



# **Missing Children & Child Exploitation**

## **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)**

### **Children's Homes**

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# 1 Introduction

Surrey Children's Services and Surrey Police have voluntarily agreed this Memorandum of understanding (MOU). It relates to children placed in in local authority children's homes or children's homes in Surrey, who may be at risk of going missing and/or child exploitation (CE). The Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) expect both partners to implement this MOU and will ensure the relevant staff have had sight of it.

Surrey Police work in association with:  
College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice (APP) Missing Persons.  
<https://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/missing-persons/>

Partners work in association with government publications including:  
[Working Together to Safeguard Children](#)  
[DofE Statutory Guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care](#)  
[DofE Children's Homes National Minimum Standards](#)

Please also refer to local Surrey County Council procedure:  
<http://surreyscb.procedures.org.uk/page/contents>

# 2 Purpose

The aim and purpose of this document is to provide guidance to staff, in order to ensure a coordinated, consistent, and robust approach when dealing with children who go missing and/or are at risk of child exploitation (CE). The ultimate intention will be to reduce the number of children who go missing or who are at risk of CE and prevent children coming to harm.

It is intended that everyone works together to ensure that:

- All appropriate agencies and individuals are notified if children are missing and when they return.
- All appropriate agencies and individuals are notified if a child is at risk of CE.
- A clear plan of effective inter-agency action is in place to trace or return children who repeatedly run away or go missing.
- A clear plan of effective inter-agency action is in place to manage and reduce the level of risk of CE to individuals.
- Appropriate and effective actions are taken when children and young people return or are located. This includes provision of a prevention interview by police, a follow-up return home interview and on-going support when required.
- Children are actively encouraged to influence the outcome of any professional intervention; the child's voice is listened to ensuring a child centred approach is taken by all agencies.
- Effective and early intervention and prevention strategies are implemented to help reduce the potential of repeat cases.

### 3. Missing children

#### **Definition of a Missing Person from College of Policing:**

Anyone whose whereabouts **cannot be established** will be considered as missing until located, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed.

#### **When a child is missing –**

**A child is missing and should be reported to police if a) you do not know where they are and b) you are unable to establish where they are.**

### 4. Children's homes

In the DofE Statutory Guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care. Section 63 It states, "The Children's Home Regulations require providers to have explicit procedures in place both to prevent children going missing and to take action if they do go missing". [Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

If you are concerned that a child in your home might go missing, fill in the Philomena Protocol as soon as possible, with as much information as you can so they can be located and returned as quickly as possible.

College of Policing Approved Professional Practice states that:

#### **Parent and carer responsibilities**

It is expected that parents and care providers, for both children and adults, take reasonable steps to locate the missing person **prior to making a report to the police.**

This could include:

- attempts to contact the child or adult
- calling friends or family
- visiting areas that the child or adult is known to frequent
- visiting the place where the child or adult was known to be attending, for example, a friend's house or party

- checking to see if any items are missing from the home

A child who has not arrived back at the home as expected or agreed should **not** automatically be reported straight to the police as a missing person, until you have conducted reasonable actions as listed above to locate the child.

**\*\*\*\* However, if there is any cause to believe that the child may have been harmed or is at risk of being harmed, then the police must be informed immediately on 999 you will be asked to explain your reasons for this concern.\*\*\*\***

If the child is found by staff, then the home should make the appropriate arrangements to collect or return them. The child’s absence should be recorded internally to inform safeguarding plans. If the child cannot be found despite reasonable enquiries conducted to find them, then the home should contact police and report them as a missing person, providing as much information as possible using the Philomena Protocol.

The home must inform police of any changes or updates to the information provided, particularly where this may alter the level of risk. The home must continue to actively search for the child. The home should notify the police as soon as possible, should the child return or be found. The police will in turn ensure the home is notified if they locate the child.

Arrangements should be agreed with regards to how the child is returned home. The responsibility in the first instance, will be for the home to either arrange to collect them or to pay for alternative transport. The police will only assist with transport where there is a concern of violence or for the ongoing safety of a child.



Surrey Police  
Philomena Protocol

## 5. Police role

Once a child is reported to police as missing the call centre will ask a series of questions to establish the child is actually missing. They will then create a missing person report and give an initial missing risk grading based on the information the home have provided. All missing person reports sit within a continuum of risk:

<b>Low risk</b>	the risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as <b>possible but minimal</b>	proportionate enquiries should be carried out to ensure the subject has not come to harm
<b>Medium risk</b>	the risk of harm to the subject or the public is	active and measured response by police and partner agencies

	assessed as <b>likely</b> but <b>not serious</b>	
<b>High risk</b>	the risk of <b>serious harm</b> to the subject or the public is assessed as <b>very likely</b>	immediate deployment of police resources

Surrey Police no longer use the APP guidance category 'no apparent risk' for missing persons.

When a child has been located and returns home, police will attend to complete a police Prevention Interview. Children classed as high risk, will be completed as a priority and for children classed as low or medium risk, this interview will be completed within 12 hours.

The purpose of the Prevention Interview is to check on the child's physical welfare, identify if they are victim of any offences and to obtain information as to where and with whom they have been.

## 6. Return Home Interview/ Strategy Meeting/ Intervention Meeting

Surrey Children's Services will offer a child a Return Home Interview (RHI) to all children in Surrey who have been missing, to try and uncover information to prevent the risk recurring and reduce exposure to risk while missing.

Relevant information from the RHI will be shared with the police and the home as appropriate and should be used to update any safeguarding/trigger plans.

When a child repeatedly goes missing (3 times in 30 days) or is missing for over 24 hours this *might* lead to a s47 strategy meeting if the risk of harm is met. However children's services might decide that a missing intervention meeting would be more productive in establishing patterns of missing, push/pull factors, risk of exploitation and planning. Sometimes the frequency and pattern of missing means that partners decide on regular intervention meetings to help with information sharing and safety planning. In either case, if the episode was over 24 hours or 3 in 30 days, there should be either a strategy meeting or an intervention meeting with multi agency representation.

## 7. Partnership Intelligence

If you receive intelligence during the course of your professional role you can share this with Surrey Police by emailing [Partnership.Intelligence@surrey.police.uk](mailto:Partnership.Intelligence@surrey.police.uk) which will create an automatic response with the intelligence form and guidance on completion.

Any new intelligence should be shared with police and social worker/youth worker, in order to inform any investigation and to safeguard the child. Whilst intelligence about exploitation or missing can be discussed with appropriate police officers and staff, it should always be documented as well using the partnership intelligence form.

The type of intelligence that should be shared is:

- Any new associates – particularly if they are suspected to be perpetrators or other vulnerable children, new locations they may be frequenting, any car registration numbers seen to be collecting them / hanging around, new phone numbers, unexplained wealth, a person with several phones.
- Keep the content **concise** and this can include low level, soft ‘whisperings’ and gut feelings, something that does not sit well with you or your co-workers but has no-where else to go. It can include information from third parties or anonymous sources.
- Ask yourself, will the information I have help the police or other professionals safeguard the child?



Partner Intel Form



Partner Intel Guide

## 8. Forensic considerations

Should there be any suspicion that a child has been a victim of sexual abuse whilst missing, then the police should be called as soon as possible so that a Forensic Examination can be considered. In the first instance, any forensic capture will be the responsibility of the police. Staff are asked however, that whilst waiting for police they try where possible to ensure:

- the child does not wash/shower.
- the child’s clothes, including underwear, are secured, and preserved for Police collection.
- the child’s mobile phone and any other digital device are secured (however if the child is likely to go missing then this must be weighed up with the risk of them going missing without a phone).
- marks or injuries are photographed.

## 9. Child Exploitation

Children who repeatedly go missing, can indicate underlying vulnerabilities and make them more vulnerable to various forms of exploitation and abuse:

**Child Exploitation is a form of child abuse.** It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual or criminal activity a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator.

The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

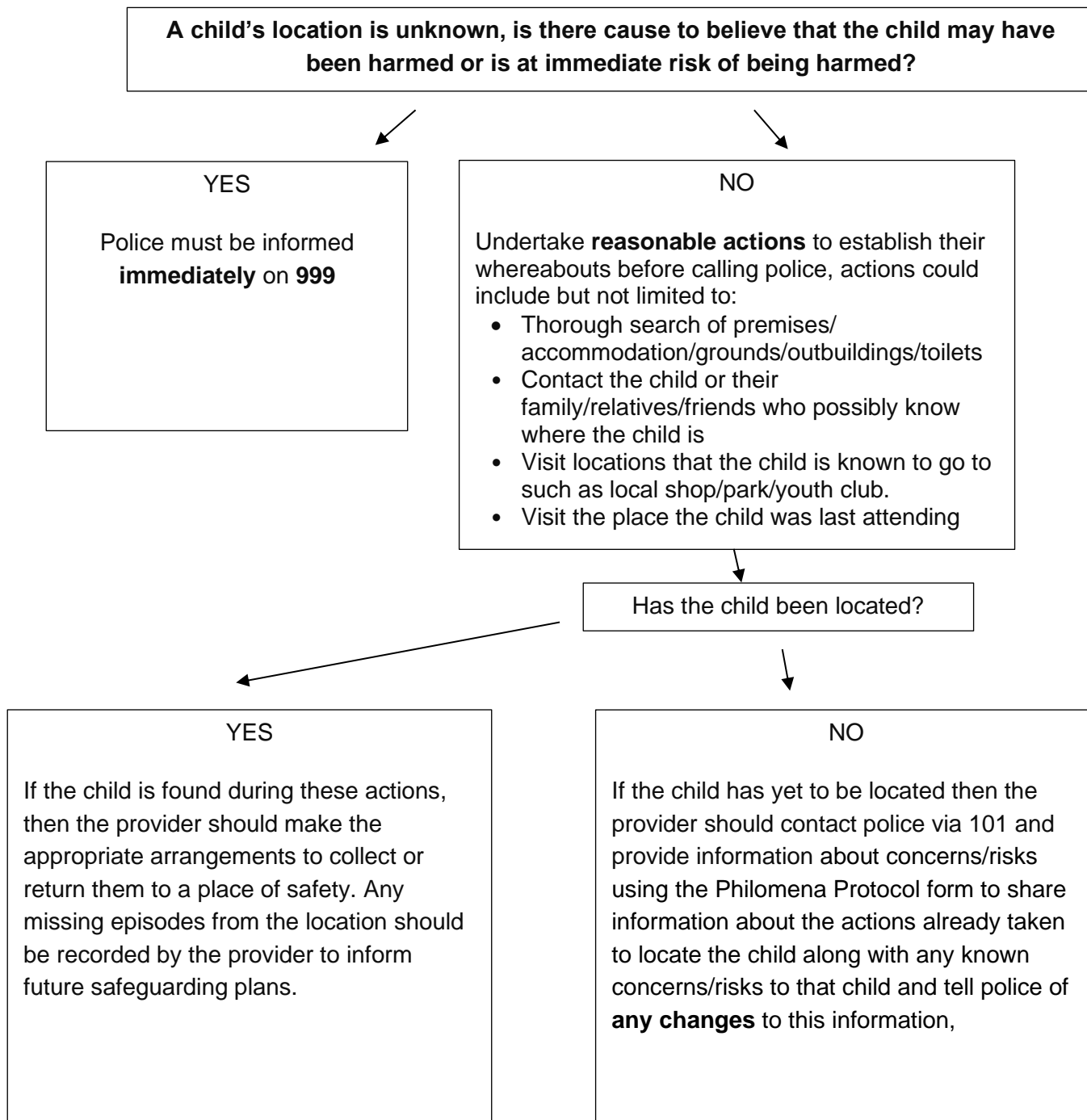
Criminal Exploitation of children is broader than just county lines and includes for instance children forced to work on cannabis farms or to commit theft. County Lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of “deal line”. In all cases, those exploiting the child have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources.

A common feature of Child Exploitation is that the child does not recognise the coercive nature of the relationship and does not see themselves as a victim of exploitation. A child who is identified as a repeat missing person and/or children considered to be at risk of exploitation should be referred to the Risk Management Meeting (RMM) at the relevant area. A Child Exploitation risk assessment will be completed by the social worker/ youth worker with help from the education provider or accommodation provider where required. Information should be shared between agencies in order to adequately prepare and implement a safeguarding plan for the child and to remove them from harm and reduce the likelihood of them being reported again as a missing person to police.

RMM's take place weekly in each of the four SCC social care areas. Jointly chaired by children's services and family services, the RMM provides a multi-agency forum with responsibility for assessing and reducing the risk of exploitation for children. These meetings will also include representatives from Surrey Police, Education and Health and any other agencies appropriate to the children being discussed. Each week, the RMM will consider new referrals with a view to agreeing a safety plan for the child. The RMM will allocate a lead agency with responsibilities for the implementation of an agreed safety plan. The RMM will review and assess the effectiveness of each safety plan and adapt interventions in accordance with changing risk/circumstances.



## Appendix A: Action flow chart



Once the child has been located .....

Have you updated the police to say they have been found? Has the child told you any information that is considered to be useful to the police? If yes please share by calling us on 101 or share intelligence using the Surrey Police **Partnership intelligence form**