for more than 28 days, a Strategy discussion should be held, arranged by Children's Social Care and the Police invited (if the child has a Child Protection Plan, then officers from the Missing Persons Unit and the Child Abuse Investigation Unit or if not then the Missing Persons Unit only). All agencies who attend/are invited to this meeting are responsible for ensuring that there is a clear statement of the actions being taken in respect of the child's absence and should satisfy themselves that all that should be done is being done.

A senior manager in Children's Social care or equivalent in responsible partner agencies, should formally review all cases where children have been absent for six months or more and should satisfy him/herself on the actions taken to recover the child.

All Police missing person's files will remain 'live' until the child is located and returned to their home, or whose circumstances are considered to be appropriate.

8. Responding to Children Missing from Education

The monthly **Children Missing from Education Panel** considers case notified by schools and kept on the CME Register by the local authority.

Panel members are:

Education Officer Youth Offending Team
Senior Social Worker Children's Social Care Team
Exclusions Officer
Head of Virtual School for LAC
Head of Pathways Short Stay School
Senior Education Welfare Officer
Interim Deputy Director of Schools
Youth Offending Team Manager (YOT)
Interim Head of Inclusion
Service Manager Statutory Assessment
Head of School Admissions Team
Head of Alternative Provision and Medical Needs Unit , PSSS
Children Missing Education Support Officer

Role of the Panel

- To ensure that children and young people in need of an educational place are referred to the CME Panel if they have been out of education for more than 4 weeks.
- To discuss any child who is living in Bexley Borough but who is not receiving a suitable education and is therefore on the CME Register.
- To identify a keyworker who will be responsible for the actions agreed at CME Panel and for providing updates and feedback to CME Panel.
- To consider the educational needs for children missing education and to agree a support/care plan that will lead to identifying a school place or alternative provision.
- To monitor the child or young person whose cases may also be being discussed at Fair Access Panels, Complex Case Panel, Statutory Assessment Panel depending on the circumstances of the child.

- To agree a child or young person can be removed from the CME Register when it is clear they are receiving a suitable education or they have moved out of Bexley and the new area have been informed and confirmed the presence of the child in their area.

The Head of Inclusion sits on the Missing Operational Group of the BSCB, and cross references case work with children missing from home or care.

9. Locating the Child and their Return

Planning for when the Child is Located and their Return

If a child is '*missing*' the Police and parents, Social Worker, Residential Unit Staff/Foster Carer and Police should commence contingency planning for when the child is located. Plans should include:

- Will the child return to the placement/home address or are they safe in the location where they are found?
- If the child is to return, how will s/he be conveyed to their placement/home address?
- Do the Police wish to interview the child where they are located or after they have returned their placement/home address?
- Who will be an appropriate 'independent person' to talk to the child when s/he is located/ returned?

Normally the Residential Unit Staff/Foster Carer or Social Worker/Emergency Duty Team out of hours will make arrangements for the transportation of a child to his/her placement/home address.

There will be occasions when a child is found in a location that may be considered unsuitable, but where there would be no legal grounds for taking them into police protection or where to do so would be unsustainable because of the child unwillingness to co-operate. In these cases police and the accountable manager from Children's Social Care will need to liaise to discuss what steps may be necessary in order to safeguard the child's welfare.

Until the child is returned home, further reviews of the missing episode should take place every seven days. Within a maximum of 28 days, the case should be jointly reviewed by the Police and Children's Social Care. The Divisional Chief Inspector and the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care must be kept informed of progress.

Interviews

Police 'Safe and Well' checks: the Police will interview all children when they return. The interview consists of a simple series of questions about where the child was whilst missing, where they went, what they did, who they were with etc. If the child makes an allegation of crime that occurred whilst they were missing or that contributed to him/her running away, the Police will record this allegation and take appropriate action.

Independent interview: children should be informed that they would be expected to talk about their absence to someone independent of their parents/carers on their return. Providing children with an opportunity to talk is key to safeguarding them. The interview and the actions that following from it

The child must receive the interview with the independent person within 72 hours of being located or returning from absence and Appendix 4 must be completed.

Independent Interviews for Children Missing from Care

For Looked After Children – Children’s Social Care will ensure the interview takes place. The Manager for the social work team will agree who will carry out the interview. This cannot be the allocated social worker or Independent Reviewing Officer. For children placed outside of Bexley the independent interview will be arranged working closely with the host authority.

When a looked after child is located, Children’s Social Care will review whether the child’s placement remains appropriate in discussion with the child and carers where appropriate. The child’s placement plan will be kept up to date and include a strategy to reduce the pressure on the child to run away.

Independent Interviews for Children missing from Home

For children living in the community, the Police and Local Authority have responsibility for ensuring that an opportunity for an independent interview is provided. This is provided by the Early Help and Prevention Services. The child should be asked who they wish to speak to.

After the interview, it is important to put in place any support and preventative measures to avoid a repeated missing episode. Agencies who may be able to provide support are listed in Appendix 6.

Where a child has gone missing more than once, the Multi Agency Support Hub (MASH) will assess the circumstances and refer to Children’s Social Care. The Thriving Families Service will undertake the return home interview and if appropriate in partnership with another professional actively working with the child including the Police or Youth Offending Worker

The Multi Agency Support Hub (MASH) or allocated Social Worker within Children’s Social Care will notify the Thriving Families service when the child goes missing and when they return home to enable the return home interview to be undertaken.

Return home interview documentation will be provided to the allocated social worker within Children’s Social Care immediately after the interview has been completed and within 24 hours. Where there are child protection concerns these will immediately be communicated with the appropriate social worker.

Children Missing from Education

Links between local authority education department and schools will be made by the local authority. Where there are children missing education these will be reviewed and managed by Bexley Education Representative in the MASH

service or another delegated appropriate educational representative. There is an onus on education representative for missing children to ensure that a CAF is instigated; referral to Thriving Families is in place or child protection procedures are followed,

Missing Children Panel

Children who have gone missing more than once will be considered for review at the Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) Panel or the Missing Panel. The role of the panel will primarily be a strategic one and will help identify trends and patterns of missing children in Bexley, for example whether children are going missing in a particular part of the borough.

Child Abduction Warning Notices (Harbourers warnings)

Where young people under the age of 16 years (under 18 if in local authority care) place themselves at risk of significant harm due to their associations and the forming of inappropriate relationships, sometimes this is with individuals who are much older than themselves, Child Abduction Warning Notices can be issued by the Police. The Warning Notices are issued to suspects / associates who are believed to place the subject at risk of offences being committed against them under, in particular, the following legislation:

- If child is under 16 years of age – Sec 2. Child Abduction Act 1984
- If child is under 18 years AND in local authority care under Sec 31. Children Act 1989 – Sec 49. Children Act 1989.

There is no statutory or other legislative provision dealing specifically with the issue of Child Abduction Warning Notices. Breach of a Notice is NOT a criminal offence.

Children under 16 who are not in local authority care

To issue a Warning Notice in these circumstances a complainant statement from one of the parents (whoever has full parental responsibility) is required. If parental responsibility is shared, just one statement is needed.

Children under 18 who are in local authority care under sec 31. Children Act 1989

The local authority will have full parental responsibility for the child. The notice in this case will be valid until the child is 18yrs or leaves local authority care, which ever comes first.

In cases of an interim care order parental responsibility can be shared. In such cases it must be verified where the majority of responsibility lies and a statement taken from the majority holder. If this is the local authority then the statement can be obtained from the subject's designated social worker.

Procedure to be adopted

The issue of a Warning Notice should be viewed as a Safeguarding measure for the child concerned and also as active case building in the first stage of a potential prosecution for an offence under the above legislation (and/or any other relevant legislation such as the Sexual Offences Act 2003) or to support applications such as

Sexual Offender Prevention Order [SOPO] –Sec 104 Sexual Offences Act 2003.

Risk of Sexual Harm Order [ROSHO] –Sec 123 Sexual Offences Act 2003.

10. Information Sharing

Each Local Authority should have a Lead Person with responsibility for Missing Children, in Bexley this is the Head of Service for Placements and Specialist Services. The Multi Agency Support Hub (MASH) must be informed of all children who go missing for 24 hours or more and will record the details on the Children's Social Care client database, Liquid Logic. For looked after children the social worker for the child must be notified who will record the information on Liquid Logic

Children's residential units should supply monthly information to the LB Bexley and Ofsted, HM Inspectorate about children who have gone missing.

Partner agencies should receive information from each other on the basis of their need to know and take action to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child.

There should be regular inter-agency meetings to monitor the implementation of this Procedure and exchange information. There should be regular reports on children who go missing to the senior management, elected members, trustees and/or governors of all partner agencies.

11. Reports to Bexley Safeguarding Children Board

In accordance with the statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care, from January 2014, the Bexley Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB) will scrutinise regular reports from the local authority analysing data on children missing from home and care. Data on missing children from home and care will be included in the BSCB quarterly dataset.

Appendix 1

Missing Child Risk Assessment Record

This form is specifically designed for information needed when a CYP goes missing. However, parts of it can be completed in advance and updated intermittently.

Date _____

Name of child _____

Address _____

Factor	Details and Explanation
Age (please tick) 10 yrs old or younger 11 to 14 years of age 15 to 18 years of age	(eg behave younger or look older than their age)
Has a Child Protection Plan	
Needs essential medication or treatment not readily available to them e.g. asthma inhaler, insulin etc	
May not have the physical ability to interact safely with others or in an unknown environment e.g. visually impaired, history of abuse or inappropriate adult/stranger relationships, Downs syndrome etc	
Lacks reasonable awareness of risks associated with running away, inc. learning disability	
Known to associate with adults or children who present a risk of harm e.g. sex offenders, offenders against children, drug users etc	
Mental illness or psychological disorder which may increase risk of harm to themselves or others	
Drugs and/or alcohol dependency	
Suspicion of abduction	

Factor	Details and Explanation
Suicide or self-harm risk	
Victim of violent and/or racial incident or confrontation immediately prior to disappearance	
Concerns about state of mind e.g. unusual behaviour prior to disappearance or disappeared with no prior indication, or seemed troubled etc	
Inclement weather conditions where exposure would seriously increase risk to health	
Family/relationship problems or recent history of family conflict/abuse	
Employment problems	
Financial problems	
School or college problems	
Ongoing victim of bullying, harassment or exploitation e.g. racial, sexual etc	
Previously disappeared and suffered or was exposed to harm whilst missing	
Victim or potential victim of forced marriage, FGM or trafficking incl for sexual exploitation	
View of Parents on their child's needs and actions required	

Summary of risk

(Summarise the risks in a couple of sentences)

Summary of actions taken

(Include attempts to talk to child on mobile phone and to contact friends and family)

Review date for Actions Decided

Completed by (FULL NAME)

Signature

This Risk Assessment is an aid to action and for information sharing and recording with appropriate agencies: GP/LAC Nurse/School/Police/Supervising Social Worker/Thriving Families Key Worker.

Aid to action: As an action tool the purpose of the Risk Assessment is to inform single- and multi-agency decision-making and planning to locate a 'missing' child. The Risk Assessment provides an indication of:

- The urgency of inquiries
- Areas of inquiry e.g. where drugs are available or that certain adults frequent, country of origin or country children are trafficked on to etc
- Type of specialist knowledge that might be needed
- The supervision that may be required
- Agencies who may be first alerted e.g. local Accident & Emergency services

Aid for information sharing and recording: At the time that a child goes '*missing*' the completed Risk Assessment should be shared with all agencies working with the child and kept on the child's file in each agency. In cases where new information becomes available and/or the child remains absent for a protracted period, the risks should be re-assessed, shared with the agencies and kept on the child's file in each agency. The most recently completed Risk Assessment should remain on the child's file in all agencies working with the child.

Appendix 2

Information Sharing Form

Please use this form for general information on each child in your care. If the information is to be shared with other agencies because the child has gone missing, you will need to give additional details on Page 3.

Contact Details for the CYP	
Address where child currently resides (family home, Residential Unit, Foster Carer):	
Residential Unit/ Foster Carer contact tel. nos	Contact Name:
Child's Full Name	Next of Kin relationship, name and address
Placing Authority	Social Worker and contact number
Doctor	Child's mobile number
Dentist	Child's NI number
Occupation/School/College	Occupation/School/College contact number
Numbers of Bank Cards, Passport, Oyster cards etc	
Names, addresses and contact numbers of friends	

--

Description of the Child	
Ethnic origin & Ethnic appearance	D.o.b. Age
Height and Build	Gender
Physical/psychological disabilities Recent behaviour	
Medical conditions & medication required e.g. asthma inhaler, insulin etc	
Appearance including, eye colour, hair, glasses, tattoos, piercings, facial hair etc	
Family history (brief details)	

A recent photograph

--

Please complete this page if you are using this form for a child who has gone missing

Information about friends and relatives etc visited before they went missing			
Date	Time	Name/Phone number & address	Result of enquiries

Details of going missing	
Time child was last seen	
With whom	
What clothes were they wearing?	
Recent behaviour	
Your assessment of the risk: low/medium/high:	
The basis for your risk classification	

Appendix 3

Residential/Independent Fostering Agency Monitoring Form

Record	Detail of Information or where information is held
Child's name, DOB and recent photo	
Date and time Child was reported missing or absent	
Completed Missing Risk Assessment	
Category of Absence missing/unauthorised	
Date Police informed/reason why if not informed	
Date Social Worker information/action taken by Social Worker	
Date and time child/young person returned	
Outcome of the Independent Interview on their return	

Appendix 4

Children Missing from Care And Home: Return Questionnaire

Introduction

Children who go missing may sometimes be running from something which places them at risk and may run into or to, situations which also place them at risk.

Children may be to talk about these issues, however professionals need to find out why the child goes missing in order to safeguard them.

Who Interviews the Child

Professionals must liaise to ensure that children are not interviewed more than is absolutely necessary about the same thing. The Police will interview all children when they return. In addition all children should be offered the opportunity to talk to an independent person whom they trust.

According to the *Young Runaways Report (SEU, 2002)* the professionals most closely involved with the child are often frustrated by the child's behaviour which means that children are likely to receive a negative response when they return. This response can stop the child talking about their experience and exacerbate the situation rather than resolve it for the child.

Return Home Interviews (RHI) for children missing from home are undertaken by an independent person. Thriving Families (Early Help and Prevention) Service undertakes the return home interview (RHI) for children missing from home. The independent person could be a Thriving Families Family Key worker, Youth Worker or Thriving Families support worker. The child should be asked who they wish to speak to. Where more appropriate the independent person could be a teacher, school nurse, Youth Offending Team Worker or a voluntary sector practitioner. The Thriving Families Service will identify the most appropriate worker to undertake this interview with the young person.

The following points need to be considered when interviewing a missing person:

- Try to determine the reason why the person went missing and in particular, if they have been subject to violence, abuse, exploitation or bullying.
- Establish whether they have been a victim of crime before or while missing.
- Establish if they have been committing Crime whilst missing
- Discover where and by whom they have been harboured (obtain pars if possible)
- Obtain information which may lead to their early discovery should they go missing again.
- Put in place any support and preventative measures to avoid such a recurrence. (consider CAMHS, YOT, Children's Social Care, Early Help and Prevention Services..)

Areas to be Covered

The fullness of the interview will depend on the circumstances and the degree of risk to the child.

1. Is the child happy where they are living, or are they worried/upset about anything?

2. Where was the child and who were they with?

<p>3. What did the child do whilst they were missing?</p>
<p>4. Did the child feel safe and looked after?</p>
<p>5. What happened when the child got home?</p>
<p>6. What does the child want to have happen now – short term/long term?</p>
<p>7. Parents/carers view of the incident?</p>
<p>8. The interviewer should provide the child with information about how they can access further or ongoing support services. Record the information here:</p>

Tick to confirm CAF form completed

Interviewer Name	Designation	Date

NB: The interviewer must ensure that other professionals who are involved with the child/ young person are copied into this information.

Appendix 5

London Notification of Children with Child Protection Plans and Vulnerable Persons going Missing

This note clarifies the London arrangements, in line with the *London Child Protection Procedures*, for notification of missing children and vulnerable persons.

* Sections 9.7.3 & 4 and 9.7.20 * 21 (See reverse of this sheet for extracts)

The arrangements address four areas:

- Communication medium & arrangements
- Contact person & address
- Format of notifications
- Removal of notifications

1. Communication medium & arrangements

1.1 Notification of missing children and persons should be made via email².

1.2 Every London Children's Services has a missing children/persons email address, which reads: missing@boroughname.gov.uk

2. Contact person & address

2.2 The London Child Protection Co-ordinators maintain an up-to-date list of their contact names and details (formerly the list of the custodians of the child protection register). The list can be accessed at: www.londoncpc.gov.uk

3. Format of notifications

3.1 All notifications of missing children/persons will be recorded and transmitted on the form attached as Appendix 5.

3.2 Originating authorities who want confirmation that the notification has arrived should set their email system to alert them when mail is read.

4. Removal of notifications

4.1 The details of missing children/persons should be removed from the list by the receiving authority after six months.

4.2 To assist with 4.1, administrators can use the missing children/persons email inbox to check when the notification was received.

4.3 If a child/person is still missing after six months then the notifying authority should re-notify other agencies/authorities this process 1 - 4.

² Although the email system is not totally secure, the professional judgement of the London Child Protection Co-ordinators is that in this context the need to share information quickly to protect children and vulnerable persons outweighs the need to protect sensitive data.

Circumstances for Implementing Procedure

These procedures apply if a child likely to suffer significant harm goes missing or cannot be traced. Some examples would be:

- A child who is the subject of a child protection referral or s.47 enquiry
- A child subject to a child protection plan who goes missing or is removed from her/his address outside the terms of the child protection plan
- A looked after child who leaves or is removed from placement, without this being part of the care plan
- Any child who goes missing in suspicious circumstances or about whom there are concerns – e.g. one who is subject to initial / core assessment where there are developing concerns about their safety or where there is reason to believe that the child may have fled abuse or be at acute risk of abuse or exploitation whilst away from home

These procedures also apply to adults whose whereabouts become unknown in the following circumstances:

- A pregnant woman when there are concerns about the welfare of the child following birth
- A family where there are concerns about the welfare of the child because of the presence of a person with previous convictions for an offence against children (Schedule 1 offender, Children and Young Persons Act 1933) or other person suspected of previously harming a child
- A family which goes missing in response to child protection enquiries being made or about to be made

Follow up Children's Services Action

If the strategy discussion agreed that the details of the child or family are to be circulated to other local authorities, the key worker should draft a short letter giving details of:

- The children in the family
- Other family members or significant adults
- The circumstances causing concern
- Action required if a child is found
- Details of contact arrangements for the key worker / social worker – including out of office contact
- Where possible physical descriptions of the key people and photographs, if available

The letter should be sent to the child protection manager for distribution to her/his peers nationally, who in turn should circulate within the council and local agencies.

Appendix 6

Referral to Register of Children with Child Protection Plans and Vulnerable Persons going Missing

1. Family Constellation

Relationship	Name	D.O.B.	Ethnic Origin Preferred Language

2. Reasons for Concern

(Include registration categories and legal orders)

Registration categories	Legal orders

3. Circumstances of Absence

Date Missing	Address Left	Any Comment

4. Description of Missing Child / Family Members

--

5. Who to Contact if Child / Family Found

1)	2)

Appendix 7: Useful Contacts

NSPCC

Child Trafficking Advice Centre

0808 800 5000

help@nspcc.org.uk

Missing People

Missing People is a registered charity and was formerly known as the National Missing Persons Helpline.

They offer the following services:

- Provide support and advice for families left in limbo via a national 24 hour free phone helpline 0500 700 700 for people who are missing someone.
- Runaway Helpline – 0808 800 70 70 a national, free, confidential service, for anyone who has run away from home or care, or been forced to leave home. Whether you have run away from home because of an argument, bullying, abuse or you're unhappy. Sometimes you just want to get some space. Runaway Helpline is there for you day or night.
- Message Home – a 24 hour free phone service 0800 700 740 that helps missing adults to reach advice, support and to reconnect with their family or carers via a message or three-way call.

Appendix 8: Child Sexual Exploitation – Met Police Flowchart



CSE - Multi-Agency Referral Pathway

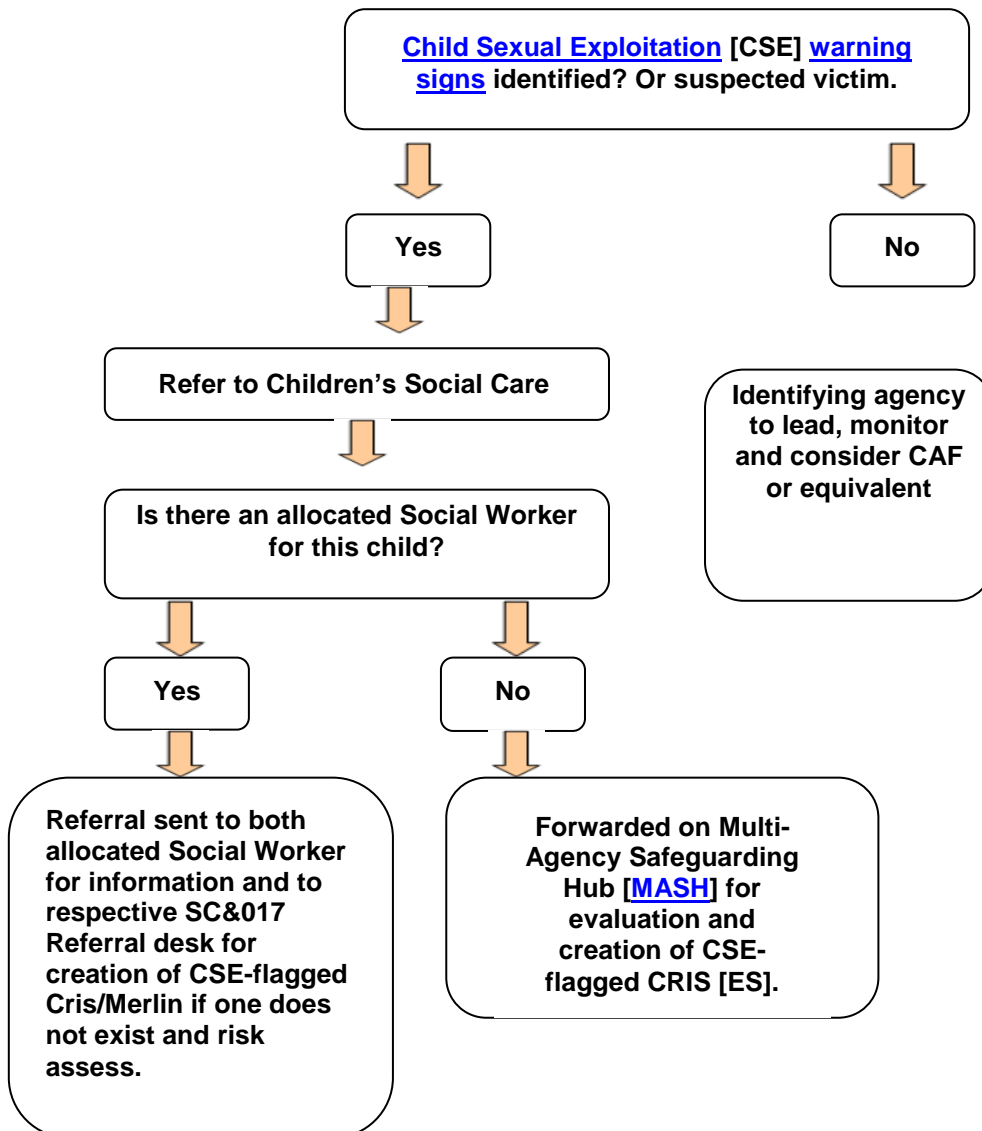
The following flowchart illustrates the pathway by which agencies such as education, health, probation and non-government organisations identify and refer cases of CSE, or suspected cases CSE.

Police Categories

Police Category 1 - A vulnerable child or young person, where there are concerns they are being targeted and groomed and where any of the CSE warning signs have been identified. However, at this stage there is no evidence of any offences. These investigations will remain with the local Borough.

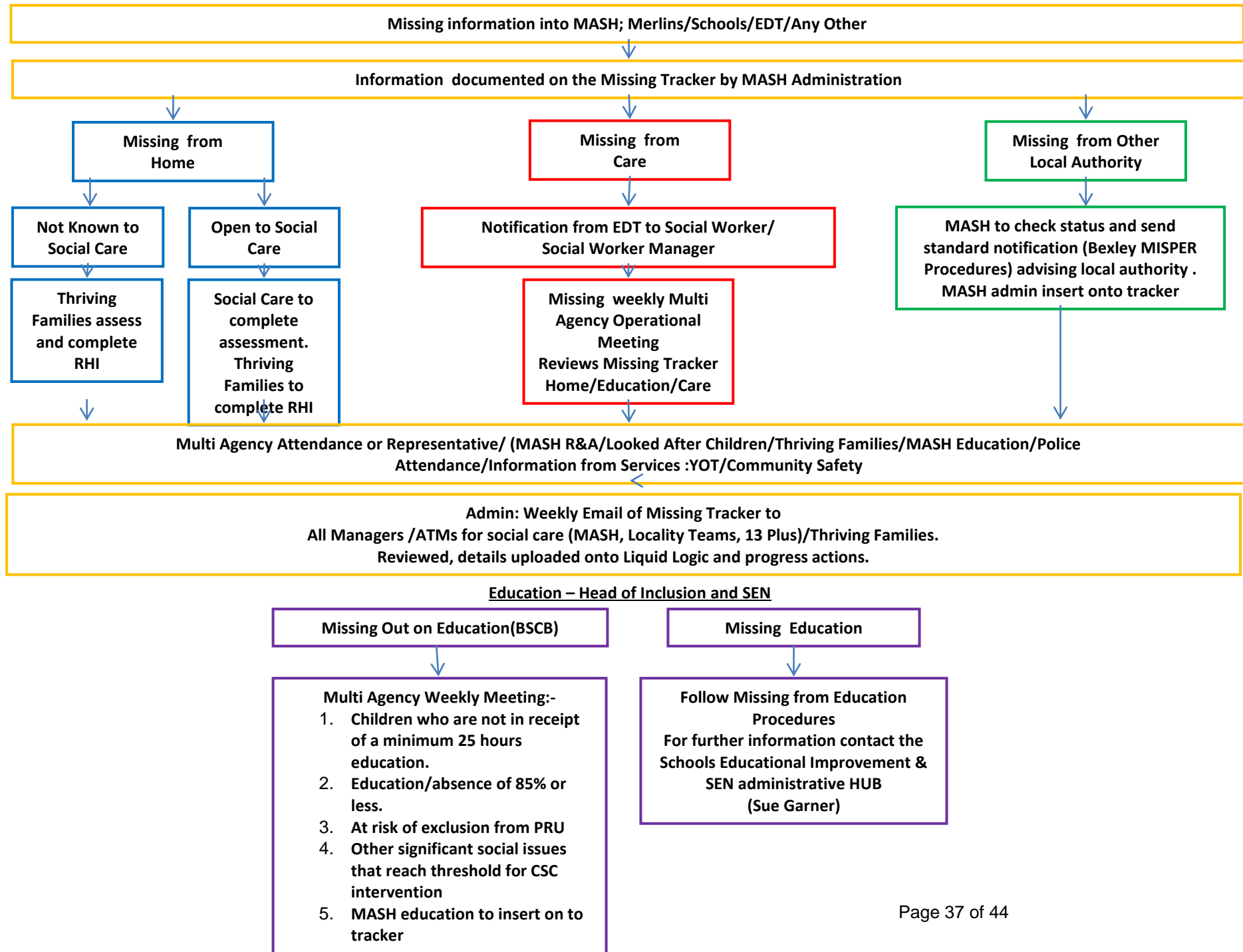
Police Category 2 - Evidence a child or young person is being targeted for opportunistic abuse through the exchange of sex for drugs, perceived affection, sense of belonging, accommodation (overnight stays) money and goods etc. This includes being sexually exploited through the use of technology without receiving any reward. IE: the exchange of indecent images on-line. The likelihood of coercions and control is significant.

Police Category 3 - A child or young person whose sexual exploitation is habitual, often self denied and where coercion / control are implicit. This is often carried out by multiple perpetrators.



SC&017 comprise of the former CAIT and SAPPHIRE teams. All referrals for CSE, suspected offences involving children should be made via the form 87A and submitted to the referral desk. The referral Desk will then evaluate the information and if required complete a crime report. This report (Cris) will then be sent to the relevent unit to deal with.

Appendix 9: Missing Children Flowchart



Appendix 10: Children Missing Education Panel Procedure – Revised July 2014

Author	Wendy Vincent
Scope	Describes the role and functioning of the Children Missing Education Panel
Responsibilities	The Deputy Director is responsible for the functioning of the panel. The Head of Inclusion is responsible for chairing the panel. Other Service Managers are requested to attend regularly.
Legislation	Education Act (1996), Children Act (1989, 2004)
Forms	none

Introduction

All Bexley Children will be supported in educational provision within their local communities wherever possible. The multidisciplinary Children Missing Education Panel (CMEP) will enable the small numbers of children who are not receiving an appropriate education to secure a school place in a timely manner.

For most children, professionals working with the child will jointly assess and agree a school placement or alternative placement within Bexley's existing provision.

Children will only be presented to CMEP for consideration and discussion when, despite the efforts of all relevant agencies, a school place has not been secured for them and they have been out of education for 4 weeks or more.

Members of the Panel

Education Officer Youth Offending Team
Senior Social Worker Children's Social Care
Team
Exclusions Officer
Head of Virtual School for LAC
Head of Pathways Short Stay School
Senior Education Welfare Officer
Interim Deputy Director of Schools
Youth Offending Team Manager (YOT)
Interim Head of Inclusion
Service Manager Statutory Assessment
Head of School Admissions Team
Head of Alternative Provision and Medical
Needs Unit , PSSS
Children Missing Education Support Officer

Role of the Panel

To ensure that children and young people in need of an educational place are referred to the CME Panel if they have been out of education for more than 4 weeks.

To discuss any child who is living in Bexley Borough but who is not receiving a suitable education and is therefore on the CME Register.

To identify a keyworker who will be responsible for the actions agreed at CME Panel and for providing updates and feedback to CME Panel.

To consider the educational needs for children missing education and to agree a support/care plan that will lead to identifying a school place or alternative provision.

To monitor the child or young person whose cases may also be being discussed at Fair Access Panels, Complex Case Panel, Statutory Assessment Panel depending on the circumstances of the child.

To agree a child or young person can be removed from the CME Register when it is clear they are receiving a suitable education or they have moved out of Bexley and the new area have been informed and confirmed the presence of the child in their area.

Preparation for CME Panel

The Panel needs sufficient information about the child in order to make informed decisions and recommendations.

This information should include, where possible:-

- Name, age, date of birth, ethnic origin, special needs and details of previous educational provision.
- Social Care status i.e CIN, CP
- Family history, structure, relevant background information
- Option already considered, tried

This information should be passed to the CME Support Officer who will complete initial investigations regarding the child. These would include where the child lives, if they had made an application for a school place, if they were on the Elective Home Education Register, if they were on a school roll and other appropriate checks.

The CME Support Officer will send a school application form to any family found to be living in Bexley but who has not applied for a school place for their child/children.

If no response is received within 4 weeks, the case will be presented to CME Panel.

Cases where there is more concern/risks will be referred to Education Welfare Service and/or Social Care Teams prior to CME Panel.

Status of the Panel

The Panel can recommend packages of learning and support and work with the relevant schools, provisions and agencies to put these in place.

Frequency of Panel Meetings

The CME Panel will meet monthly. It is agreed that all Panel members will attend or send a designate. If this is not possible, updates on cases should be sent to CME Support Officer prior to the panel meeting.

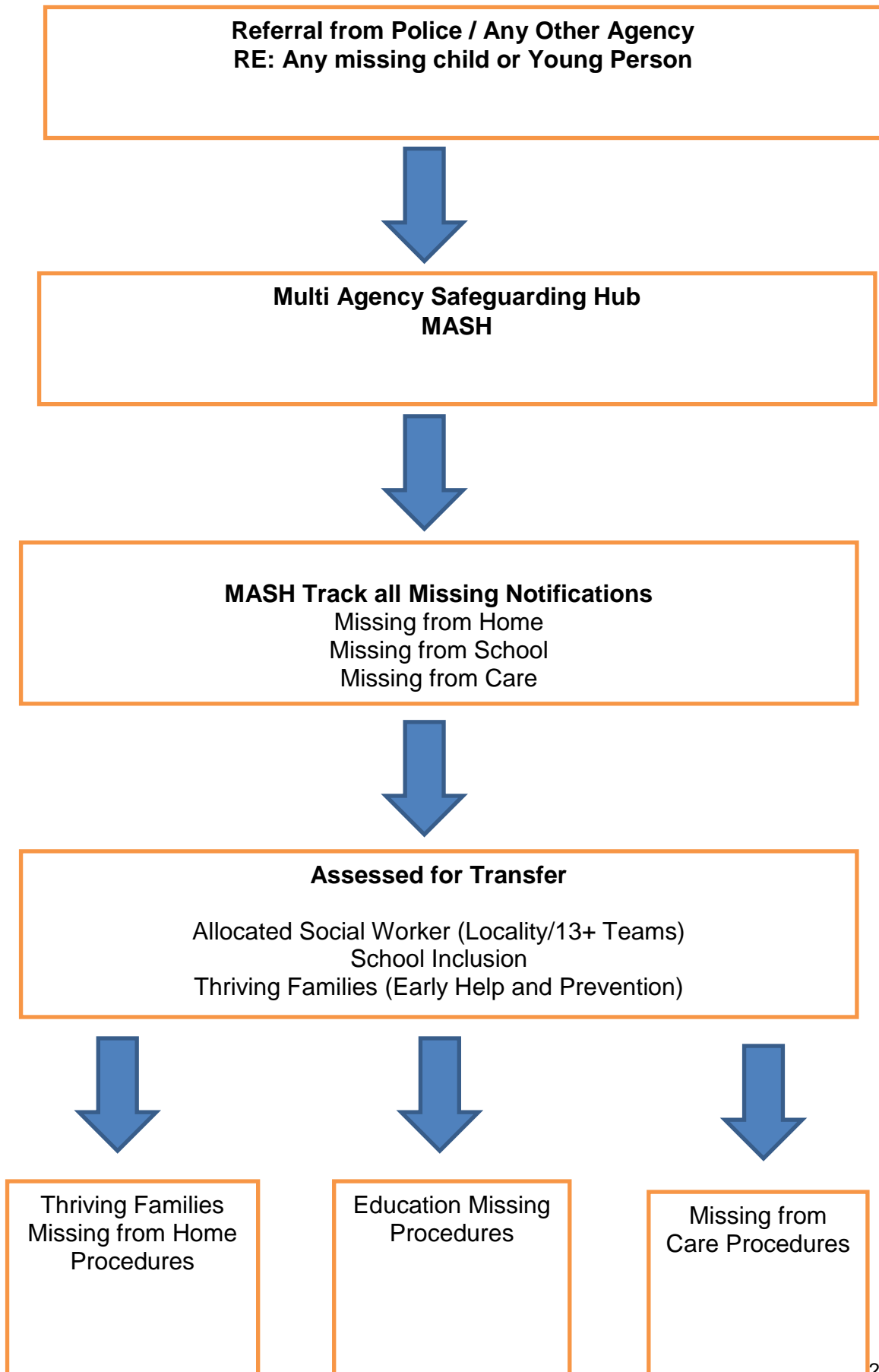
Agenda for Panel Meeting

- Attendees/Apologies received
- Minutes from last meeting
- Review Actions identified from last meeting
- Discussion and Update on all cases on CME Register by Keyworkers
- New Cases
- Any other business
- Date, time and venue of next meeting

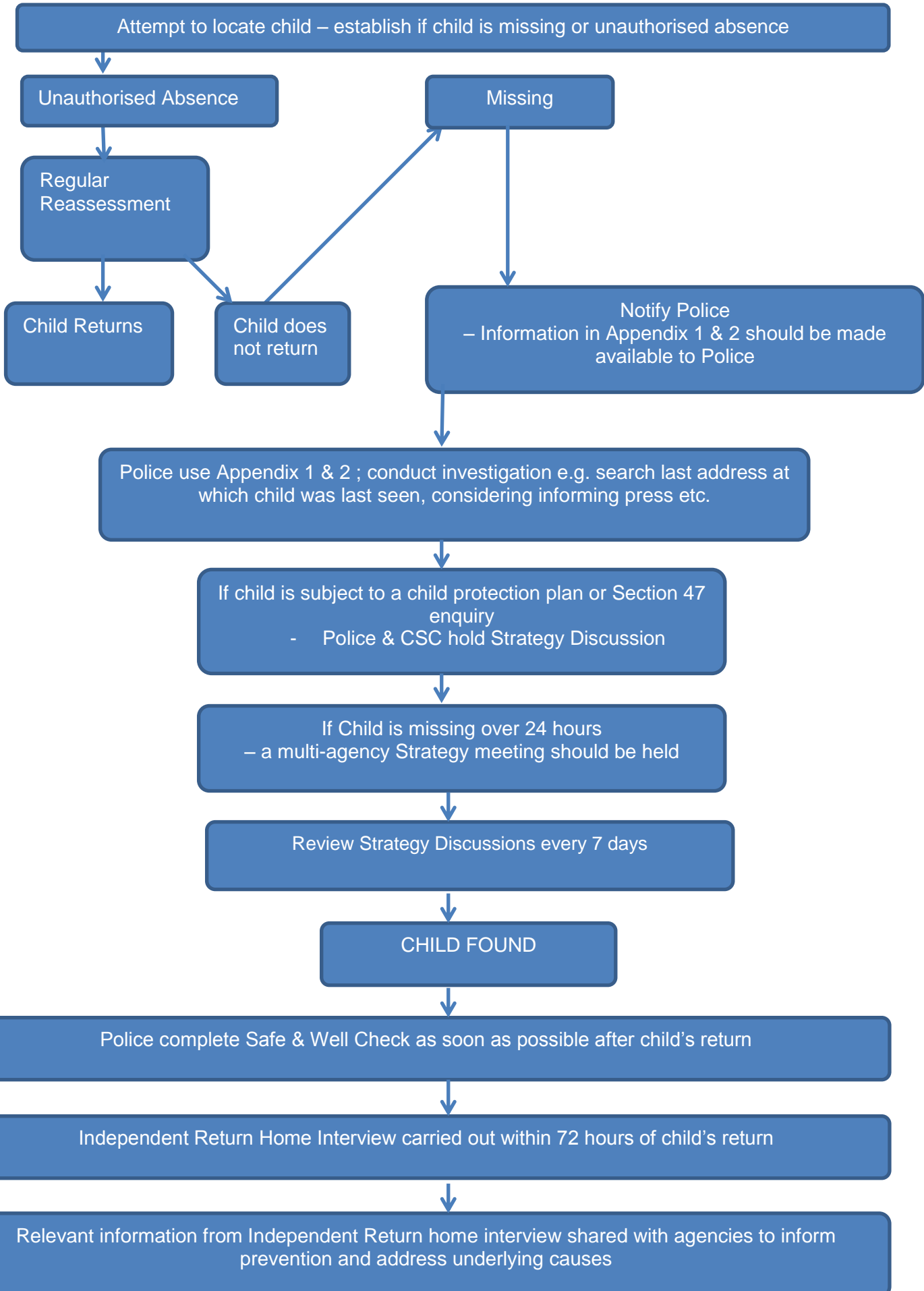
Appendix 11 :

FLOWCHART

Management of Bexley Missing Children



APPENDIX 12: Children Missing from Home Flowchart



APPENDIX 13: Children Missing from Care Flowchart

