

Cross County Protocol

Children and young people who are reported missing

This protocol is about any child or young person up to and including the age of 18 who has been reported as missing.

The basic principle that underpins these arrangements is that children and young people who run away are vulnerable and likely to be in need of multi-agency services and that the information about their needs should be available in whichever authority they reside. It applies to every case where an authority is notified that a child or young person has been reported missing. Timescales, required actions and responsibilities will be laid down in each Authority's Missing Children Protocols.

The expectation is that professionals from all agencies will promptly verbally notify and discuss with their counterparts, and that written or electronic information will follow at the earliest opportunity.

Children to whom this protocol applies

- Any child under the age of 18 years reported missing from home and whose whereabouts is unknown.
- Any child under the age of 18 years reported missing from care and whose whereabouts is unknown.
- Any child reported missing from a private fostering arrangement and whose whereabouts is unknown.
- This protocol does not apply to children whose whereabouts is known but they are not where they are expected to be.
- Any child who has runaway or is staying away from the person who is responsible for the child.
- Any child who has left home owing to rejection by the person who is responsible for the child.
- Any child who has been unlawfully taken away or is being unlawfully kept away from the person who is responsible for them.

Guidance

Much of this guidance is addressed to staff within Children's Services. However, all involved agencies must ensure that they give timely and comprehensive information to their counterparts in other authorities when a child has been reported missing and it is thought the child has left their home authority or has been reported as found in another authority.

A child reported missing and found in another authority

In this instance the agency who has discovered the child will inform the Children's Services within that area. If the agency is the local police force an initial safe and well check might take place but not a full return interview. All reasonable attempts should be made for the child to be spoken to by a duty worker to ascertain identity and reason for running away. This information must be reported to the child's home authority upon receipt and arrangements made for the child to return to the home authority.

The home authority will in the meantime carry out any background checks considered necessary to ensure that all relevant and current information is available. This will mean checking current education status, health needs and any known services currently being provided by Children's Services or the voluntary sector. This information will inform who will conduct the return interview. The arrangements for return interviews are likely to be laid down in each authority's Missing Children protocols.

A child reported missing from their home authority

If there is intelligence available to suggest a child who has been reported missing is likely to be in a particular authority an alert should be sent to them with relevant detail. The home authority retains the responsibility for deciding whether a case warrants an all authority alert or not, depending on the information and circumstances surrounding the running away episode.

A child on the Sex Offenders Register

Children who are on the Sex Offenders Register are covered by the public protection arrangements. If a child on the sex offenders register is reported missing an all authority alert should be triggered and when located the following information shared:

- Any recent risk assessment
- The youth offending pre-sentence report
- Any previous reports or factual information relating to the perpetrator

This is to ensure that until the child is returned to their home authority arrangements for their accommodation can be made. In all matters appropriate information sharing protocols must be applied.

Information sharing in special circumstances

There will be circumstances for all agencies where it will be appropriate to share information about adults where there is reasonable cause to suspect that they may pose a risk to children. These will generally be adults whose behaviour is, or has been, of grave concern but who have not been convicted.

There may be circumstances where a child has been reported missing and intelligence suggests that they have left with, or to be with, an adult either not previously known to them or whereby the relationship is considered inappropriate.

At all times compliance with Bichard recommendations is necessary and legal advice should be sought in individual circumstances.

