

POLICY – MISSING FROM HOME

ENGLAND HOMES

Policy Author	Laura Dickie, Head of Policy
Approval Date	Feb 2026
Policy Approver	Jo Dunn, Compliance, Regulation and Quality Director
Next Review Date	Feb 2027
Version No.	001
Policy Level	England Homes
Staff groups affected	All England Homes Staff

Monitoring and Review

This policy will be monitored on an ongoing basis through the service's established governance and quality assurance systems. Responsibility for ensuring that the policy remains compliant with legislation and regulatory frameworks sits with the Responsible Individual or Senior Leader. A formal review of this policy will be undertaken no later than 1 year from the date of approval, or sooner if changes in legislation, regulatory guidance, or operational requirements necessitate it.

The Head of Policy will support this process by identifying relevant changes in legislation, regulation, national standards and emerging best practice. The Head of Policy will also incorporate learning from inspections, audits and practice developments into future revisions whilst overseeing all proposed amendments to this policy to ensure accuracy, consistency and compliance.

Local or service-level alterations may not be made without approval through the organisation's policy governance process.



Malissa McCarthy

Responsible Individual

Terminology

Our aim is to use consistent terminology throughout this policy and all supporting documentation as follows:

'Establishment' or 'Location'	This is a generic term which means the home
Individual	Means any child or young person under the age of 18 or young adult between the ages of 18 and 25.
Service Head	This is the senior person with overall responsibility for the home. Kerry Byron Head of Care.
Key Worker	Members of staff that have special responsibility for Individuals residing at or attending the Establishment.
Parent	Means parent or person with Parental Responsibility
Regulatory Authority	Regulatory Authority is the generic term used in this policy to describe the independent regulatory body responsible for inspecting and regulating services. (e.g CIW, Ofsted, CQC, CIS)
Social Worker	This means the worker allocated to the child/young person/adult. If there is no allocated worker, the Duty Social Worker or Team Manager is responsible.
Placing Authority	Placing Authority means the local authority/agency responsible for placing the child or commissioning the service
The Company	Any service owned by CareTech

1. Purpose

This policy sets out how we prevent, respond to and learn from episodes where a individual goes missing from home or care. Missing episodes can signal distress, exploitation, conflict, fear or attempts to seek connection or autonomy. Our approach is therefore trauma-responsive and grounded in strong relational practice.

We act in line with statutory guidance, including DfE (2014) Missing from Home or Care, which emphasises prevention, risk assessment, multi-agency working, and ensuring every person is offered an independent Return Home Interview (RHI) within 72 hours.

We also follow Working Together 2023, which reinforces child/person-centred practice and standards for multi-agency safeguarding.

Responding quickly and proportionately is vital because children who go missing are at heightened risk of violence, exploitation, trafficking, criminal involvement, substance misuse and serious harm.

Staff follow their home's Missing From Home SOP for detailed guidance on what to do if someone is missing.

Key Purposes

- Safeguard and promote the welfare of children/young people and those over 18 years who remain in our care.
- Prevent missing episodes wherever possible.
- Provide a trauma-responsive approach when an individual is missing and on their return.
- Ensure timely, proportionate and well-recorded actions by all staff.
- Strengthen local and national multi-agency coordination.
- Identify and disrupt risks related to exploitation, trafficking, and radicalisation.
- Meet statutory duties related to RHIs, notifications, and care planning.

2. Legislative and Statutory Framework

Our safeguarding responsibilities are shaped by several pieces of legislation and guidance. The DfE's missing guidance (2014) establishes mandatory expectations for local authorities and their partners on preventing missing episodes, supporting safe return, conducting independent return interviews and analysing data.

The College of Policing's Missing Persons APP gives police definitions and sets out their risk-led response, emphasising that all missing children and young people are assumed at risk until located.

Ofsted's Social Care Common Inspection Framework (SCCIF) requires children's homes and supported accommodation to demonstrate effective safeguarding, risk management and appropriate notifications.

Statutory Framework

- **Children Act 1989 & 2004** (core safeguarding duties)
- **DfE Statutory Guidance: Children who run away or go missing from home or care (2014)**
- **Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023** (multi-agency standards; harm outside the home)
- **College of Policing – Missing Persons APP (2023 update)** (definition, continuum of risk)
- **Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015** – including **serious incident notifications to Ofsted**
- **Prevent Duty Guidance (2024 update)** (England & Wales) – statutory responsibilities around radicalisation
- **Modern Slavery Act & NRM guidance for children** (mandatory referral where trafficking is suspected)
- **Children Missing Education (CME) statutory guidance 2025** – safeguarding links

3. Definitions

Clear and consistent definitions help ensure that staff, police and the local authority respond appropriately. Police use a single national definition of “missing”, and local protocols specify procedures for away from placement without authorisation, unauthorised absence, and safe return.

Definitions

- **Missing:** Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and whose well-being cannot be confirmed. (College of Policing APP)
- **Missing from Care:** Looked-after individual whose location is unknown and who is not where they are expected to be. (DfE 2014)
- **Away from Home Without Authorisation:** Whereabouts known, but not at placement or expected location; and concerns exist.
- **Return Home Interview (RHI):** Independent interview offered within 72 hours of return, to understand push/pull factors and reduce future risk.
- **Absconded:** Someone who fails to comply with a criminal court order which requires them to remain or be present within set parameters. Should an individual be reported missing and then breach a legal stipulation such as a return home time or a missed bail attendance, this should then be escalated to absconding. Repeated absconding incidents should be considered as potentially having underlying safeguarding concerns.

4. Trauma-Responsive & Preventative Practice

Individuals often go missing because they feel overwhelmed, unsafe, unheard or controlled. A trauma-responsive approach reduces shame and fear, strengthens trust and increases safety. Prevention focuses on relational connection, predictability and early identification of risks.

Expectations

Staff must:

- Build safe, attuned, predictable relationships with individuals.
- Co-produce Missing From Home and Staying Safe/Risk Plans as soon as an individual moves into the home including push/pull factors and known risks.
- Identify early warning signs (withdrawal, agitation, changed peer groups).
- Promote advocacy, voice and choice.
- Understand contextual risks (peer networks, online spaces, transport routes).
- Refer to multi-agency meetings when patterns emerge.

5. Immediate Response When an Individual Is Missing

Staff must act with urgency, sensitivity and clear documentation. The priority is to establish the person's safety through proportionate steps, escalating to police when risk criteria are met.

5.1 Initial Risk Assessment

Consider:

- Age/maturity/disability/learning needs
- Emotional state before leaving
- Time of day, weather, location
- Known associates, exploitation concerns
- Any criminal, trafficked or county-lines indicators
- Previous patterns
- Medical needs, medication
- Unknown whereabouts = presumed risk

5.2 Attempts to Locate Before Calling Police

- Check house/grounds/local area
- Attempt contact (call/text/online)
- Check usual routes/locations
- Contact trusted friends/family (within plan boundaries)
- Record every step taken

(Expectation that **reasonable steps** are taken before reporting, except where high risk is immediate – DfE 2014.)

5.3 Reporting to Police

Report as missing when:

- Location cannot be confirmed safely
- Risks escalate, or
- Individual is vulnerable/high risk
- If individual MFH Protocol specifies

Provide:

- Description, last seen, known associates
- Photo (if consented)
- Legal status (LAC)
- Risks (CSE/CCE, trafficking, mental health, substances)
- Responsible authority contact details (DfE flowchart).

6. While the Individual Is Missing

Actively monitoring updates, ongoing attempts to contact, and good communication with police and social care are essential.

- Continue attempts to call/text
- Check online status if possible (only from a work device and not staff's own devices or personal social media accounts)
- Re-check known addresses/locations.
- Maintain contact with police and local authority.
- Update Missing From Home / Safety/Risk Plan regularly.
- Plan for collection/return arrangements.

7. Return Home Procedures

The return phase is a critical safeguarding opportunity. Individuals must experience warmth, welcome, and care, not interrogation or blame. Initial conversations should only focus on safety and wellbeing.

7.1 Immediate Actions

- Welcome person warmly; regulate before talking.
- Offer food, warmth and rest.
- Check for injuries, distress, coercion, substances.
- Notify social worker and responsible/host authority.
- Ensure police are informed of return.

- Update Missing From Home and Safety/Risk plan.

7.2 Return Home Interview

The RHI is central to safeguarding and must be independent (local authority commissioned) and ideally held within 72 hours of the person's return.

Purpose:

- Explore push/pull factors
- Identify exploitation, grooming, coercion
- Understand what happened and what would help them feel safer
- Inform care planning, placement stability and interventions

8. Exploitation, Abuse/Harm, Trafficking & the NRM

Missing episodes are a key indicator of child criminal exploitation (CCE), CSE, and

If exploitation/trafficking suspected → mandatory NRM referral for under-18s (no consent required).

Adults (18+) require consent; if declined → Duty to Notify applies.

- Police must be informed as potential criminal offences may have occurred.
- Support must run in parallel with existing safeguarding processes.

Staff follow the Safeguarding / Child Protection Policy and Notifications Policy for further guidance on escalation.

9. Roles & Responsibilities

Clear responsibilities ensure consistency, timeliness and accountability.

All Staff:

- Recognise indicators
- Act immediately
- Record accurately
- Maintain trauma-responsive practice
- Escalate safeguarding/child protection concerns accordingly in line with the Child Protection / Safeguarding Policy

Key Worker:

- Maintain Missing From Home / Staying Safe/Risk Plan
- Coordinate return home support
- Attend multi-agency meetings

Manager / Registered Manager:

- Ensure quality of risk assessments & records
- Oversee notifications and communication with LA/police
- Convene strategy/multi-agency meetings when required
- Ensure staff training and supervision
- Escalate safeguarding/child protection concerns accordingly in line with the Child Protection / Safeguarding Policy

Responsible Individual:

- Provide governance, data monitoring and oversight
- Ensure compliance with SCCIF and notification regulations

10. Recording and Information-Sharing

Accurate, timely and proportionate information-sharing is essential to safeguarding.

- We record a clear chronology (times, persons notified, risk ratings, decisions and rationale)
- We share information lawfully and proportionately to protect life and reduce harm, following Working Together 2023 safeguarding information-sharing guidance and internal Information Governance Policies.
- For individuals who are looked after, we notify the placing authority and the host local authority whilst ensuring the IRO and relevant education/health partners are informed per the 2015 Regulations.

11. Notifications

We follow the notification duties set out in the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the Ofsted guidance on reporting serious incidents. Providers must notify Ofsted only when a missing episode meets the threshold of a notifiable incident, such as:

- **Serious harm** occurring during, or as a result of, the missing episode;
- **Serious safeguarding concerns**, including actual or suspected abuse or exploitation requiring multi-agency investigation under **Working Together 2023**;
- **Police escalation** into a criminal investigation or emergency response relating to the episode;

- Circumstances that may trigger a **serious incident notification** under the Children's Homes Regulations or Ofsted's regulatory expectations.

Routine missing episodes **do not** require notification to Ofsted. However, all episodes must be:

- fully **recorded**;
- shared promptly with the placing authority (and host authority where applicable);
- managed in accordance with local safeguarding procedures and the DfE statutory guidance on missing individuals.

Ofsted expects providers to demonstrate timely action, clear risk assessment, and learning through inspection, consistent with the **SCCIF** focus on safeguarding and individual's experiences.

Staff follow the Notifications Policy for further guidance.

Staff also follow the Serious Untoward Incident Policy for guidance on whether a missing from home/care episode meets thresholds for internal notification and escalation.

11. Training & Supervision

All staff receive training on:

- DfE 2014 missing guidance
- Trauma-informed approaches
- Exploitation & NRM pathways
- Prevent Duty & Channel referrals
- Local RMFHC protocols
- Information-sharing & recording
- Ofsted SCCIF expectations

Supervision includes reflective debriefs after significant episodes.

12. Monitoring, Oversight & Learning

Missing episodes must drive improved safeguarding and placement stability.

Managers and Responsible Individuals:

- Track patterns (times, associates, locations).
- Identify contextual risks.
- Ensure RHIs inform plans and care reviews.
- Report themes through governance systems.

- Demonstrate improvement through SCCIF lenses (safety, well-being, leadership).

13. Media Involvement

Media appeals are led only by police as per DfE guidance.

Any external communication must be agreed with police and the local authority.

Equality Impact Statement

This policy has been developed to promote equality, safeguard individual's rights, and ensure fair and inclusive practice across all services. The potential impact of the policy on children, young people, young adults, families, and staff with protected characteristics has been considered in line with the Equality Act 2010.

No negative impacts have been identified. Staff must apply this policy with sensitivity to individual need and make reasonable adjustments to ensure equitable access, safety, wellbeing, and participation for every individual. Any emerging risks of differential impact should be reported and addressed through ongoing review and quality assurance.