

Policy and Procedure on Missing From Care

Policy Author / Reviewer	Mike Ore/Lorna Fearon
Version No	4
Policy Level	Children's Homes
Staff Groups Affected	All Staff

Contents

1. Monitoring and Review	1
2. Terminology	2
3. Definitions	3
4. Legislation and Guidance	4
5. Purpose.....	4
6. Policy.....	5
Guidance	6
Individualised and proportionate response	7
7. Procedure	7
Preventative strategies	7
When a young person goes missing.....	8
Contacting the Police.....	9
Police Missing From Care Categories – High or Medium Risk.....	10
"High Risk"	10
"Medium Risk"	10
When a child is found – role of the home	11
Physical Intervention.....	11
Protocol for a young person's return	11
Persistent Absences	12
When a child is found – Safe and well checks	12
When a child is found – Independent Return Interview	13
Extended role of the Registered Homes Manager.....	14
Triggers for Review	14
Young People missing from an External Activity	15
8. Standard Forms, Relevant Documents, Letters & References	15
This Policy	15
Other Cambian Policy	15
Further Reading and Guidance.....	15
9. Appendix I – Local RMFHC	16
11. Appendix II – Flowchart	17


1. Monitoring and Review

- 1.1. The Proprietor will undertake a formal review of this policy for the purpose of monitoring and of the efficiency with which the related duties have been discharged, by no later than two years from the date of approval shown above,

or earlier if significant changes to the systems and arrangements take place, or if legislation, regulatory requirements or best practice guidelines so require.

- 1.2. The local content of this document will be subject to continuous monitoring, refinement and audit by the Head of Service.

Signed:

Jeremy Wiles
Group Executive Director – Children’s Services

Daniel Pitt
Principal, The Forum School

2. Terminology

- 2.1. 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 Children’s Home/school/college.
Young Person	This means any child or young person under the age of 18 or young adult between the ages of 18 and 25. At The Forum School we have children and young adults residing at and/or attending our school, college and homes between the ages of 7 and 19 years.
Service Head / Head of Service	This is the senior person with overall responsibility for the school and children’s home. At The Forum School this is Daniel Pitt (Principal) and Kerry Byron (Care Services Manager).
Key Worker	Members of staff that have special responsibility for Individuals residing at or attending the Establishment.
Parent, Carer, Guardian	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.
Social Worker	This means the worker allocated to the individual’s family. 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.
Staff	Means full or part-time employees of Cambian, agency workers, bank workers, contract workers and volunteers.

3. Definitions

- 3.1. The 'Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care' issued by the Department for Education in January 2014 use the following definitions:
- **Child:** anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people'.
 - **Young runaway:** a child who has run away from the home or care 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.
 - **Looked after child:** a child who is looked after by a local authority by reason of a care order, or being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 or a child is not looked after by a local authority under regulation 19 (CHR) placed by a voluntary organisation or for other reasons to follow the agreed plans in place.
 - **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.
 - **Care leaver:** an eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989.
 - **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.
 - These have been taken from the Ofsted report, 'Children looked after in England (including adoption), year ending 31 March 2017' and the police ACPO definitions issued in April 2013.
- 3.2. 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'.
 - **Looked after child missing from their placement:** Where a looked after child is missing from their placement, and his/her whereabouts are not known and/or the child is known or suspected to be at risk considered to be at risk they should be reported to the police as missing and a record of this should be made.
 - **Looked after children absent from their placement without authorisation:** Where a looked after child is not in their placement as agreed, their whereabouts are known and they are not at risk, carers/local authorities need to record as absent without authorisation from their placement.
 - **Child abduction:** Where a child has been abducted or forcibly removed from their place of residence, this is a 'crime in action' and should be reported to the police immediately

4. Legislation and Guidance

- 4.1. This policy has been updated in the spirit of good practice taking into account a number of changes highlighted by:
- The Ofsted Report, '[Children looked after in England \(including adoption\), year ending 31 March 2017](#)'
 - the DfE guidance document named '[Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care](#)' updated January 2014
 -
- 4.2. This policy update has also given consideration to the revised [Children's Homes Regulations 2015](#).

5. Purpose

- 5.1. It is thought that approximately 25% per cent of children and young people that go missing are at risk of serious harm:
- In the year ending 31 March 2017 there were 10,700 children looked after who had a missing incident, which equates to 10% of the 102,590 children looked after during the year. There were 60,720 missing incidents, which is an average of 5.7 missing incidents per child who went missing. 6,660 children went missing more than once and 330 were missing at the 31 March 2017. .
 - There were 60,720 missing incidents, which is an average of 5.7 missing incidents per child who went missing. 6,660 children went missing more than once and 330 were missing at the 31 March 2017.
- 5.2. Looked after children missing from their placements are particularly vulnerable. In 2012/2013, three reports highlighted that many of these children were not being effectively safeguarded:
- the [Joint All Party Parliamentary Group \(APPG\) Inquiry on Children Who Go Missing from Care](#),
 - the accelerated report of the Office of the Children's Commissioner's (OCC) on-going inquiry into [Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups](#) and
 - the final report of the OCC's enquiry into [Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups](#).
- 5.3. Key issues were that:
- 5.3.1. Children in residential care are at particular risk of going missing and vulnerable to sexual and other exploitation; and
 - 5.3.2. Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) have an important role to play in monitoring and interrogating data on children who go missing.
 - 5.3.3. Effective information-sharing with and between agencies can be achieved through ensuring there are strategic and operational links between child sexual exploitation co-ordinators, missing person co-ordinators and women, gangs and girls co-ordinators (in gang affected neighbourhoods).
 - 5.3.4. The following safeguarding principles should be adopted by Cambian 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 have suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.
- 5.4. The Ofsted report '[Missing Children](#)' published in February 2013 on local authority work in relation to children missing from home and care highlighted a number of concerns. These were that:
- 5.4.1. Risk management plans for individual looked after children are often not developed or acted on;
 - 5.4.2. Placement instability was a key feature of looked after children who ran away;

5.4.3. Reports about looked after children missing from their care placement were not routinely provided to senior managers in local authorities; and

5.4.4. There was little evidence that safe and well checks or return interviews were taking place

5.5. This policy aims to take into consideration all the recommendations and findings from these guidance and legislative pieces to ensure Cambian Group is fully compliant and operating within an arena of safety in relation to caring for young people who go missing from care or home.

6. Policy

6.1. The aims of this policy are:

- To safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people who might be missing without permission (push and pull factors).
- To clarify for staff their duties and responsibilities in relation to missing young people.
- To outline the procedures to be followed when young people go missing.
- To clarify expectations for staff on caring for young people upon their return to the home.
- To emphasise the need to employ effective preventive measures and to learn from experience when these fail and young people absent themselves without permission.
- To provide clarity of Cambian Group's expectations of external agencies roles in protecting young people who put themselves at risk of harm when they go missing from care.
- To ensure that on a day to day basis, all Cambian Group staff endeavours to positively engage young people in services provided by the home.
- To uphold Cambian Group's ethos of 'High Warmth/High Control' parenting.

6.2. The care and support provided to children minimises the risk that they will go missing and reduces the risk of harm should the young people go missing.

6.3. Children and young people running away and going missing from home or care is a safeguarding issue.

6.4. Children's homes staff and foster carers should be trained and supported to offer a consistent approach to the care of children, including being proactive about strategies to prevent children from running away; and to understand the procedures that must be followed if a child goes missing.

6.5. The competence and support needs of staff in children's homes and foster carers in responding to missing from care issues should be considered as part of their appointment, appraisal and supervision.

6.6. Listening to a child is an important factor in protecting and minimising the chances of a child running away. The Children's Rights Director (2012) reported that: "one of the major influences of them running away is having a sense that they are not being listened to and taken seriously", particularly about placement decisions and moves. All looked after children should be informed about their right to be supported by an independent advocate.

6.7. The Children's Home Regulations 2015 (CHR), require providers to have explicit procedures in place to be followed whenever a child has runaway or is missing from their placement. This procedure must take into account police and local authority protocols for managing missing person's incidents in the area where the provision is located. The CHR now state that where the registered person considers that a child accommodated at the home is, or has been, persistently absent without permission from the children's home, or who is at risk of harm, the registered person shall request the placing authority review the child's care plan. The plan would be reviewed via a risk management

meeting to develop strategies for Individuals who are persistently missing from care as in 9.32 of the quality standards.

- 6.8. Young people are less likely to be missing without consent where they feel secure and safe, able to express their feelings and wishes, make appropriate choices and develop positive relationships with the staff and their peers, which are free from bullying. Going missing from home can be a means by which a young person signals that he/she is unhappy or experiencing difficulties in placement or may indicate wider concerns associated with drug/alcohol misuse, child exploitation, self-harm issues, family issues, bullying or any other serious matters. The reasons that a young person goes missing from care are called 'push' and 'pull' factors and by identifying some of these, difficulties can be addressed.
- 6.9. Young people should feel that their plans are being progressed, that they have a positive future and that staff are working enthusiastically to support, advice and listen to them.

Push Factors – those things in the home environment that leads the child or young person to believe that the only option is to run away:

- Parental issues – for example parental substance misuse or domestic abuse within the home.
- Family conflict or breakdown – for example numerous arguments in the home or a parent starting a new relationship with someone the child does not like.
- Abuse and/or bullying – being a victim of abuse may lead children and young people to believe that the only option to stop is to run away.
- Loneliness – the child or young person may see running away as a chance to meet new people and make new friends.
- Loss of control – particularly for children and young people in care, the perceived lack of control over their lives and lack of involvement in key decision making can lead to them running away as a means to establish some control.

Pull factors – those things that entice a young person to leave the home environment, usually believing that they are improving their lives in some way or meeting some underlying need.

- Risks online
 - Drugs
 - Friends
 - Fear
 - Being groomed or exploited.
- 6.10. Young people are less likely go missing/be pulled out of the home in which they are well cared for, feel safe and enjoy positive, warm and respectful relationships with their carers. Positive engagement of young people in activities that they like/personalising their bedrooms to their choice has in the past proved to reduce levels of missing from care.
- 6.11. In these circumstances young people are enabled and empowered to talk about their difficulties and seek help from their carers in finding solutions. They also feel valued and worthy and see the home as their own and a place of safety.

Guidance

- 6.12. Young people should have a clear understanding of expectations upon them, the routines of the home and house rules; to this end, they should know whether it's acceptable, or not, to leave the home without permission or consent

and they should be counselled and informed of the risks that are posed to them if they become missing of the agencies that may be able to help them, such as:

- Children's Commissioner for England Website
- Children's Commissioner for Wales website
- Childline

Individualised and proportionate response

- 6.13. When young people go missing from care it is important that staff respond appropriately and proportionately. The level of response will be determined by the young person's legal status, vulnerability and the degree of risk their absence might pose to themselves and others.
- 6.14. This will be recorded in the individual young person's **Individual Risk Management Plan** (agreed by all relevant stakeholders) and staff will have a good understanding of what this means. Each case will be treated individually, with clear recorded attempts at appropriate engagement from staff prior to any missing from /home occurring and during the incident to attempt a safe return.
- 6.15. Some of the children that 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. An unaccompanied migrant or asylum seeking child who goes missing immediately after becoming looked after should be treated as a child who may be a victim of trafficking. The NSPCC **Child Trafficking Advice Centre (CTAC)** provides specialist advice and information to professionals who have concerns that a child or young people may have been trafficked. CTAC can be contacted at free phone number: 0800 107 7057, or by email at CTAC@nspcc.org.uk.
- 6.16. When young people go missing, best outcomes are achieved by staff working in partnership with other responsible agencies – in particular the police, parents, education, health, safeguarding teams, social workers and Social Care Department's (E.D.T).

7. Procedure

- 7.1. In order to ensure compliance with the revised Children's Homes Regulations, this policy will be shared with the local Police and other local services to the home as deemed appropriate and on a regular basis and their views will be taken into account at each review of this policy.
- 7.2. If an individual is absent from the home and their whereabouts are not known (i.e. the young person is missing), the homes procedures are compatible with the local Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) protocols and procedures applicable to where the home is located. **Regional Managers must submit a copy of this localised policy to the relevant LADO/LSCB's for approval and maintain a full audit trail to evidence this.**
- 7.3. If Individuals placed out of their local authority run away, the local RMFHC protocol should be followed, in addition to complying with other processes that are specified in the policy of the Responsible Local Authority. It is possible that the child will return to the area of the responsible authority so it is essential that liaison between the police and professionals in both authorities is well managed and co-ordinated. A notification process for missing/ absent episodes should be agreed between responsible and host local authorities.

Preventative strategies

- 7.4. At the beginning of each placement the issue of missing from care must be considered and preventative/incident management strategies agreed. The preventative strategy should include consideration of:
- Completing the initial risk screening forms, baseline assessment, and impact assessment report between Days 1-5 of the placement. Complete impact risk assessment, this should be done PRIOR to offering placement wherever possible. Where placements are planned, these should be completed as part of the placement consideration and

matching process and be accompanied by detailed risk management plans that are agreed by all stakeholders and known to all the staff working in the home prior to the young person being admitted into the home.

- Where it is an emergency placement, the homes manager must complete the above within 24 hours of the admission and agreed by all stakeholders by the 72 hours before or at the placement review meeting and copies of the agreed plan circulated
 - An understanding of the likelihood of a young person going missing and their degree of vulnerability in such circumstances
 - Information about past history of going missing including triggers, known associates or places where the young person usually goes
 - The level of support and supervision to be given by carers
 - The young person's views about going missing
 - Parental views and advice about what action should be taken if the young person goes missing and when they wish to be informed
 - The level of risk presented to both themselves and others if the young person goes missing
 - Associated impact of young people being placed 'out of area'
- 7.5. These issues should be taken into account and incorporated into the young person's placement plan and risk management plans and agreed with all stakeholders, including the young person, their parents, the police, the social worker, YOT, safeguarding, CAMHS, the relevant regional heads etc. The missing from care protocol outlines, the roles, responsibilities and timescales for return from home interviews.
- 7.6. All staff must familiarise themselves with this information and work actively to minimise the likelihood of a young person leaving home without permission and placing him/herself in an unsafe position.
- 7.7. When missing from care is an issue, staff should liaise closely with the young person's school to ensure the contact person is aware of the concerns and involved in the ongoing management of the concern and their agreement to the risk management plan sought and recorded as such.
- 7.8. Even with strong systems and services that minimise the likelihood of young people running away, some young people will still feel that they have to run. In all circumstances local safeguarding procedures should be followed as set out in the [local RMFHC protocol](#).

When a young person goes missing

- 7.9. It is important to quickly establish the category of absence. If it is safe to do so, staff should undertake enquiries locally and with the other young people as to the whereabouts of the young person to establish that he/she is absent.
- 7.10. This should include a thorough check of the local area and the home and will include contacting people who know the child or going out to look for them. The risk management plan and Missing persons plan must also include what is expected of staff and when is not expected of staff. If going to an environment to search for a child would place the staff member at significant risk this must be considered. If the young person has become absent during an activity away from the home, staff should conduct a search of the vicinity, if it is safe to do so. Searches beyond the local vicinity may only be undertaken with the approval of the manager. If it is decided that the young person is 'absent', this will be managed in line with their placement plan and risk management plan. This decision will be kept under review until the young person returns home and can be revised depending on how long the young person has been absent and any change of circumstances.
- 7.11. If the young person has gone missing following alleged abuse from either the staff or those present in the home, this matter should be followed up in line with the procedures (now called local safeguarding partnerships) and the Safeguarding Children Policy. It is imperative that as well as these procedures being followed, the police are informed

of the absence, consultation with the Principal, or the DSL (Designated Safeguarding Lead) and the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) where appropriate or MASH team.

- 7.12. If it is believed a young person has been abducted the matter should be reported to the police immediately, your Home Manager, DSL, and Regional Manager/Operational Director.
- 7.13. If a young person has gone missing the following initial actions should be taken prior to reporting them missing from care to the police:
- Make a **record of the time** that it was noticed that the young person may have gone missing.
 - Call the young person's **mobile phone** to try to ascertain their whereabouts – this must be at regular intervals in line with what has been defined within their individual risk management plans
 - **Make enquiries** with other young people and known associates including friends and family of the missing young person
 - If the young person has not previously been noted as leaving the home, **check the building and immediate grounds** of the home and other parts of the property where the young person may be hiding
 - **Search the immediate vicinity of the home** providing that a risk assessment indicates that it is safe to do so. Drive out to known addresses, local areas and known hang out points
 - Check out any **sources of information** that may be helpful in locating the young person i.e. other young people or staff in the home or anyone the young person may have been with beforehand
 - If a young person is found by staff but refuses to return, staff are to contact the police and request urgent assistance due to the vulnerability of the young person

Contacting the Police

- 7.14. Heads of Service will ensure that the home's **Police Liaison policy** and protocols are up to date and also agreed and signed by their local Police co-ordinator.
- 7.15. For all young people who are missing – the decision on whether and when to inform the police and others will be based upon the written agreement made with the placing authority at the admissions stage in relation to the agreed risk management plan for that young person. This will include issues in relation to:
- Any medical condition the young person might have
 - The young person's mental wellbeing including issues relating to self-harm
 - Previously assessed levels of vulnerability
 - The young person's age and level of understanding
 - Any concerns about physical or learning difficulties
 - Previous patterns of behaviour including criminality, drug/alcohol misuse
 - Known associates when missing
 - The risk of sexual exploitation/criminal exploitation
 - Any risk a parent or carer might present – e.g. substance misuse, domestic violence, child protection issues, mental health problems.
 - The outcome of this assessment will determine the risk status. All high risk cases should be referred immediately to the police. Low and medium risk outcomes must be kept under regular review and may be revised upwards as time passes and circumstances change. Any such changes in missing episodes will be discussed with the social worker/regional head/other stake holders with subsequent control measures being approved by all parties.
 - The risk management plan could /should be shared with the local missing person officer and Return Home Interview team/ professional - they can then flag up on police national system.
 - Also add if British transport police need to be alerted of they travel via train.
- 7.16. When it is decided that a missing young person should be reported to the police the informing carer should provide the following information:

- The young person's name, age and date of birth
 - What time the young person was noticed to be missing from care.
 - Legal status (i.e. Sec 20 or Sec 31 and any contact restrictions)
 - Young person's Social Worker (and contact number) and placing authority
 - Parent's address (if applicable)
 - What attempts the management team at the home have made to encourage the young person not to go missing as well as attempts to safely return them prior to police involvement
 - Contact name and number for the home
 - Known addresses, local areas and known hang out points
 - Additional features that would make the young person more vulnerable such as a history of self-harming, child sexual exploitation, drug &/or alcohol misuse, family contact concerns
 - The clothes the young person left in, what they said before they went
 - Any Distinguishing features
- 7.17. Whenever a child runs away from the home, the carer or the manager on duty in the children's home is responsible for ensuring that the following individuals and agencies are informed within the timescales set out in the local RMFHC protocol and the child's individual risk management plan:
- the local police;
 - the authority responsible for the child's placement - if they have not already been notified prior to the police being informed; and
 - parents and any other person with parental responsibility, unless it is not reasonably practicable or to do so would be inconsistent with the child's welfare.
- 7.18. Please refer to [Appendix II](#) – flowchart to accompany statutory guidance
- 7.19. If young people are found but refuse to return to the home, staff must consult the manager (who should consult the relevant social worker) or, in an emergency/where the young person or others are seriously at risk, call the Police.

Police Missing From Care Categories – High or Medium Risk

- 7.20. The police will prioritise all incidents of missing children as high or medium risk. Please note that these are the police categories of risk and may not necessarily correlate to the internal home risk management categorisation – this should be agreed with all stakeholders. 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 the staff reporting the incident.

"High Risk"

- 7.21. 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.
- 7.22. 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"

- 7.23. In this case the risk posed is likely to place the subject in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others. 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.

- 7.24.** The member of staff should also inform the Homes Manager at the earliest opportunity and the young person's Social Worker (or EDT if out of hours). The member of staff, in consultation with the Manager, and in line with the young person's placement plan and risk management plan, will decide when to inform the young person's parents. The time the homes manager should be notified must be contained within the risk management plan's control measures and based upon the presenting risks to the young person. As the legal responsibility rests with the Registered Manager, he/she must be notified rather than the on-call manager. During periods of leave, the relevant Regional Manager is to take lead in this area and guide relevant deputy managers or team leaders.
- 7.25.** While waiting for the police to arrive at the home the carer should collect the following:
- A copy of the young person's Missing From Care Protocol
 - A detailed description of the young person and what they were wearing when last seen
 - The demeanour of the young person prior to leaving the home
 - A recent photograph of the young person
 - The child's telephone number
 - A list of the young person's known associates or places when they usually go – including places they may not be allowed to visit
 - Contact details for the young person's family and friends
 - Additional features that would make the young person more vulnerable such as a history of self-harming, child sexual exploitation, drug &/or alcohol misuse, family contact concerns
- 7.26.** If there are any further developments or if the young person makes contact with the home this information must be passed to the police and Social Worker (EDT) without delay.

When a child is found – role of the home

- 7.27.** When the young person is found or confirms his/her location, arrangements should be made for his/her return home. Best practice suggests that this should be facilitated by a member of staff from the young person's home (circumstances and staffing levels permitting).
- 7.28.** Caution must be exercised when making these arrangements and if it is felt that there is any risk associated with the strategy then police assistance should be requested.
- 7.29.** Any actions taken to recover the child and return them to the home must focus on promoting the young person's welfare and must take account of their care or legal status, age, understanding and level of risk posed to them or others.

Physical Intervention

- 7.30.** The use of physical interventions should not be used unless there is an immediate risk of significant harm, serious damage to property, as a last resort and if staff are confident that such interventions will work to de-escalate the situation and make the young person safe; if this outcome is not likely, they should withdraw and immediately consult their manager or the Police. Any physical intervention which is used away from the home must be reported and recorded using the home's Physical Intervention policy and paperwork at the earliest opportunity and within 24 hours and all aspects of the process followed including debriefs for both staff and Individuals.

Protocol for a young person's return

- 7.31.** Whether the young person returns of their own volition or is brought back home, they should receive a positive and warm welcome. Staff should express relief that the young person has returned safely and should attend to any immediate needs (food/drink, medical attention, etc) and be aware of any particular causes for concern (the young person being dropped off by someone, returning home with different clothing, or items not previously in their possession, bruising, change of mood etc). Running away should not be viewed as behaviour that needs to be

punished. The need for safe and reliable care may be particularly significant for a child who faces pressure to run away from their placement as a result of circumstances beyond the control of their carers.

- 7.32. The member of staff should immediately inform the police of the young person's return (if they do not already know) and anyone else (Manager, Social Worker, EDT) who has been involved in the incident. Depending upon the time of day and arrangements agreed in the young person's placement plan/risk management plan, the member of staff should inform the young person's parents.
- 7.33. When the child has been located, the placing authority will be responsible for deciding whether the child's placement remains appropriate. The decision should be informed by discussions with the child and carers where appropriate.
- 7.34. When young people who have been missing return home, they should be welcomed back and staff should undertake an assessment of their immediate needs (food and drink, medical attention, bath or shower) and these should be offered and recorded as such.
- 7.35. Upon his/her return each missing young person should be seen by an independent person to explore the reasons why they were missing and whether action is required to prevent future incidents.

Persistent Absences

- 7.36. It is the registered manager's responsibility to ensure that following instances of persistent absences or if they feel a child is at risk of harm they arrange with the placing authority and request an urgent review of the care plan for that child. Where the manager does not receive a response to this request they must escalate this accordingly through the ranks of hierarchy within the placing authority. This can be done via email or letter however must remain on the child's file as evidence.

When a child is found – Safe and well checks

- 7.37. Safe and well checks are carried out by the police as soon as possible after the child has returned. Their purpose is to check for any indications that the child has suffered harm, where and with whom they have been, and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them.
- 7.38. Where a child goes missing frequently, it may not be practicable for the police to see them every time they return. In these cases a reasonable decision should be taken in agreement between the police and the child's parent or carer

with regard to the frequency of such checks bearing in mind the established link between frequent missing episodes and serious harm, which could include gang involvement, forced marriage, bullying or sexual exploitation.

When a child is found – Independent Return Interview

- 7.39.** This is an in-depth interview and is best carried out by an independent person who is trained to carry out these interviews and is able to follow-up any actions that emerge. Young people sometimes need to build up trust with a person before they will discuss in depth the reasons why they ran away. The responsible local authority should ensure the return interview takes place, working closely with the host authority where appropriate.
- 7.40.** Where a looked after child has run away they should have the opportunity to talk, wherever possible before they return to the home, to a person who is independent of their placement about the reasons they went missing. The child should be offered the option of speaking to an independent representative or advocate.
- 7.41.** The interview and actions that follow from it should:
- identify and deal with any harm the child has suffered - including harm that might not have already been disclosed as part of the 'Safe and Well check' - either before they ran away or whilst missing;
 - understand and try to address the reasons why the child ran away;
 - help the child feel 'safe' / understand that they have options, to prevent repeat instances of them running away;
 - provide them with information on how to stay safe if they choose to run away again, including helpline numbers.
- 7.42.** Contact should be made with the young person within 72 hours of them being located or returning from absence, to arrange an Independent Return Interview in a neutral place where they feel safe. It is especially important that this Interview takes place when a child:
- has been reported missing on two or more occasions;
 - Is frequently absent without authorisation
 - has been hurt or harmed while they have been missing
 - is at risk of sexual exploitation or trafficking;
 - is at risk of involvement in criminal activity or drug use
 - has contact with persons posing risk to children; and/or
 - has been criminally/sexually exploited
- 7.43.** The responsibility for the independent return interview lies with the placing authority and when a child is placed out of authority the placing authority must still complete this interview however working closely with the hosting authority. If this is not practicable, it may be agreed that an independent person within the company can facilitate this meeting i.e. another Manager of a children's home within Cambian.
- 7.44.** Following the Safe and Well Check and Independent Return Interview, all stakeholders should work together:
- to build up a comprehensive picture of why the young person went missing;
 - what happened while they were missing;
 - who they were missing with and where they were found; and,
 - what support they require upon returning home in accordance with the 'Working Together' guidance.
- 7.45.** Where young people refuse to engage with the interviewer or have not been seen for whatever reason, parents and carers should be offered the opportunity to provide any relevant information and intelligence they may be aware of. This responsibility will sit with the Homes Manager who should conduct the interview in a facilitative, non-

confrontational way with the purpose of understanding the reasons for the young person going missing and developing a strategy to prevent further incidents.

Extended role of the Registered Homes Manager

- 7.46. The manager should be persistent in pursuing this discussion and not accept a young person's initial reluctance to talk. This should then be recorded on the [Missing from Care form](#).
- 7.47. Following the incident it should be fully recorded and an entry made in the home's [Missing from care log](#). The manager must ensure there is a clear audit trail which covers all actions, from the point the young person's absence is discovered, through informing all the relevant people to the young person's return, debrief and notification to all interested parties.
- 7.48. Any information which emerges from the incident management process or the young person's interview with the independent person (including names and addresses of friends or associates or locations including 'hotspots' which the young person had visited) should be included in the young person's placement and risk management plans to help in the management of further incidents. Managers and Staff should consider contextual safeguarding- hold a meeting with the Police to discuss contextual safeguarding, this should include location risk assessment and should be updated regularly to record these concerns.
- 7.49. It is the homes managers responsibility to complete the de-brief with the young person and cover the risks associated with the young person going missing as well as what the manager can offer the young person (activities/incentives) to not go missing. In instances when the home manager is on leave, prior agreement should be reached with the relevant Regional Manager as to whom will complete the de-brief with the Regional Manager guiding allocated deputy managers/team leaders in this task.
- 7.50. The Cambian Policy stipulates that repeat episodes of a young person going missing from care should not be viewed as a normal pattern of behaviour:

Triggers for Review

- 7.51. If a young person is missing on 3 occasions in 30 days (either individual days or consecutive days), the homes manager will ask the young person's social worker to convene a strategy meeting to review and agree the supportive intervention measures contained in the young person's risk management plan. The homes manager must also inform their line manager who will in turn report this into Cambian's Safeguarding Board for further advice/guidance.
- 7.52. If a young person is missing on 7 occasions in 30 days (either individual or consecutive days), the home's manager will request that the young person's social worker contact the Independent Reviewing Officer to chair a meeting and further review and agree the supportive intervention measures contained in the young person's risk management plan. Risk management plans must be approved/signed off by all stakeholders. The homes manager must also inform their line manager who will in turn report this into Cambian's Safeguarding Board for further advice/guidance.
- 7.53. It is important to note that Cambian's procedure on this is deemed as good practice and must happen as a bare minimum. All homes must still work in line with the Local Runaway and Missing From Home and Care Protocols (RMFHC Protocol) as agreed with the Placing Authority and Police at point of admission. The RMFHC Procedures can be found in appendix 1 at the end of this Policy.
- 7.54. Where a child already has an established pattern of running away, this should also be addressed within their statutory review as a safeguarding concern. A statutory review of their care plan can provide an opportunity to check that it addresses the reasons for an absence. The review should result in the development of a strategy to minimise a repeat of the missing episode. In particular any issues relating to the vulnerability of the child to sexual exploitation, trafficking or crime/gang involvement should be identified and actions to address these needs and ensure the child is kept safe clearly set out in the care plan. The police and other relevant agencies should be given the opportunity to contribute to the review.
- 7.55. **Local authorities hold MACE meetings** (MACE is a multi-agency professional meeting) It is aimed at preventing children and young people from being exploited by working together to gather, share and understand information and intelligence in order to identify potential risks and for agencies to use their resources to protect the child or young

person. Any child who has been missing should be raised and discussed at the MACE. The RHI independent person and local police safeguarding officer can raise them at the MACE.

Young People missing from an External Activity

- 7.56. If a young person goes missing during an external activity, the person in charge of the event should:
- Notify the local police – providing as much information about the young person as possible (see above)
 - Inform the Home Manager or Duty Manager (if out of hours)
 - Institute a local search if staffing levels permit and this does not compromise the safety of other young people
- 7.57. The Home Manager will be responsible for ensuring that the usual procedures in relation to missing young people are followed. The Home Manager and the person in charge of the event will decide at what point the party will return home if the young person remains missing.
- 7.58. The Manager will continue to liaise with local police where the missing occurred and make arrangements for the young person's return when he/she is found.

8. Standard Forms, Relevant Documents, Letters & References

This Policy

- 8.1. Missing from Care Form
- 8.2. Missing from Care Pack / Folder

Other Cambian Policy

- 8.3. Safeguarding Policy
- 8.4. Child Sexual Exploitation Policy
- 8.5. Links with Home and Family
- 8.6. LSCB procedures
- 8.7. Police Liaison

Further Reading and Guidance

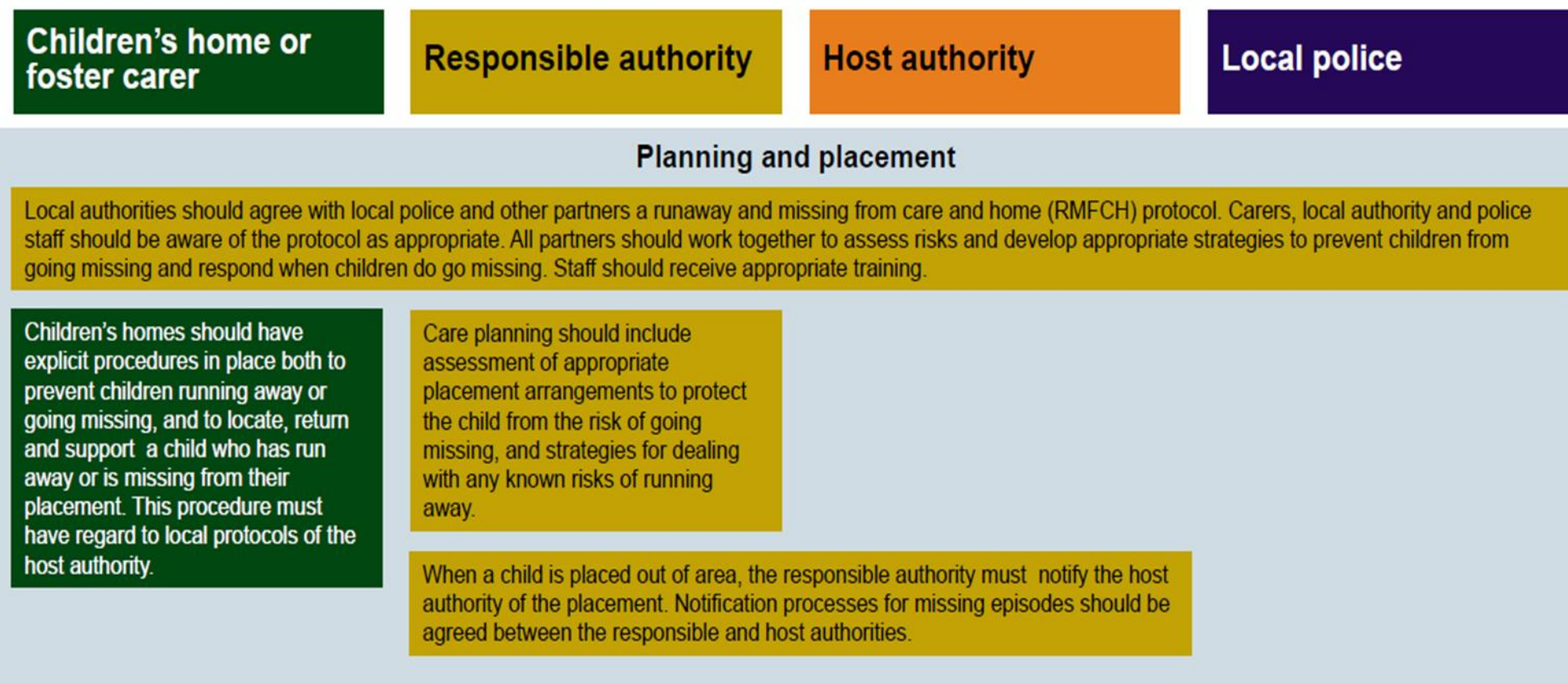
- 8.8. Children looked after in England (including adoption), year ending 31 March 2017
- 8.9. Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care, January 2014 – [click here](#)
- 8.10. NSPCC - Helping Children who have been abused – [click here](#)
- 8.11. Gov.uk - Missing Children and Adults strategy (2011) – [click here](#)
- 8.12. Safeguarding Children Who May Have Been Trafficked Guidance (2011) – [click here](#)
- 8.13. Ofsted Missing Children Report – February 2013 – [click here](#)
- 8.14. NSPCC Child Trafficking Advice Centre (CTAC) – [click here](#)

9. Appendix I – Local RMFHC

11. Appendix II – Flowchart

11.1. Roles and responsibilities when a child goes missing from care taken from DfE on [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)

The following chart shows the main steps that need to be taken when a child goes missing from local authority care, and where responsibility lies for those steps. It should be read alongside the full statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care, and is not intended to be a comprehensive list of actions.



When a looked after child goes missing

The carer should take agreed actions to locate the child. If they can not be located, they should inform the police, the responsible authority and anyone else identified in the child's care plan (such as their parents).

Useful information to report to the police include:

- the child's name, date of birth, description and a recent photograph
- any details of where and when the child was last seen, who they were with, etc
- details of family, friends and associates
- details of the responsible authority.

The responsible authority should provide relevant information about the missing child to the police to enable all the risk factors to be considered.

The responsible authority should notify the host authority that a child in their area has gone missing.

Police should perform a risk-assessment which will form the basis for their operational response. The case will remain the subject of constant review, particularly in the light of new information and changes in circumstances.

Children's home or foster carer

Responsible authority

Host authority

Local police

When a looked after child is found

If the child returns to their placement, the responsible authority and police should be informed.

Carers should continue to offer warm and consistent care when a child returns, and running away should not be viewed as behaviour that needs to be punished.

The responsible local authority should review whether the child's placement remains appropriate. The decision should be informed by discussions with the child and carers where appropriate.

If the child is located but meaningful contact can not be established, the responsible authority and police should consider appropriate action.

An independent return interview should be offered and provided within 72 hours of the child's return. When a looked after child is placed in a host authority, the responsible authority should ensure the independent review interview takes place, working closely with the host authority.

Care plans should include a strategy to minimise future risk of repeated missing episodes.

IROs should be informed about missing episodes and address these in statutory reviews.

A safe and well check should be carried out by the police as soon as possible after a child reported as missing has been found.

Data and analysis

Children's homes should be prepared to provide information on missing incidents to those conducting independent visits to monitor the effectiveness of the home.

Data on missing episodes, including intelligence from return interviews, should be analysed regularly by all relevant partners to map problems and patterns. Regular reports should be provided to council members and the LSCB.

Data for children missing or away from placement without authorisation should be reported to the Department for Education by the responsible authority through their annual data returns on looked after children.