

Missing Children

Children's Services Operational Instructions

About this document

Revision	Version 3
Implementation date	August 2019 (reviewed August 2022)
Review date	August 2024
Lead Director	Kathy Marriott, Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care
Head of Service	Chris Jackson
Policy Lead / Author	Chris Jackson and Jo Nash
Produced by	CSC Locality Social Work and Family Assessment

Target Audience

Children's Services Social Care and Early Help operational staff

Purpose of guidance

To define the processes for reporting children missing, including additional considerations for Looked After Children and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC).

Summary of review updates

- Clarifying procedures and joint working with Police
- Addition of MASH missing meetings and UASC
- November 2022 addition of: RHI for children placed in in-house residential care can be completed by residential worker



Contents

CTRL + click to follow link to the page you want to view

1. Scope	3
2. Guiding Principles	3
3. Links to Exploitation	4
Research, practice tools and training	5
4. Missing Procedures	5
Reporting a child missing	5
The role of Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)	5
Informing Social Workers - open cases	6
MASH missing meetings	6
Recording	7
Case recording ownership	8
Missing for 24 hours+	8
Looked After Children - actions	9
Return Home Interviews (RHI)	9
Responsibility for the RHI	9
The role of Police intelligence and data in targeting RHI's	10
5. Additional Considerations for LAC	10
Looked After Children missing for 24 hours+	10
Strategy Discussion - LAC	10
Long term missing - UASC	12
Secure Accommodation	12
Looked after children placed in children's homes	13
Appendix 1: Missing Children Timeline	15
Appendix 2: Police Reporting Procedure (Missing Children)	16
Before reporting a child missing to the Police	16
Reporting a child missing to the Police	17

1. Scope

1.1 These procedures relate to all children and young people. This includes those living at home and all Looked After Children who are looked after by ESCC, including those placed outside of ESCC. It also covers children who are living in East Sussex and who are the responsibility of Other Local Authorities (OLA's)

1.2 For Looked After children, these procedures relate to children who are the subject of:

- Police Powers of Protection, Section 46 Children Act 1989
- Emergency Protection Orders, Section 44 Children Act 1989
- Care Order, Section 31 Children Act 1989
- Interim Care Order, Section 38 Children Act 1989
- Section 20 Accommodated 1989 Children Act 1989
- Remands to Local Authority Accommodation; and
- Placement Order but not yet adopted under Section 52 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

2. Guiding Principles

2.1 When children or young people go missing their welfare and protection is paramount. There may be a variety of reasons why children/young people go missing, but they must be located as quickly as possible, returned to a safe place, and have a clear opportunity to say what made them go missing. Workers must listen to their reasons with respect and act accordingly, and then support the child/young person to minimise further missing episodes.

2.2 All appropriate information must be shared with Sussex Police and other professional agencies to facilitate the safe return of a child/young person.

2.3 Planning for the possibility of a child/young person going missing from home or care is essential and should form part of the Child's Plan if one is in place. This includes placement plans, Child in Need or Child Protection Plans. It is essential that concerns about a child or young person going missing are addressed in any assessment and plan. Early strategies, appropriate interventions and pro-active support from workers/carers should be in place to encourage children/young people not to go missing.

2.4 When children/young people are missing, professionals need to be careful about making judgements they are safe. No assumptions about safety must be made in the absence of clear verified information.

2.5 Children reported as missing to the Police will come to the attention of Children's Services. Police forces use a definition of 'missing' in relation to children and adults who are reported missing to the police as "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 others.”

2.6 Children’s Services will screen these episodes and they will be recorded on the Children’s Social Care case management system. All Child Plans and risk assessments should be regularly reviewed, updated, and recorded after any significant missing episode and should include the following:

- The degree and nature of risk and vulnerability if the child goes missing.
- The views of the child/young person and those with potential responsibility to be taken if the child/young person goes missing.
- Consideration of any external influences in a child/young person’s life.
- The likelihood of the child being harboured, any previous episodes, location frequented by the child/young person and trigger incidents.
- Agreed interventions.

2.7 For Looked after children the following should also be included:

- The level of supervision/support that care staff will provide for the child.
- How parents/carers and significant other family members will be informed if the child/young person goes missing

3. Links to Exploitation

3.1 There is a clear link between missing children/young people and increased risk of sexual and criminal exploitation. Workers must be alert to potential signs of sexual and criminal exploitation. The definitions below are from [Working Together 2018](#)

3.2 Child sexual abuse (CSA)

Involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing, and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet). Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

3.3 Child sexual exploitation (CSE)

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual 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 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 sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

3.4 Child criminal exploitation (CCE)

As set out in the [Serious Violence Strategy](#), published by the Home Office, where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or (c) through violence or the threat of violence. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child criminal exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

3.5 County Lines

As set out in the [Serious Violence Strategy](#), published by the Home Office, 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'. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money, and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons. The government has published [county lines guidance](#) for frontline staff who work with children, young people, and potentially vulnerable adults.

Research, practice tools and training

3.6 There is a wide range of information and resources for practitioners on the [CSE/CCE Research and practice tools](#) Single Source intranet pages. There is training available via [East Sussex Learning Portal](#) but practitioners should discuss with their manager and supervisor the most appropriate courses for their role.

4. Missing Procedures

Reporting a child missing

4.1 A Child should be reported to Sussex Police if they are missing by calling 101. The police reporting procedure is detailed in [Appendix 2](#). An overview of how missing cases are communicated to Children's Social Care and escalated is in the [missing children timeline Appendix 1](#).

4.2 If there are concerns as the child/young person's immediate safety, it is always appropriate to report the matter to Sussex Police immediately using 999.

The role of Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

4.3 All Missing Notification forms or Sussex Police reports, where a child/young person has gone missing, will be screened daily Monday to Friday inclusive. These reports will be jointly screened by MASH police and a qualified Senior

Social Worker in the MASH. That joint screen of each relevant report will include the following:

- Check whether the child is already open to Children's Social Care (CSC). If this is the case, then that information must be shared with the allocated social work team straight away.
- Form a view about the level of risk using the continuum of need framework
- Define appropriate actions to be taken. This is to include if it is necessary and proportionate for a Return Home Interview to be offered to the child and/or whether a discussion is required between MASH Practice Manager and Police Detective Sargent about whether threshold has been reached for a strategy discussion. This decision making should always include reference to the child's history, the circumstances of the missing/found episode and if an initial police safe and well check has already been completed.

4.4 All notifications must be taken seriously and recorded on the children's social care electronic recording system as a missing episode.

4.5 The MASH will hold responsibility for recording all missing episodes. If this relates to a child who is already open to another part of children's social care (locality children's social care, looked after child's teams, YOT or children's disability service) then the missing episode will still be allocated to a MASH caseworker although the information that will form the update to that missing episode will be provided to the MASH caseworker by the child's allocated social worker.

4.6 All cases of missing children, depending on the assessed level of risk, will be considered for a Strategy Discussion from Day 1 of the missing incident and every day they are known to be missing from that point.

Informing Social Workers - open cases

4.7 The allocated Social Worker and their Practice Manager will be notified if the case is already open to CSC. The police report or missing notification received will be sent directly to the allocated Social Worker and their Practice Manager (in cc) to prevent any delays. The information should be shared on the same working day as the information is received as a minimum expectation. If the child is open to another local authority living in East Sussex, the information must be shared with that Local Authority in the same way

MASH missing meetings

4.8 MASH teams hold regular weekly Missing Meetings throughout the week. These are attended by the

- MASH Practice Manager
- MASH case worker; and
- a representative from Sussex MASH police as appropriate.

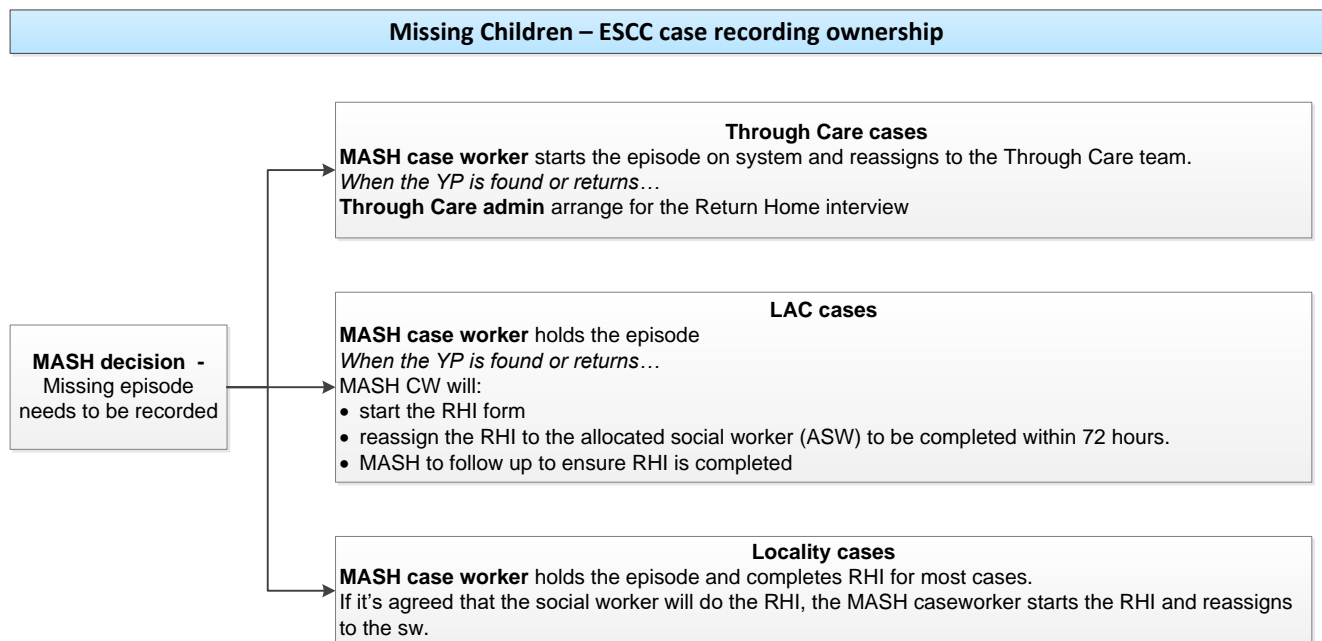
- 4.9 These meetings consider and review all children who have been missing since the last meeting. This includes other local authority children placed in East Sussex over the past 7 days. The meeting provides a safety net to ensure all risks to children who have gone missing have been picked up, assessed and appropriate safeguarding procedures have been followed.
- 4.10 At the meeting there will be explicit reference to the Power BI dashboard produced by Sussex Police. This provides a list of the children who have been most frequently recorded as missing in the past week and month. The Police use a rag rated system for those considered most at risk. Any child who appears on these lists should always be offered a Return Home Interview (RHI) irrespective of the circumstances of that missing episode.
- 4.11 The notes from the meeting are recorded on the LCS case note record for each child considered. These should include a list of any actions agreed with clear timescales.

Recording

- 4.12 [LiquidLogic guidance for Missing Children](#) gives step by step instructions on how to record missing children in LCS.
- 4.13 Missing Person notifications are sent to the MASH via the police. MASH will open an initial contact form in EHM and progress the case to a MASH Information Gathering episode (MIG). All missing notifications and reports are read and assessed daily Monday to Friday by MASH Senior Social Worker and Police.
- 4.14 Information recorded in the MIG form on Liquid Logic must include:
- Circumstances that led to the missing episode
 - History of missing incidents
 - Date and time missing
 - Any significant information
 - An analysis of risk and vulnerabilities
 - Any action taken
 - Has a strategy meeting been arranged?
 - Is there a media strategy in place?
- 4.15 The Head of Service (HoS) with case responsibility must be informed of all cases categorised as high risk on day 1 of missing episode. This includes any vulnerable child at home, looked after child and care leaver. The information recorded on the MIG and in the missing episode is needed to provide the HoS with the right information.

Case recording ownership

This workflow is not accessible. If you require an accessible version, please contact the document author.



Missing for 24 hours+

4.16 The allocated Social Worker and Practice Manager will continue reviewing and discussing cases involving missing incidents in collaboration with the police until the child is found or returns. However, if the child is missing for more than 24 hours, the Practice Manager will inform the following people:

- Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) if the child is looked after.
- Assistant Director if the child is looked after. A briefing summary should be prepared for elected members.
- Child Protection Chair and Head of Service if child is on a CP Plan or MACE Panel.

4.17 The Practice Manager will:

- Take the lead in coordinating an immediate safety plan with the Missing and Exploitation Police Team
- Inform the Head of Service
- Discuss the need for a potential s47 Strategy Meeting with the MASH Police Detective Sargent to agree further action to locate or see the child
- Prepare a plan for when the child is returned

4.18 All cases will be considered for a Strategy Discussion from Day 1 of the missing incident and every day they are known to be missing from that point.

Looked After Children - actions

- 4.19 The [Looked After Children missing for 24 hours+](#) has full details of actions required.

Return Home Interviews (RHI)

- 4.20 All children that are reported and recorded as missing and subsequently found must be offered a Return Home Interview (RHI). Exceptions to this are children that are:
- The responsibility of another Local Authority. In some cases, ESCC will agree to provide this service either because it is not practical for the responsible Local Authority to provide this due to geographical distance or because the risks to that child are immediate.
 - Cases assessed at a low level of risk and need ([level 1-2 Continuum of Need](#)). This may include when a child has been missing for a very short period without any other risk factors relating to the child's history, the response of the parent and outcome of the Police safe and well check.
 - Any child who appears on the most up to date Sussex Power BI list of the children who are most regularly missing or deemed to be at the highest level of risk should always be offered an RHI. This is irrespective of the level of risk for the most recent missing episode.
- 4.21 Return Home Interviews should be conducted within 72 hours of the child's return and aim to find out:
- why the young person went missing
 - what happened to them while they were away; and
 - what support they need to keep them safe and prevent them from going missing again.

Responsibility for the RHI

- 4.22 In all cases where the child is not already open to children's social care, the RHI will be completed by the MASH case worker. However, if the MASH case worker feels that another trusted adult is better placed to engage the child this is entirely appropriate and should be encouraged.
- 4.23 Where the child is already open to Children's Social Care the RHI should be offered to the child by the allocated Social Worker or another trusted adult such as teacher or youth worker. If the allocated Social Worker is unable to complete the RHI within the required 72 hours, then the allocated Social Worker or Practice Manager can request that the RHI be completed by a MASH Caseworker. This may be because of a Social Worker's annual leave or competing priorities.
- 4.24 For children placed in in-house residential care only the allocated Social Worker will agree with the child who they want to complete the RHI with when

they have been missing. The residential worker would be considered a trusted adult to complete the RHI with the child if this is agreed with them. In all cases it is essential that the child is making a proactive choice to have the RHI completed by their residential care worker. It must be clear they can request the RHI from another trusted adult at any time.

- 4.25 When children decline the offer of an RHI, consideration should be given to requesting a joint RHI by the Social Worker/Caseworker and the Police Missing and Exploitation Team Officer. When the risk is judged to be high a joint RHI should be considered even when the child has not given consent.

The role of Police intelligence and data in targeting RHI's

- 4.26 Sussex Police will share monthly Power BI data that shows children who have been most at risk from a missing perspective in the preceding month. Any child who appears on the monthly list should be offered a RHI irrespective of the circumstances of an individual missing episode. This decision should remain in place until the child no longer appears on the monthly police list.
- 4.27 The most recent monthly lists should be shared with all managers across the wider service. This allows managers to be aware of the children most frequently missing each month and those deemed to be at the highest degree of risk.

5. Additional Considerations for LAC

- 4.28 In most instances the procedures for reporting missing LAC children follow the standard processes above. In addition to the standard processes, the Head of Service with case responsibility must be informed of any vulnerable child who has gone missing who are
- at a home
 - looked after; or
 - care leaver.

Looked After Children missing for 24 hours+

- 4.29 **Head of Service** -If the child is looked after and has been missing for more than 24 hours, the HoS will immediately inform the Assistant Director and Head of Safeguarding by email and signpost to the missing episode, MIG or missing child form for full details.
- 4.30 **Assistant Director** - The Assistant Director must notify corporate parenting members, elected members for Children's Services, if a looked after child has been missing for 24 hours.

Strategy Discussion - LAC

- 4.31 A Strategy Discussion must be called to which the Police are invited for Looked After Children who have been missing for more than 24 hours. The

Strategy Discussion should take place within 72 hours for low and medium risk cases and within 24 hours for high risk cases.

- A judgement needs to be made regarding the timing in relation to attendance by key professionals.
- If the circumstances relating to a child/young person are particularly concerning, then an immediate Strategy Discussion should be convened.
- If the child/young person is found before the Strategy Meeting takes place, consideration must be given to the Strategy Meeting going ahead. This is so the circumstances relating to the child/young person's missing episode can still be discussed.

4.32 The Strategy Discussion needs to consider the following:

- Information relating to potential risk/harm
- Is the child at risk of child sexual and or criminal exploitation? If so a referral to the Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) Operational meeting should be actively considered using the relevant MACE Hub referral form. See [MACE Operational Instructions](#).
- At what stage publicity will be sought? This needs to be agreed by Head of Service.
- Information relating to possible locations where the child may be.
- What contact has there been with child/young person?
- A clear strategy for finding the child/young person.
- Any additional specific information which should be passed to other professionals.

4.33 The police representation at a strategy discussion where the child's missing status is a primary risk factor should be a member of the Sussex Police Missing and Exploitation Team rather than MASH Police. Although the joint decision making that a strategy discussion threshold has been reached still sits with the MASH Detective Sergeant and relevant Practice Manager.

4.34 All Strategy Discussions must have minutes recorded and agreed actions emailed to participants within 24 hours. The situation must be kept under review considering the level of risk. If the child is not found a Review Strategy Discussion must be arranged.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

4.35 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) are at high risk of trafficking and exploitation. There is a significant risk that UASC may be coerced or forced into leaving care. The risk that a young person may go missing from care is particularly high in the first 48 hours after they become looked after.

- 4.36 When UASC are received into local authority care, it is vital that their biometric information is taken by Border Force or the Police. The [Pan Sussex Safeguarding Procedures section 7.8.29](#) has links for the Op Innereste details of the Police response to new arrivals. Children's Social Care should also ensure that there is a current photograph available on the child's record.
- 4.37 In the first 2 weeks of placement a young person should be reported immediately that they are absent from placement. A strategy meeting should be held within 24 hours to ensure a timely response. Normal missing protocols should be followed after this.

Long term missing - UASC

- 4.38 It should be noted that most UASC arrive in the UK with no known contacts and no social history. This therefore limits the amount of information available to inform searches beyond the action plan agreed at the initial strategy meeting. Many UASC young people will be missing from care for months.
- 4.39 It is important that Social Workers keep in regular contact with Police and other professionals to monitor the progress of the missing investigation. A Review Strategy Meeting should be held monthly for the first 6 months. These meetings should be recorded on the young person's liquid logic record and include a plan for when they are found.
- 4.40 If there are concerns that the investigation relating to the missing young person is not progressing, it may be necessary for legal advice to be sought in relation to additional powers to compel the Police to carry out their investigation differently. This should be discussed between the Social Worker and Practice Manager. Any contact for legal advice should be agreed by the Operations Manager.

Secure Accommodation

- 4.41 Section 25 of the Children Act sets out the criteria, which must be met before a child can be placed in secure accommodation. It states that a child being looked after by the Local Authority may not be placed, and if placed, may not be kept in secure accommodation unless it appears:
- That he/she has a history of absconding and is likely to abscond from anything other than secure accommodation; and
 - If he/she absconds he/she is likely to suffer significant harm; or
 - If he/she is kept in anything other than secure accommodation he/she is likely to injure him / herself or other persons.
- 4.42 If the criteria are satisfied, there is a mandatory duty on the Court to make the Order. Children under the age of 13 cannot be placed in secure accommodation without the permission of the Department for Education.

- 4.43 A child/young person may be placed in secure accommodation for up to 72 hours without a Court Order. This can only be agreed at Assistant Director/Director level.
- 4.44 A court may make an order for up to a month or 3 months on a first application. These orders are a last resort and once made should only continue as is necessary and unavoidable.
- 4.45 The [secure accommodation operational instructions](#) gives full details about admission and review of children in secure accommodation.

Looked after children placed in children's homes

- 4.46 Looked after children who are placed in children's homes are subject to the [Children's Homes Regulations 2015](#). Under Regulation 40(4) the Registered Homes Manager must notify Ofsted and other relevant persons if one of the situations/serious events specified in the regulation occurs. Relevant people include Police, probation services, health professionals, Social Worker and others involved with the care and protection of the child. In addition, the Registered Homes Manager must also notify, as above, if there is an incident in relation to the protection, safeguarding or welfare of child living in the home which the registered person considers to be serious (40(4)(e)). Examples of incidents that are likely to be considered serious affecting the welfare of a child include:
- A child being the victim or perpetrator of a serious assault (this would include a sexual assault),
 - A serious illness or accident
 - A serious incident of self-harm
 - Serious concerns over a child's missing behaviour or where they have been missing for a considerable period and their whereabouts is unknown.
- 4.47 The registered homes manager must make the notification to Ofsted within 24 hours. The record must include a description of the action and the outcome of any resulting investigation. In relation to events and incidences to criminal and/or child sexual exploitation, this would include the outcomes of any strategy meetings, and actions put in place to reduce the risks of child exploitation.
- 4.48 As noted in the [missing children timeline](#), it is the primary responsibility of the Practice Manager responsible for the child to ensure safeguarding procedures are followed. However, the Registered Home Manager (RHM) should contact the MASH Practice Manager to discuss with them the need for a strategy discussion within the context of the serious event. This process supports the consistency and timeliness of response, particularly where incidents may have happened at night or over weekend. MASH will be well placed to consider the information held within a police report or missing notification forms.

4.49 For children placed in in-house residential care only the allocated Social Worker will agree with the child who they want to complete the RHI with when they have been missing. The residential worker would be considered a trusted adult to complete the RHI with the child if this is agreed with them. In all cases it is essential that the child is making a proactive choice to have the RHI completed by their residential care worker. It must be clear they can request the RHI from another trusted adult at any time.

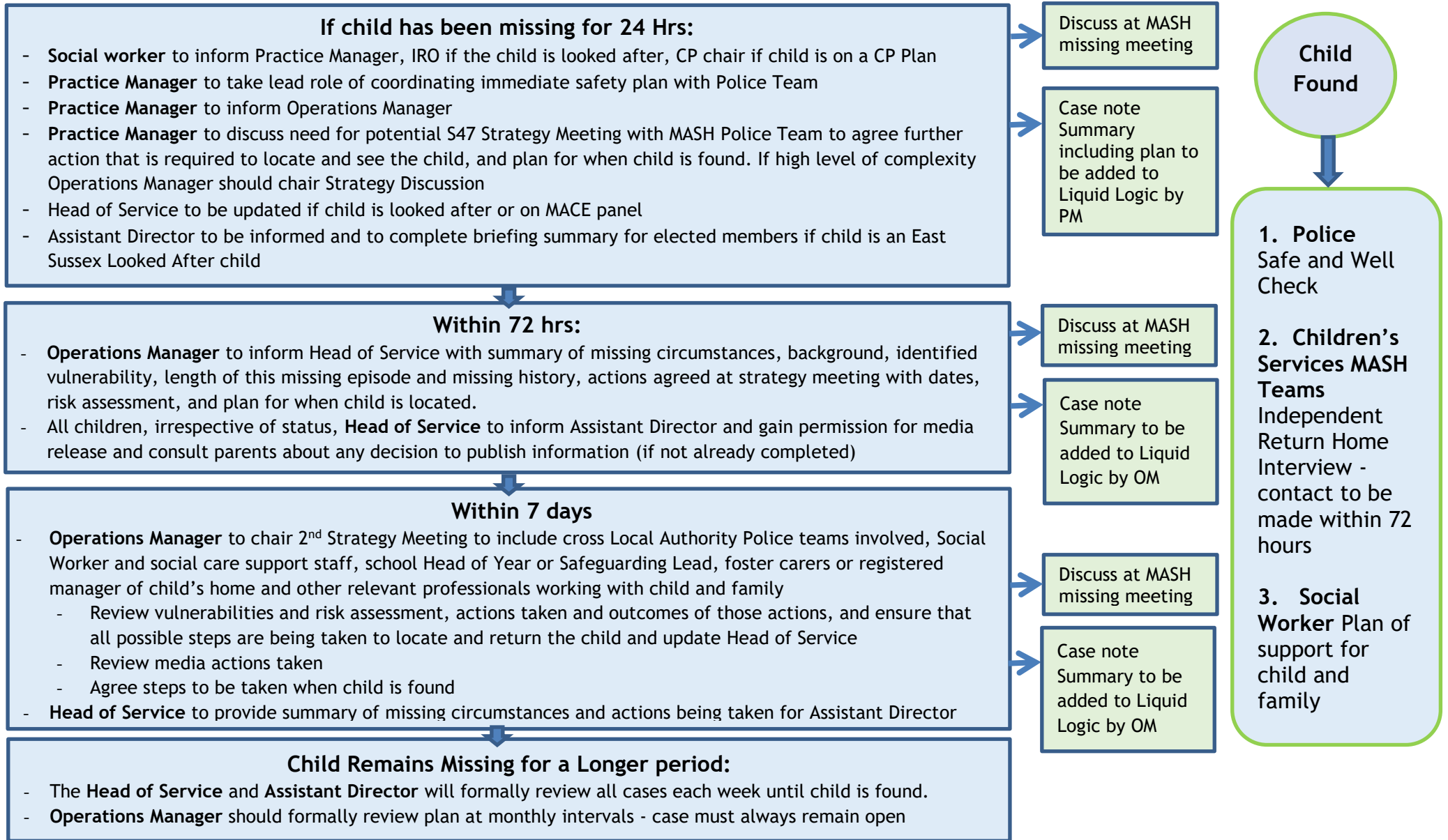
4.50 Other Local Authorities (LA) placing children in East Sussex must arrange for RHIs to be completed. Requests for these to be completed by East Sussex Children's Social Care on behalf of other LAs can be considered but there must be a clear reason for this. For example, the responsible LA not being able to safely deliver a RHI service to that child due to geographical distance. The children's home provider or foster carer should not complete RHIs on behalf of another LA. The East Sussex MASH practitioner will liaise with the responsible LA to

- share the details of the missing episode
- our initial judgement on the level of risk present; and
- to ask them to arrange for a RHI to be completed.

4.51 Any completed RHI assessment should then be shared with Sussex Police so that relevant local intelligence regarding possible exploitation is shared appropriately.

Appendix 1: Missing Children Timeline

This workflow is not accessible. If you require an accessible version, please contact the document author.

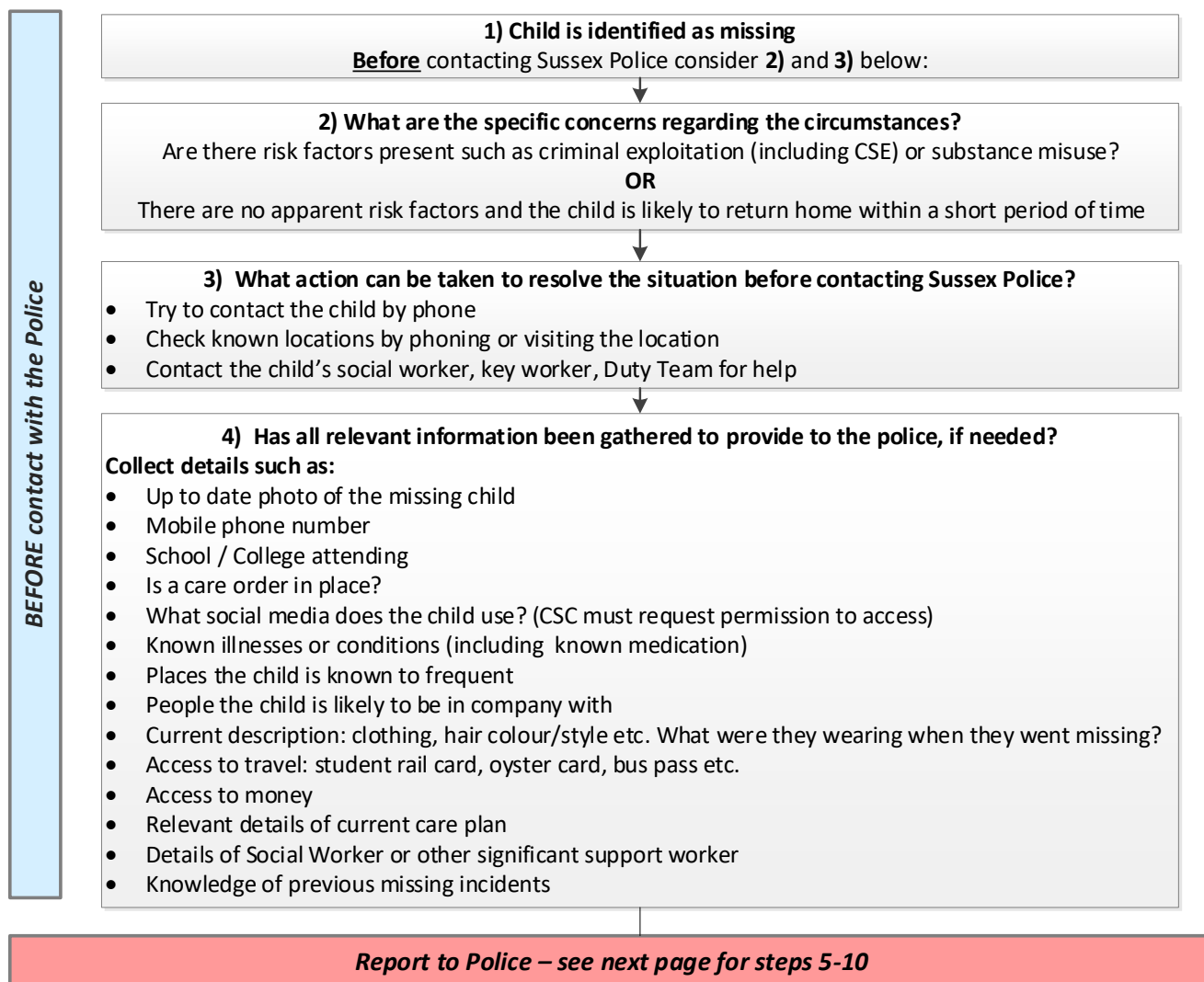


Appendix 2: Police Reporting Procedure (Missing Children)

Before reporting a child missing to the Police

This workflow is not accessible. If you require an accessible version, please contact the document author.

Missing Children - Police Reporting Procedure (before contact)



Reporting a child missing to the Police

This workflow is not accessible. If you require an accessible version, please contact the document author.

Missing Children - Police Reporting Procedure

