



Policy Status:	Safeguarding
Review Cycle:	1 yr

Review Date	Author	Changes Summary
August 2019	KB/ AB	Extracted from General Safeguarding Policy
February 2020	AB	Clearer definition of staff roles
February 2021	AB	Links to GM Policy and resources added Advocacy Service referenced
May 2022	AB/ TN	Refreshed with added section on Reporting and Monitoring
July 2023	ABall/TN/ABeacon	Refreshed language

Missing from Home Policy (Supported Housing)

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1. Context

This policy directs the work of the Manchester Settlement staff and volunteers that support referred young people to our targeted support projects, in particular, where young people reside in properties managed by the charity.

Currently the charity does not provide residential care for young people, our role is limited to the provision of support for a limited number of hours per week dependent upon the needs of the young person, but normally between 3 and 10 hours per week.

External references and resources

Greater Manchester Councils have adopted common procedures which are available [here](#).

[5.10.2 Children Missing from Home and Care - A Standardised Approach to Dealing with Missing and Absent Children and Young People Across Greater Manchester \(proceduresonline.com\)](#)

2. Key points about our services

- Our services do not provide direct 24 hour / 7-day access to support.
- Young people are all over the age of 16 and have freedom to make personal choices about how and where they live their lives.
- Our service users will be classed as children if they are under 18 and adults if they are over 18, with different applicable safeguarding local frameworks
- Differently commissioned support packages may have different expectations regarding the number of nights that a YP has to stay in the accommodation before rules are broken. These rules are not by definition related to an assessment of whether a YP is determined as missing from home.
- Individual risk assessments and support plans are maintained for each young person that will identify individual benchmarks for when a child/young person is classed as missing from home.

3. When is a Young Person Classed as Missing from Home - and how do we judge whether this is a matter of concern?

This will depend of the circumstances around the situation. From time to time a young person will decide to do something that isn't agreed but will feel that they want to do it anyway – examples of this are;

- Travelling to see friends in another town or City despite staff members/SWs raising concerns.
- Young people attending a concert/festival without permission.
- Staying away from home with a partner or friends.

This list is not exhaustive

Whilst we consider these situations unfortunate, they are often part of a young person's natural development as they mature into adulthood and pushing boundaries, we do not 'always' consider them to be a risk in themselves.

When this happens, Their named Housing Support Worker (HSW) will and must always update the responsible social worker, it may not always be appropriate to immediately contact the police and report the young person as a missing person.

The HSW should instead, seek to negotiate with the young person and the relevant social worker a return date or manner of regular and auditable contact until normal service resumes.

On return the HSW will need to negotiate a revised risk plan that the young person understands and agrees to in relation to the change in circumstances/known behaviour – all relevant changes are to be shared with the social worker and any other supporting agencies as soon as this can be arranged. Revised risk plans need to be approved by the Housing Support Manager.

We accept that cases like this are not always easy to risk assess. Where there is doubt that a young person has gone missing, is fully in control and happy to be away from his or her usual setting you must always assume that there could be potential harm or risk to that young person.

4. What might indicate a concern that the young person is at risk?

In a situation like this, it's incredibly difficult to pin point where a stage or change in behaviour could signal that a young person could be at risk, however, as a worker for the service you must always be vigilant and share any concerns or ideas with your line manager or wider team members so that this can be discussed and actioned accordingly.

- **Has something changed?**

This could be something small or significant. Clothing, friendships, books, ideology or programs a young person suddenly starts to be interested in. As part of your role and the work you do with a young person is to explore new development opportunities to aid confidence and maturity. This can expose different ideas and thinking for a young person, you will always have an understanding basic details in terms of each young person on your case load and you are expected monitor unexpected changes. Your role and commitment to our service require you to be vigilant so that you can offer appropriate support when required but in times of stress changes in behaviour, appearance or engagement can often be a clue if they later become MFH.

- **Client history**

Does the history tell us something about young person that could/would lead us to consider missing from home as a risk factor via friends, hobbies or other factors?

- **New information**

What's happening for the young person at the moment? Is there a health issue? Are they struggling at college or work? How is their general mood, mental health and/or well-being? Have they suddenly stopped communicating or become withdrawn?

- **Change in Status or bad news**

A lot of our young people have come to live with us after arriving from another country. Because of this they are required to seek permission live in Britain from the Home Office. As a staff member you will be aware that this process is a long and difficult one, incredibly traumatic for each young person – changes in Status and negative decisions can trigger missing from home incidents.

Where relevant, your risk assessment should reflect this along with the actions agreed with the young person and social workers to reduce likelihood and/or potential harm.

- **No indication/no identifiable clues**

It's important to recognise that a MFH occurrence can happen without any changes or clues being spotted. If this happens, we need to focus on the information we do have and try to ensure that we work together with all our partners to effectively support the young person home safely.

Risk assessments

Each risk assessment / support plan completed during a young person's journey with us looks to establish changes in a young person's behaviour.

In all cases the support worker will report and share information with all professionals linked to a young person's support as soon as it is possible. Partnership working is the most important tool you have to keeping a young person safe and happy in the service, this includes when they want to be somewhere different from where it's agreed they should be.

Social workers should be contacted, detailing as much information with dates and times promptly. If they are not available, contact their manager or the Duty team to share concerns.

5. Distinguishing between when they are 16/17 from those that are 18+

All cases for under 18yrs to be reported immediately to the police. You must not wait till the following morning if a young person is missing out of hours.

Cases over 18yrs - for immediate reporting to the police please consider the points above.

If a young person is over 18yrs and has failed to return home last night and you are unable to contact friends etc, a report to the police on 0161 872 5050 number is to be made detailing the details known to the service, missing items/clothing from the young person's room and any other information pertinent to the situation.

6. Our Approach to When Someone Is Missing

We define a young person as missing if we are advised that they have left the project and we cannot contact them within a reasonable time frame. Normally all of our young

people stay in regular contact and we can generally connect with them very easily - 'missing from home (MFM)' is not defined by hours but on circumstance and the information we hold about the case.

1. Immediate action is to call 101 and speak to the missing persons lead at the station 'if they are available'. You must report that they are supported by Manchester City Council (or other council) and are living in our accommodation as part of their support package. Give a full description of clothing, share a recent picture of young person from the file and advise an out of hours contact number and name for our service and the young person's SW details. A WFIN will be shared to link up the case and this will need to be shared with all relevant people when reporting/updating.
2. You must then contact the social worker and the lead team manager at the relevant SS office and advise details of when last seen, clothing we suspect they are wearing, any other important information such as the WFIN number (mood, up to date support plan actions if relevant to case, friendship groups, missing items from their room, money they may have etc.)
3. You must then complete a call to the social services duty team to advise of the situation and share the WFIN number in case they are contacted at night. You must also advise that there could be an out of hours call re the missing person and relevant MS contact details in or out of hours.
4. You must update our commissioned ranger service – tell them we have a missing person and at which house and that they are to check the property (you will need to advise the number of times and rough timings in between the visits), you will need to share details of the WFIN number, codes/keys to the property of relevant. Instructions to the ranger service in case the young person returns and what numbers to call etc.
5. Update other HSW in the team, the Housing Support Manager and Charity Designated Safeguarding Lead.
6. Where relevant – speak to young people within the same property, remind them the importance of keeping us in the loop with any information but to also reassure. Only need to know information to be shared but it's important that we stress the need for them to share any info, contact with friends to help if they can etc.
7. A daily call to the assigned police personnel to gain an update will be completed by you or another member of the housing team until the young person's safe return.

The above 7 actions are required in **all** cases of young persons under the age of 18yrs.

If a young person is over 18yrs the following actions must be completed.

1. The HSW should update colleagues and Manchester Settlement senior managers about last known sighting, mood, clothing, friendship groups, current support circ's must be shared.
2. The SW and duty team to be advised of the above and given details of an out of hours number to contact us on if the young person returns.
3. The ranger service to be updated of missing person team – we have a missing person at which house and that they are to check the property (you will need to advise the number of times and rough timings in between the visits), you will need to share details of the access codes/keys to the property of relevant. Instructions to the ranger service in case the young person returns and what numbers to call etc.
4. Dependent on the circumstances around the young person it may be decided that an immediate report to the police needs to be made directly by the HSW
Examples of this is;
Young person is extremely upset linked to a Home Office decision/Health matter and/or other

Young person is distressed linked to the end of a friendship/relationship

Young person has become estranged from friendship or acquaintances linked to money/substances and/or other

This list is not exhaustive

What actions do we take?

See above – once actions completed, we must continue to update all parties involved on a daily basis until the young person has returned.

Once a period on 7 day with no return or contact from the young person in terms of his/her safe whereabouts a (multi agency meeting) M.A.M must be called to ensure all relevant supporters of the young person are about to discuss the case and share any relevant information.

The MAM must be minuted and the minutes to the meeting must be shared within 7 days of the meeting with all participants with a copy kept for the young person's file. Timely meetings with all relevant partners will continue at timely intervals until the young person returns or his or her safe wellbeing has been ascertained.

7. What do we do to minimise risk of Missing from Home

Our current Application and Initial Risk Assessment makes specific reference to Missing from Home past history and this is to allow us to plan and support each young person if this is an identified risk.

If this is a regular risk, then the HSW, young person and social worker will develop an agreed risk plan which will detail triggers, preferred places to visit, links to other areas, friendship groups etc.

The plan will also detail the young person's preferred way to communicate in times of stress and agreed contact methods to let the team know that he/she is safe and well but not where they are expected to be.

The HSW will devise a more suitable number of ways to check in with the young person, it may be more than once per day and one connection may be face to face so that the staff member can offer support and reassurance or an opportunity to communicate in a relaxed manner rather than simply in a planned support meeting.

All partners supporting the young person will meet more regularly than the usual Manchester guidelines suggest. This is to ensure that we approach the MFH young person's needs in a holistic, co-ordinated manner.

Where weekend absconding is deemed a current or past risk – a bespoke out of hours contact process is put into place to allow the young person the opportunity to share concerns/ ideas and be seen at times outside the normal office hours.

To ensure that partners are in the loop with any information or potential changes, a 'round robin' email process is set up and this will be sent to all members on an at least bi-weekly basis. The email will contain up to date information linked to the young person, any appointments, stresses and/ or other so that support and updates can be quickly shared, commented on and actioned.

Where MFH has not been identified as a high risk, HSW are to support and offer a bespoke support plan in line with Manchester Settlement expected standards, this will continue until there is a change in circumstance/information to ensure that the support and level that it is offered and monitored in line with each young person's needs.

8. When a young person returns home.

It's important that when a young person returns home, as much effort goes into managing the identified risks and wellbeing now, he/she has returned home as went into planning and supporting them while they were away from home.

It's likely that the young person will feel strange, unsettled and may be unable to share feelings of frustration, anger and confusion with known staff members and others.

These feelings may manifest in behaviour not known to the service and it's important that you as the allocated worker monitors this carefully, taking time to support the young person to share feelings, information about where they have been and any risks they may have been exposed to at a pace and time frame that's right for them.

The HSW must ensure that all relevant, social workers, agencies and our GMP police contact are updated with as much information as possible in relation to the young person and their whereabouts.

If relevant, an appointment should be made with the young person GP for a health check – any important information should be shared in line with Manchester Settlements processes.

After a few days, when suitable, The HSW should look to update the young person risk assessment with the young person, exploring any changes and using that document to discuss plans and aspirations now they have returned.

All documentation should reflect the new information and any changes shared by the young person and supporting social workers/agencies.

The Housing Support Manager should sign off any updated risks.

9. Access to Children's Rights and Advocacy Services

In Manchester the Independent Return Interview is conducted by the Children's Society. Our staff teams should encourage all looked after children to take advantage of the service, and help to facilitate the meetings.

10. Recording and Monitoring

Records should be kept within the MIS system detailing all individual incidents of when individual young people go missing from the service. This information should be shared with the accommodating and local authority. MIS notes should be used with the work type labelled as Missing from Home (MFH) to enable monitoring of all incidents through data analysis.

Incidents of MFH will be monitored whilst they are live, led by the Housing Operations Manager or Registered Service Manager. Cases will be reviewed in the weekly team meetings to identify trend and service level actions, such as best practice, training needs, procedural developments.

Monitoring of MFH incidents and trends forms part of the regular reporting structures to accommodating and local authorities.