National Missing Persons Framework for Scotland

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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Ministerial Foreword

This Government's vision is to build a fairer Scotland where everyone feels included in our communities and we properly support our most vulnerable people.

Every year Police Scotland receive over 30,000 calls reporting people missing. Around two thirds of these are children and young people, who are especially vulnerable to harm and exploitation.

Among adults who go missing, there is a high prevalence of mental health problems – diagnosed and undiagnosed – meaning that this group is especially vulnerable too. Fortunately, the vast majority – 88% - of people who go missing are either contacted or returned safely to their homes within 48 hours. However, for others, the outcome is not so positive. Over 500 cases are open in Scotland of people who are classed as long-term missing – those who have not been seen for 28 days or more. For families and loved ones who hear nothing after all that time, the pain must seem unbearable.

Going missing is a clear sign that something is wrong in a person's life. For many, they are having problems at home, at school or at work. The evidence tells us that anyone can become vulnerable. Some of us may already know of people who have gone missing or who have seriously thought of running away from issues in their lives. In some cases, they could be our loved ones – but, in others, our friends, our neighbours or people we are aware of from our communities. That is why all of us should make missing people our business. We should all have a duty to look out for the most vulnerable in our communities.

Often the problems which lead to someone going missing can lead to a dangerous cycle of repeat incidents. It is important, therefore, that agencies join together to understand, and try to deal with, the issues which may be lying behind any individual case.

This Framework provides a basis for such an understanding. It is the first of its kind in Scotland and is founded on a close collaboration between the Scottish Government, Police Scotland, local authorities, NHSScotland and a number of third sector organisations, including the charity Missing People, Barnardo's and Shelter Scotland. These organisations all recognise that the issue requires a coherent, multi-agency response.

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For the first time, this Framework sets out the roles and responsibilities of the respective agencies, as well as key national objectives and supporting commitments on which to focus our efforts on missing people. There is already a wealth of good practice across Scotland – some of it, world-leading - and, through this Framework, we also want to ensure that this is shared consistently.

Our shared approach will not only ensure that we continue to have a hugely effective frontline response when someone goes missing but also that we are able to put in place measures to prevent people from going missing in the first place.

Ultimately, with this Framework, I believe that we will take a major step forward in our efforts to protect some of Scotland's most vulnerable individuals and ensure that families are supported.

Annabelle Ewing

Introduction

Over 30,000 episodes of people going missing are reported to Police Scotland every year. In 2015/16, that figure was 40,070.[1] For agencies dealing with missing people, this meant the police were receiving over 100 calls about missing people every day. Going missing exposes people to unnecessary risks; it impacts negatively on their health and wellbeing; and, in a small number of cases, it can lead to death. The impact of someone going missing can be devastating for families and friends who are often left in limbo, desperately waiting for news of their missing loved one.

Anyone can be affected by someone going missing. That is why agencies need to continue to work together to prevent people from going missing in the first place and to do their best to keep them safe from the potential risks they could be exposed to. However, it is also important that those who do go missing are located quickly and are given the support they need to allow them to return to their communities or to build new lives for themselves.

Almost 1 in 2 of all missing people reported have gone missing on one or more previous occasions.[1] Evidence suggests that, if agencies do not deliver successful interventions tailored to the needs of the individual, then he or she can find themselves locked into a pattern of behaviour where they are repeatedly going missing, which in turn can expose them to greater risk.

All individuals who go missing are at risk of harm. However, for some individuals, this harm can be exacerbated by their circumstances:

- Almost two thirds of people reported missing are children and young people, with many looked after in care or residential settings.[9] We know that children and young people are a particularly vulnerable group who are more likely to be subjected to exploitation while they are missing.[8]

- Similarly, adults with dementia, although only making up around 3% of the people who are reported missing, remain one of the most vulnerable groups.[9]

- Evidence suggests that up to 80% of adults who go missing have one or more mental health problems.[2]

The decision to go missing is not one that people take lightly and it is often an act of last resort in response to abuse, distress or desperation. Many people do not disappear by choice – including people with dementia who often go missing unintentionally and young people who are thrown out of their homes.

In some cases, missing adults may choose to start their lives again. They are, of course, perfectly within their rights to do that provided they are not engaged in any criminal activity. However, the evidence tells us that this is very rare and that the overwhelming majority of people who go missing are children, young people and vulnerable adults.

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The story around missing people is not all negative. Thanks to agencies – and their dedicated staff - working in a coordinated and cooperative way, the vast majority (88%) of those who have gone missing are found or return safely within 48 hours. This is a significant achievement and we should also recognise that there are numerous high quality services operating in this area.[9]

Our aim with this framework is to build on existing good work. We want to:

- **prevent people from going missing in the first place: and**

- **limit the harm associated with people going missing.**

This Framework is the first of its kind in Scotland. It sets out how organisations can play a positive role in meeting these aims by working together, and seeks to raise the profile of the issues connected with people going missing. It doesn't propose to change policy direction or create new systems alongside those that already exist. Rather, its purpose is to ensure that, by identifying successful practice, we adapt where necessary and increase the impact of our existing systems. It also sets out some organisational roles and responsibilities to deliver the best outcomes possible for missing people. As this is a joint Framework, it has been developed in close partnership with organisations and agencies working in this area.

Families, friends and communities can be confident that, when vulnerable people go missing in Scotland, the agencies responsible for finding them already work together to minimise the likelihood that they will come to harm. These same agencies are highly effective in resolving cases as quickly as possible and provide - or guide people to - specialist aftercare to support them and their families. However, to date, there has not been a unifying Framework such as this one to support agencies in co-ordinating that activity or a national aim to reduce the number of people going missing and limit the harm related to those that do.

To achieve its aims, this Framework will focus on four closely interconnected objectives:

- To introduce **preventative** measures to reduce the number of episodes of people going missing.

- To **respond** consistently and appropriately to missing persons episodes.

- To provide the best possible **support** to missing people and their families.

- To **protect** vulnerable people to reduce the risk of harm.

All four objectives are mutually supportive and are underpinned by a series of commitments. They are all targeted at the groups most likely to go missing – children and young people; vulnerable adults; and older people with dementia.

Missing people in Scotland

what can the evidence* tell us about missing people?

Over **30,000** missing calls are received by Police Scotland each year

However, **many missing people are never reported to the police**

62% missing investigations are for **children and young people**

who goes missing?

Almost **1 in 2** missing people have been missing previously

why do people go missing?

Missing people are often **distressed and vulnerable**, and going missing can be **a sign of harm**

An estimated **40%** of people with **dementia** will go missing

Up to **70%** of **sexually exploited young people** will runaway

80% Studies show that many adults who go missing have **mental health issues – up to 80%**

Going missing has a **serious impact on missing people and their families**.

what happens when people go missing?

Most missing people – 88% - **return or are found within 48 hours**

1 in 12 are **hurt** or **harmed**

1 in 250 are **found dead**

1 in 6 young people who are missing overnight **sleep rough or with strangers**

what works to support missing people?

Prevention planning can help reduce the risk of vulnerable people going missing

Providing **return discussions** to people who have been missing can help prevent repeat incidents

*The **data available is not definitive** and missing people is a **complex** and **wide-ranging** issue.

Background

To develop this Framework, the Scottish Government has convened and led a group of the main organisations involved in missing persons prevention, investigation and aftercare in Scotland. We know that no single organisation can deliver the best outcomes for missing people on its own. Therefore, we need to work in partnership and we need to identify and adapt best practice based on what we know works in Scotland, the rest of the UK and further afield. The Framework has also been produced through consultation and feedback from people who have gone missing. Their input has been vital.

Why have this Framework?

The Scottish Government continues to work with partners to develop and deliver far-reaching policies in relation to education, employment, mental health, children and families sexual exploitation and a range of other areas. These policies are already helping to address some of the difficult underlying issues which can lead to people going missing in the first place – yet, until now, no policy intervention has been targeted specifically for missing people.

In the absence of an overarching national framework, there has been a limited sharing of the excellent practice that has been developed locally. That is not a criticism of existing practice itself, rather, it is recognition that, by sharing this practice through a national framework and by creating a national shared aim, we will achieve better outcomes for people and their families across Scotland.

Many organisations are involved in work relating to missing people. Depending on the circumstances, these may include local authority social work departments, Police Scotland, housing providers, hospitals, care homes for the elderly, children's homes, schools, or a range of third sector organisations which support vulnerable people, communities and victims of crime. Our national overarching Framework will therefore allow organisations to work collectively to deliver our shared aim in practical ways.

Definition of a "missing person"

Through the development of this Framework, we have consulted on a national working definition of a missing person. The following definition has been developed with partners and is already proving to be of practical use in dealing with, and assessing, missing people:

A missing person is anyone whose whereabouts are unknown and:

- **Where the circumstances are out of character; or**

- **The context suggests the person may be subject to crime; or**

- **The person is at risk of harm to themselves or another**

Notably, this definition has recently been used for three Police Scotland pilot projects for:

- Adults who go missing from care settings.

- Looked After children who go missing from residential and foster care.

- Patients who go missing from NHS care.

Evidence from the projects that have been evaluated suggests that the definition has been effective in helping deal with missing persons and should be used to assess whether a person is missing from home, care or elsewhere.

## Risk Assessment – moving toward a consistent approach

It is, of course, vital to assess the level of risk involved when someone goes missing and to be able to communicate that to others. However, there are currently different methods of risk assessment being used around Scotland.

Therefore, to provide professionals working in different settings with a consistent definition of risk, this Framework proposes that a consistent 'low', 'medium' and 'high' approach is adopted across Scotland.

This approach has already been used by partners in recent pilots in care and NHS settings mentioned above, and evaluation has been positive. A more detailed guide to the 'low', 'medium' and 'high levels of risk can be found in **Annex C**.

Crucially, through this risk management process, agencies are able to recognise that all reports of missing people sit within a continuum of risk, ranging from relatively little risk through to high-risk cases which require immediate, concerted action from agencies. Reviewing risk levels remains important for all agencies involved to assess changing circumstances.
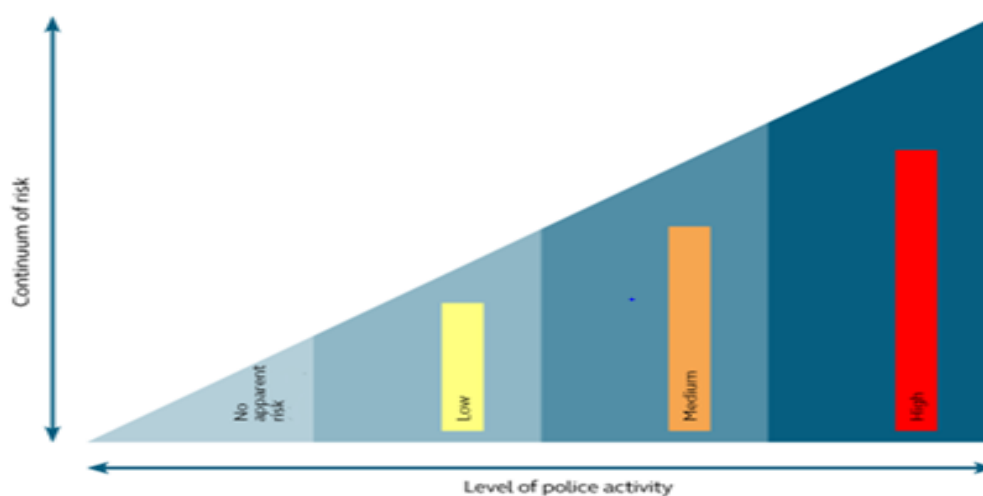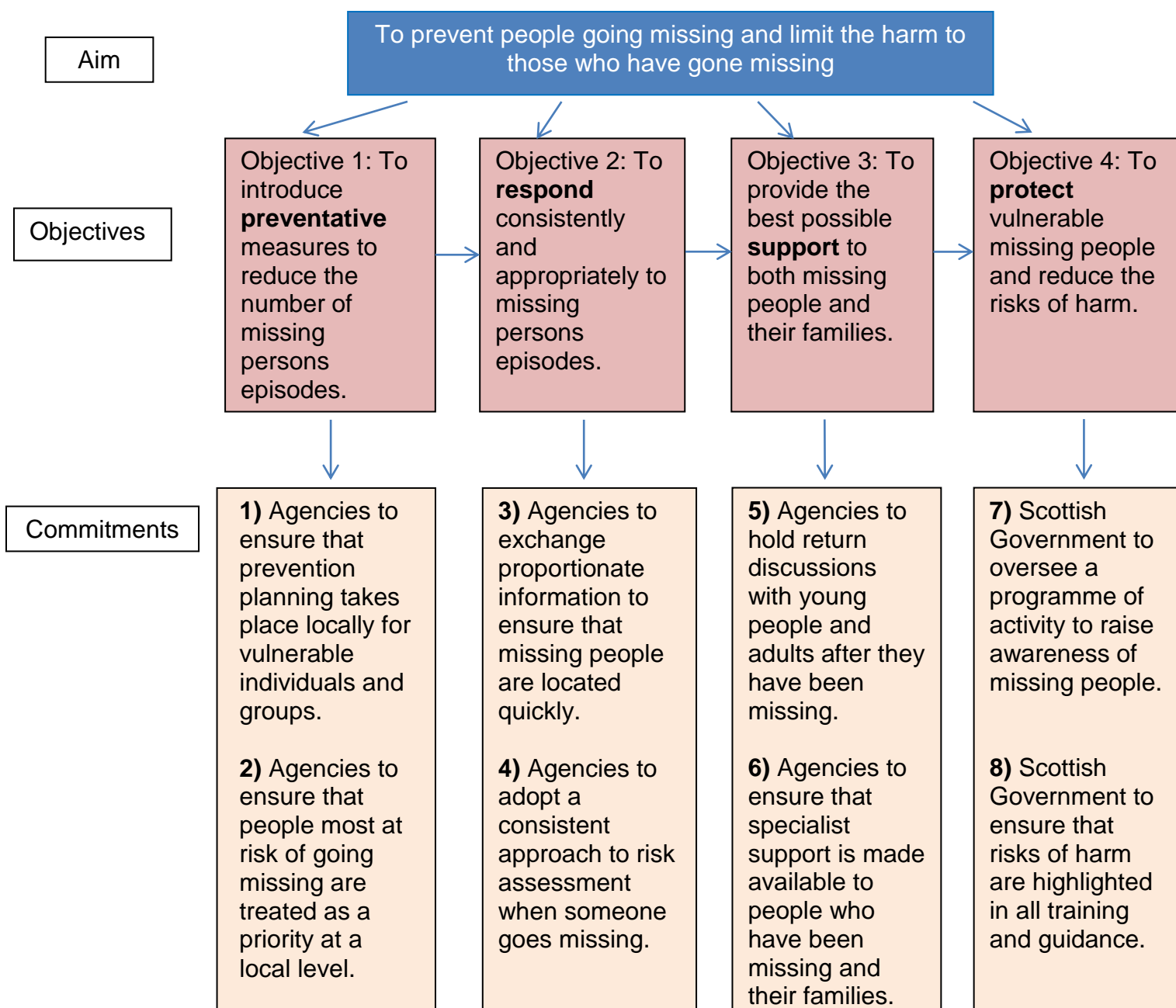
Objectives – Prevent, Respond, Support and Protect

NATIONAL MISSING PERSONS FRAMEWORK FOR SCOTLAND

As indicated above, the shared objectives of this Framework are as follows:

Aim	To prevent people going missing and limit the harm to those who have gone missing		

Objectives	Objective 1: To introduce **preventative** measures to reduce the number of missing persons episodes.	Objective 2: To **respond** consistently and appropriately to missing persons episodes.	Objective 3: To provide the best possible **support** to both missing people and their families.	Objective 4: To **protect** vulnerable missing people and reduce the risks of harm.

Commitments	**1)** Agencies to ensure that prevention planning takes place locally for vulnerable individuals and groups. **2)** Agencies to ensure that people most at risk of going missing are treated as a priority at a local level.	**3)** Agencies to exchange proportionate information to ensure that missing people are located quickly. **4)** Agencies to adopt a consistent approach to risk assessment when someone goes missing.	**5)** Agencies to hold return discussions with young people and adults after they have been missing. **6)** Agencies to ensure that specialist support is made available to people who have been missing and their families.	**7)** Scottish Government to oversee a programme of activity to raise awareness of missing people. **8)** Scottish Government to ensure that risks of harm are highlighted in all training and guidance.

These objectives are interlinking and support the overall aim of this Framework.

The **commitments** require action both nationally and locally. However, it is important to note that most – if not all – of this local activity should already be taking place through multi-agency partnerships. No new requirements are being placed on local authorities and their partners. Through this Framework, partnerships will be provided with a national focus for this activity sand a means to share best practice.

Progress toward the objectives will be assessed one year after the publication of the Framework.

Objective 1: Prevention

> *'I was only allowed half an hour time out from the ward. So I thought if I went down in my slippers, if I buggered off they wouldn't know I was gone and half an hour would give me a good start'* (Adam)*.*
> (all quotations are sourced via
> **http://www.geographiesofmissingpeople.org.uk/missingvoices**)[3]

Background

While each missing persons episode is unique, when grouped and analysed we can draw out some patterns. For example, the National Crime Agency's (NCA) analysis of UK missing persons episodes during 2015/16 shows that just under half of all cases reported to the police during the period were repeat episodes, and that children were more likely to go missing on multiple occasions.[1]

It follows, therefore, that awareness of these patterns would allow for practitioners to tailor specific interventions if, for example, young people were going missing repeatedly from one area or care facility, or adults were continually being reported missing from a hospital or, indeed, if a person is repeatedly being reported missing from their home. By understanding and addressing the reasons why a person goes missing – and identifying where they are more likely to go missing *from* -there is scope to prevent similar occurrences. We have to be aware that there are many reasons people can go missing and these include abuse and exploitation of children, young people and adults.

Prevention may take different forms, and be targeted at different groups. For example:

- For **elderly people with dementia** in care homes, it could involve taking additional, practical measures to help prevent at risk individuals from walking off the premises and getting lost.

- For **younger people at risk of going missing**, it could involve providing early third party mediation for them and their family to help defuse and find workable solutions to difficult circumstances before these reach a crisis point.

There is compelling evidence on the value of conducting a well-structured and reflective discussion with the person who has gone missing after they have returned (see Commitment 5). Typically, such a discussion would provide a safe and confidential space for the person to talk to a trained professional about any harm – physical or psychological - they have suffered while missing. It would also try to understand any underlying reasons explaining why they may have gone missing; identify options to prevent repeat instances; and provide information on how to stay safe should they feel they might be reaching a crisis point in future.

The information uncovered by these discussions can then be used, first and foremost, to protect the individual and prevent them from going missing again in the future.

As indicated above, a relatively small number of locations in each local authority area – and, typically, care homes or hospitals can see a disproportionately high number of missing persons incidents. This type of local knowledge is essential in allowing partners to build an understanding of where focus and resources can be best used to make a positive impact on the areas where there is the greatest need. The most effective tool in building this local knowledge is Police Scotland's National Missing Persons Database, which brings together information on missing people from across Scotland, and combines information held on specific geographic areas with local partner knowledge. Having this knowledge, local agencies can provide a range of practical preventative measures (see Commitment 3).

In order to provide greater intelligence and to focus activity locally, Police Scotland have been working with partners to deliver and test pilot protocols. These can be put in place to prevent missing persons episodes where, as evidence suggests, they are most likely to occur. The protocols can be used, for example, to inform local prevention plans for children and young people at risk of going missing from care; for patients at risk of going missing from NHS Scotland care; and for adults at risk of going missing from care home settings.

Commitment 1: Agencies to ensure that prevention planning takes place locally for vulnerable individuals and groups.

There are already a number of statutory frameworks to support vulnerable children and adults and we will ensure that, where appropriate, these support efforts directed at the prevention of missing persons.

Children and Young People

The Getting it Right for Every Child (GiRFEC) approach (and, when commenced, the relevant provisions in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014) will ensure that a single planning framework – a Child's Plan – will be available for children who require extra support that is not generally available to address a child or young person's needs and improve their wellbeing.

Where a child or young person is in care or has a care plan, evidence shows that better outcomes can be achieved when he or she is involved in their respective care plan. This allows the young person to feel greater ownership and understanding of why an action they may take will result in the care provider or parent taking subsequent decisions, such as reporting them missing to Police Scotland. 47% of children and young people missing in 2016/17 went missing from home.[9] Through this Framework, we will ensure that, where appropriate, all young people in care or who have a care plan and are at risk of going missing are involved in their respective care plans.

Vulnerable adults

When agencies undertake assessments of vulnerable adults and those at risk of harm, they should already be taking account of the potential for them going missing at some point and putting in place preventative measures where these are

appropriate. We know that this already happens across Scotland – and, through this Framework, we will ensure that good practice on this is shared from area to area.

Action:

- We will ensure that, where appropriate, responsible agencies will involve all young people in care or who have a care plan and are at risk of going missing in their respective care plans.

- We will ensure that, when agencies undertake assessments of vulnerable adults and those at risk of harm, these will take account of the potential for them going missing at some point and put in place preventative measures where these are appropriate.

Commitment 2: Agencies to ensure that people at risk of going missing are treated as a priority locally.

Through better data sharing and appropriate use of the intelligence held by a range of agencies, local multi-agency partnerships can build and maintain an oversight of the scale and nature of missing episodes in the local area. This will then inform required preventative activity.

Police Scotland data on missing people includes information on the location, time and circumstance of each case of a person going missing. Those who go missing do so at all times of the day, some go missing from education or health setting others from care or home. This can be combined with other sources such as local authorities' information on missing people from care homes, or third sector organisations' intelligence on un-reported missing people, in order to build a rich picture of who goes missing, from where, and why. Notably, the importance of taking such a partnership approach is already established by both Child and Adult Protection Guidance. Local circumstances will differ, but existing structures such as Community Planning Partnerships or Community Safety Partnerships might also provide a suitable forum for multi-agency working and sharing appropriate information on missing persons.

As a minimum, multi-agency partnerships should be doing the following:

- Developing local strategies for missing people.

- Liaising regularly with each other – bringing together Police Scotland's divisional missing persons lead with social work, child and adult protection committee leads, NHS Scotland, third sector partners, education and housing.

- Identifying a missing persons 'champion' within the partnership.

In most areas of the country, partnership working on missing persons is already very well developed. For example:

- **In Dundee** and **Perth** – there is strong, concerted and regular partnership working specific to missing people in both areas.
- **In Greater Glasgow** – community safety officers co-ordinate regular missing persons workshops for relevant partners.
- **In South Lanarkshire** – Police Scotland and Local Authority partnership working is ensuring weekly monitoring of missing persons issues and identifying patterns as they develop.

Development of local strategies should, of course, fit in with local priorities and structures. This flexibility will allow relationships to be built and result in local assessment, consideration and risk assessment taking place appropriately and efficiently. Responsibility will be shared and early indicators of risk can be flagged up from one agency to another highlighting that a person may be in need of support. This may be done in school for children and young people or at point of entry in a hospital or care facility.

Action:

- Through this Framework we will ensure that local multi-agency partnerships will work together to help children, young people and adults who are vulnerable or at risk of harm by:

    - establishing appropriate information sharing protocol;
    - developing local strategies to safeguard vulnerable people and
      prevent missing episodes;
    - Identify a missing persons 'champion' for the partnership.

'Prevention' objective – Roles and Responsibilities

The following sets out the roles and responsibilities for key partners based on the best practice that has been gathered

	May differ from area to area but will include a combination of lead departments from the agencies below to:
Local partnership	- Ensure that 'missing people' is a priority in local structures, for example in Community Planning Partnerships or Community Safety Partnerships. - Draw up and take forward local Missing Persons strategy. - Identify missing persons champion.
Local authorities	- Ensure assessment and prevention planning takes place for vulnerable children and adults in care and those living at home. - Agree local protocols with Police Scotland regarding children missing from care, and people with dementia going missing from care/community.
NHS Scotland Health Boards	- Ensure prevention planning takes place for patients at risk of going missing. - Agree local protocols on information sharing with Police Scotland.
Police Scotland	- Provide local analysis and data for partners about missing episodes. - Co-ordinate with local authorities, Health Boards and partners appropriate roll-out of pilot protocols, following evaluations, regarding children missing from care, NHS patients going missing, and people going missing from care homes.
Education	- Provide early identification of a person causing concern or showing signs of distress. - Ensure that the person is provided with specialist support, where appropriate.
Third Sector	Provide specialist support and share information with relevant agencies.

Objective 2: Respond

*"I was thinking "how long will it be before they report me missing?"
[…] I left there about half past one and my bus didn't leave till 6
o'clock and I'm not normally out all day so I thought they might think
something is up.* (Agnes)

*'I kept thinking if I go get on a bus somewhere half the buses now
have CCTV, so they'll know where I'm going. So that's why I started
walking. No one will know where I'm going, they can't follow me"*
(Trish).
(all quotations are sourced via
http://www.geographiesofmissingpeople.org.uk/missingvoices)[3]

Background

When someone goes missing, a judgement needs to be made about the most
appropriate way to respond. As indicated above, this is done by undertaking a risk
assessment. Police Scotland will make this assessment when a missing person is
initially reported to them using available, or lack of, evidence. If the missing person is
reported by an agency or care provider, the risk assessment will be undertaken in
partnership with that organisation so that together they can agree on the level of risk
there is to the individual. Good quality information about the missing individual is
therefore important in gauging the level of risk.

By setting out the respective roles and responsibilities of agencies when someone
goes missing, these protocols ensure that the potential for delay is minimised,
information is shared and the level of risk is established more quickly than it might
otherwise have been.

**Commitment 3: Agencies to exchange proportionate information to ensure that
missing people are located quickly.**

While the need for information sharing to effectively locate people who have gone
missing may seem self-evident, we need to recognise that we live in a society which
rightly places importance on safeguarding the data relating to us. Our laws restrict
the amount of information sharing we can do, and the circumstances in which we
can share that information. Our approach to locating missing people needs to centre
around the individual themselves and, while that is our aim, agencies need to
continue to share data responsibly.

Appropriate and proportionate information sharing is important in several respects; in
the handling of live cases by Police Scotland to build a picture of someone's history
and vulnerabilities; in understanding wider local patterns; and in safeguarding
someone who has been the victim of or is at risk of exploitation.

At present, missing persons episodes which are reported to the police generate a
'Risk and Concern' form, which is then shared with partners. A range of agencies
may hold important information which can be used to ensure an appropriate

response is made in the event someone goes missing. This might, for example, be about health issues, previous instances of a person going missing, or concerns about abuse or exploitation at home or elsewhere, which will have been captured in any prevention plan (see Commitment 1).

Children and Young People

When the relevant provisions are commenced, the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 will make a Named Person available to children and young people across Scotland from birth to age 18, or beyond if still in school. A Named Person is a central point of contact that children, young people and parents/carers can go to for advice, information and support. At present, Health Boards and Local authorities can make the Named Person service available on a policy basis-and, through this Framework, we will ensure practitioners consider whether they should pass information about missing children or young people to the Named Person, where doing so would support, promote or safeguard the child's wellbeing and where sharing this information is compatible with the Data Protection Act, Human Rights and the law on confidentiality.

Adults at Risk of Harm

With regard to adult support and protection, statutory duties also exist for specific agencies regarding the sharing of information about an adult who is 'known or believed' to be at risk of harm at home or elsewhere. Through this Framework, we will ensure that local partners continue to share information about vulnerable people to both safeguard and protect.

Action:

- We will ensure that practitioners consider whether information about missing children or young people should be passed to their Named Person where it would help to support, promote or safeguard their wellbeing.

- We will ensure that local partners agree information sharing protocols for missing persons.

Commitment 4: Agencies to adopt a consistent approach to risk assessment when someone goes missing.

To achieve consistency of approach across Scotland, the Framework proposes that the 'low' 'medium' and 'high' levels of risk outlined above (page 8) are adopted by all agencies. This will ensure a common understanding and agree a joint risk assessment across administrative boundaries where appropriate. A guide to the 'low' 'medium' and 'high' levels can be found in **Annex D.**

Action:

- Through this Framework, all the relevant agencies will adopt: (a) the national definition of a 'missing person' outlined above; and (b) the 'low' / 'medium' / 'high' definition of risk for missing people.

'Response' objective – Roles and Responsibilities

The following sets out the roles and responsibilities for key partners based on the best practice that has been gathered:

	May differ from area to area but will include a combination of lead departments from the agencies below to:
Local partnership	• Establish information sharing protocol/agreement. • Promotes common understanding of risk assessment across agencies.
Local authorities	• Agree information sharing protocol with partners. • Agree to work to single definition of missing persons with local partners. • Adopt common understanding of risk assessment.
NHS Health Boards	• Agree information sharing protocol with partners. • Agree to work to single definition of missing persons with local partners. • Adopt common understanding of risk assessment.
Police Scotland	• Agree information sharing protocol with partners. • Agree to work to single definition of missing persons with local partners. • Adopt common understanding of risk assessment.
Education	• Agree information sharing protocol with partners. • Agree to work to single definition of missing persons with local partners. • Adopt common understanding of risk assessment.
Third Sector	• Agree information sharing protocol with partners. • Agree to work to single definition of missing persons with local partners. • Adopt common understanding of risk assessment.

Objective 3: Support

> *He made it very easy for me to relax a little and talk to them and we spoke about other things that helped. I think that all has to contribute to my getting better'* (Sophie).
>
> *'Everybody wants you to explain yourself and I couldn't. For days afterwards I was still the same so, you know, it was on the verge sort of 'I can still walk out' I still threaten it'* (Trish).
> (all quotations are sourced via
> **http://www.geographiesofmissingpeople.org.uk/missingvoices**)[3]

Background

After a missing person has been located, the underlying causes which led the individual to going missing need to be identified and addressed. There may be multiple complex reasons which lead to an individual going missing and these issues do not simply disappear after a missing person has been located.[7] Individuals who return to circumstances which are unchanged from when they left, and where there is little prospect of them changing in the future, may be driven to further episodes of going missing and these will have a negative impact on them and their families.

Of course, in some cases, action to address those underlying issues will already be happening; a young person may already be under Child Protection Plan/supervision for example, or an adult may already be identified as at risk of harm under the Adult Support and Protection Act 2007. However, for other people, going missing may be the first indication that there are problems or vulnerabilities. In all circumstances, it is important that there is an opportunity to identify the issues, and then help or ensure people get the appropriate support or protection available. Those who are vulnerable in the community and without care or support around them are the most difficult to protect.

In the case of vulnerable children and young people, there are protections in the Children's Hearings System. Where the Reporter considers compulsory measures of supervision may be necessary to keep a child or young person safe, either from themselves or others, the child will be referred to the Children's Panel to make a decision on the most appropriate measures to be taken. In some circumstances, the risks associated with going missing may be the trigger which leads to the Hearings System being used.

The Hearings System can also authorise the use of secure care for the small number of children who present a high risk to themselves or others. The secure care criteria must be met and a child absconding is part of the criteria which indicates the level of risk presented. Professionals would make a judgment on whether a child who is missing should be considered to have absconded. The welfare of the child or young person must be the primary consideration and exploration of the current reasons for going missing should always take place.

All people who go missing are at risk of having to sleep rough - outdoors and exposed to the elements - or making other risky decisions about where to spend the night, (1 in 6 children who go missing overnight sleep rough or stay with a stranger and 1 in 3 adults who are missing overnight sleep rough). It is also consistently identified that young people who run away before they are sixteen years old are at high risk of homelessness and having housing problems later in life.[6] The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 provides local authorities with powers to provide short-term refuge for children or young people who appear to be at risk of harm and who request refuge. Some children and young people who are missing make confidential contact with ChildLine or Missing People's Runaway Helpline as an initial support. At present, there is no dedicated emergency accommodation available for young people in Scotland.

For the families of those who are missing, practical information is available from the National Missing Persons Bureau which has developed a range of factsheets. Missing People, the national charity dedicated to bringing missing children and adults back together with their families (see case study below) also provides support services across the UK including a free and confidential 24/7 helpline, and Police Scotland provides a single point of contact for families of a missing person.

Where an adult is missing for a long-time, there can be practical implications for family members, such as having to manage finances or mortgages. In Scotland, applications can be made to the courts to appoint a Judicial Factor 'in loco absentis' to provide control over the missing persons' affairs, including finances. These powers appear to be used very rarely. The Scottish Government is therefore currently reviewing the administrative options for handling missing persons' estates.

Commitment 5: Agencies to hold return discussions with young people and adults after they have been missing.

A return discussion can help to support a person following their return, provide a platform to identify underlying issues and obtain information that could prevent future missing episodes.

The purpose of a return discussion is to:
- support the individual who has gone missing and identify the underlying causes so that these can be addressed;
- provide an opportunity for them to talk about the circumstances that prompted them to go missing;
- provide an opportunity for them to talk about their experience when missing and their feelings following their return;
- use relevant information gathered to help prevent further missing episodes by;
  - determining any on-going risk of harm and relevant local risk information;
  - referring the individual to appropriate support services.

There is no set time for the discussion to occur but, when possible, first contact should be made within 72 hours, with the discussion taking place within one week, at a suitable time for the individual. The discussion should take place in a safe

environment with a trained professional of their choice when possible. It is important that a person who has been missing is given the opportunity to speak about it as soon as they are ready to do so.

Speaking and listening to people after they return is an important way of understanding the reasons they went missing and any harm they may have come to, or could still be at risk of. The most appropriate support can then be offered to the person. The information obtained can also help to inform the necessary steps or actions required to prevent a repeat incident.

The discussion may not be practical at the point of return; it can often be more useful for Police Scotland to conduct a brief 'safe and well' check and allow a return discussion to be followed up in the coming days when circumstances may be more appropriate for the individual. This should be seen as a process rather than a one off event. The person who has been missing may well be vulnerable and it's important that they have time and the opportunity to talk to a skilled professional.

The benefits of a return discussion are widely recognised. Currently, some form of return discussion is in place in all areas across Scotland. However, they vary substantially depending on local circumstances. Sometimes a local authority service such as Housing may carry out a discussion for its own purposes. In Aberdeen and Fife, Police Scotland has specialised officers whose role it is to carry out discussions and these officers have developed considerable expertise. In other areas, third sector organisations including Barnardo's and Shelter Scotland provide an interview service on behalf of Police Scotland and the local authority.

Discussions should generally respect the confidentiality of the adult or child who has been missing. However, information gathered during the discussion which could help safeguard the adult or child from any harm should be shared with the relevant agencies. Appropriate information sharing between partners may be necessary (sometimes required by law) to adequately support the individual, understand risk and prevent the person going missing in the future. This point should be discussed with the person at the beginning of any return discussion to ensure they understand why confidentiality may be broken and can give informed consent to sharing of relevant information. By having this conversation the professional allows the returned person to build trust.

An expert working group has coordinated the development of good practice guidance, including examples that draw out the areas key to providing successful return discussions (**Annex D**). The group was established at the recommendation of the national steering group and recommends that:

The return discussion should:

- Be available for all people (adults and children) who return from being missing in Scotland;

- Be conducted in person, where possible, by a trained professional/practitioner who is trusted by the person who has been missing;

- Happen at the most suitable and appropriate time in a safe and comfortable environment (ideally within one week with initial conduct occurring within 72 hours) for the individual after they have returned from going missing;

- Sensitively address confidentiality and what information may need to be passed on.

Aim to obtain:

- How the person is feeling;

- What he or she thought about their experience when missing;

- The reasons for going missing;

- What happened, including where they went, and who with;

- Whether any harm was experienced;

- What the person feels could help prevent them going missing again.

And inform:

- Additional help or support that may be helpful;

- Assessment of vulnerability;

- Care plan, if applicable;

- Local intelligence of potential risk factors.

Appropriate provision should be provided for all adults as well as children and young people. Support should be provided, for example, through the attendance of a caregiver or communication aids where appropriate, and a discussion held when the person is available to do so.

In many circumstances, the discussion can be done informally as a conversation between the person who has returned and a service provider they may already be engaged with, such as a social worker, a key worker in a care facility or a support worker from a third sector organisation. However in some instances the person may prefer to speak with someone else and should wherever possible be given this option as this is likely to increase the value of the discussion.'

In the absence of another service provider local provision for return discussions has been provided by Police Scotland, as the main responders to a reported missing person. Although, it is recognised that in some circumstances Police Scotland are not the ideal body to have responsibility for a return discussion, it is important that a missing person, when they return, has the opportunity to speak about their experience. The lead agency for a return discussion should be agreed locally within

each partnership group, including but not limited to local authorities, Police Scotland, Education, NHSScotland and Third Sector organisations, to identify local responsibility and ensure provision is available for all missing people.

A return discussion should be treated as essential following the return of a missing person. It is intended to identify support that may be required, understand the issues and reduce risk of future episodes. Those leading the return discussion should be trained and aware of the purpose and importance of the discussion and not approach it as a tick box exercise. Training is important for professionals and practitioners and the Scottish Government, along with partners, will develop a training package for conducting return discussions.

Appropriate and proportionate information gathered should be shared with the agencies concerned, including Police Scotland and the local authority, as agreed with the interviewee, and in line with information sharing protocols. Disclosures that are made about criminality or harm should be actioned accordingly and the individual should be made aware of this process and why it is necessary, both before the discussion begins and again at the conclusion to ensure understanding.

Where a referral is made for the person to receive further support or protection, the leading organisation, agreed within the local partnership, should follow this up to ensure action is being taken. This will develop good practice and allow local partnerships to measure the outcomes for people who have been missing following a return discussion.

When a referral is not deemed necessary, the returned person should still be signposted to more general support, for example Missing People or Runaway Helpline, Childline, Samaritans or alternative Third Sector organisations. They will therefore have the opportunity to further discuss the issues they are facing, or to reach out if they're thinking about going missing again.
If a discussion is declined, any reasons given should be recorded and the leading agency should consider if any change is needed to the return discussion process itself.

Action:

- Local partners to agree a consistent return discussion procedure for their area.
- Scottish Government, with partners, will develop training for return discussions.

Two Case Studies: Return Interviews

In **Aberdeen City, Police Scotland** has a dedicated return-interview officer who is based in a Community Safety Hub. The trained officer reviews missing person cases involving young people and identifies where a return interview is needed. The officer works out of uniform and arranges meetings in a location where the interviewee can be comfortable and best supported. She proactively provides support and builds relationships where possible, not only with the young person concerned, but directly with local care homes. As a result she has successfully broken down the barriers which can sometimes exist between young people and the police.

The **Safer Choices service in Renfrewshire** is a partnership established in 2012 between Barnardo's Scotland and Police Scotland to reduce episodes of young people going missing from home and care, and reduce the risk of sexual exploitation and other crime. The service provides a rapid response to problems such as disengagement from school and offending, and provides return interviews after a young person returns from being missing. The interviews identify the trigger points to help develop effective coping mechanisms. They also help young people manage risky situations identify the support available to them, and assess the risk of harm and the likelihood of any future episodes of going missing from home or care.

The impact has been a reduced frequency and duration of missing persons episodes, and an increase in young people's understanding of the risks and how to keep themselves safe. Barnardo's approach to return interviews is to ensure they are effective in both information gathering and providing an opportunity for the young person to talk about the circumstances of the missing episode from their own perspective.

Commitment 6: Support is made available to people who have been missing and their families.

When someone goes missing it is often not only the missing person who is affected. The families of missing people can face significant emotional turmoil and practical difficulties. Everyone who has a loved one go missing should be provided with some form of support. Police Scotland, as well as any other agencies involved with the missing person, should refer people to the appropriate services available.

Often there will be a range of local and national voluntary organisations that may be able to offer support to people with specific needs. People who have been missing and their families should be encouraged to contact these organisations. These include national services, such as Missing People or the Runaway Helpline,

Barnardo's, the Samaritans, ChildLine, ParentLine Scotland and Shelter Scotland. Police Scotland; for example, have been working with Missing People to promote the support that is available to families and friends of missing people.

Action:

- Through this Framework, all local multi-agency partnerships will draw in specialist expertise on missing people that is available locally and will build signposting to support services into their protocol.

Case Study: Missing People charity

When someone goes missing the families left behind face huge emotional turmoil. The national charity Missing People provide support to not only children and adults who are thinking of going, or who have gone missing, but also the families and friends of missing people.

"*The emotional turmoil of a child going missing is beyond words to express and I can only express what I have known. It goes without saying that anytime a family member mysteriously goes missing, it is unbearable for the family left behind.*"
Mother of a missing boy.

Missing People provides free, confidential 24/7 helplines offering practical and emotional support for missing children, adults and for the families left behind. All Missing People services are delivered by experienced and accredited staff and volunteers and can be accessed for free by calling or texting 116 000, or emailing 116000@missingpeople.org.uk . The charity provides a wide range of online information and guidance for missing people, for families left behind and for professionals at www.missingpeople.org.uk. The charity is also able to offer commissioned services such as return interviews, family support services and follow-up support for children and adults after a missing incident.

Missing People provides a publicity appeal service to gather vital information from the public when someone is missing and considered to be vulnerable. With consent from the family, they disseminate a tailored publicity which can be local, regional or across the whole UK appeal through 150,000 social media followers and other sources including national and local media partners, and a national network of digital advertising billboards. Police officers can request a publicity appeal through www.missingpeople.org.uk

'Support' objective – Roles and Responsibilities

Local partnership	**May differ from area to area but will include a combination of lead departments from the agencies below to:** • Work with partners to agree who will conduct return discussions from relevant setting in the local area. • Review local support services available and build reference file to refer and sign post when appropriate.
Scottish Government	• Work with partners around training for practitioners to conduct appropriate return discussions. • Work with partners to provide an evidence base for the Framework and the efficacy of return discussions. • Continue to support a legacy national working group to review the operation of guidance for missing persons in Scotland.
Local authorities	• Work with partners to ensure adults, children and young people receive an appropriate return discussion. • Review the provision of emergency accommodation and other therapeutic support.
NHS Health Boards	• Work with partners to ensure adults, children and young people in their care receive an appropriate return discussion. • Review the provision of emergency and other therapeutic support.
Police Scotland	• Work with partners to ensure adults, children and young people receive an appropriate return discussion.
Third Sector	• Work with partners to build awareness of support services available. • Work with partners to highlight support available to those affected by missing episodes.

Objective 4: Protect

> *'I got there they started to inhale heroin and I have never ever seen that before. I didn't know where I was, they locked the front door and they wouldn't let me out. Then I ended up jumping out the window trying to get away'* (Jasmine).
> (all quotations are sourced via
> **http://www.geographiesofmissingpeople.org.uk/missingvoices**)[3]

Background

The links between going missing and sexual exploitation, homelessness and abuse are widely recognised. Children and young people who go missing are at particular risk with 1 in 6, who slept rough or with strangers, experiencing sexual exploitation or serious violence, with an estimated 1 in 6 sleeping rough or with strangers, and 1 in 9 experiencing harm while missing.[8]

The Missing People charity provides a free, confidential 24/7 helpline offering practical and emotional support for missing children and adults (through the Runaway Helpline) and for the families left behind. The Scottish Government has funded Missing People from April 2016 and will continue to do so under the current round of funding until 2018.

The commitments below seek to ensure that the risks related to going missing are highlighted to professionals, those at most risk, and more widely to the public.

Commitment 7: Government to oversee a programme of activity to raise awareness of missing people.

To many, the high number of people going missing in Scotland is a surprise. There is also a relatively limited understanding of what going missing entails and the dangers that it can involve.

By raising the profile of missing persons, this Framework can help build a better awareness and understanding.

The Scottish Government will ensure that, where appropriate, messaging about missing persons is included in, for example, wider information in relation to sexual exploitation, or mental health. We will work to raise awareness of the issue and the development of knowledge around the risks of going missing.

Action:

- Through this Framework, the Scottish Government and partners will raise awareness of missing persons; the scale of the problem; and the risks associated with going missing.

Commitment 8: Government to ensure that risks of harm are highlighted in all relevant training and guidance.

There is already a wide range of existing relevant guidance and training for professionals, at both a national and local level. Recent national strategies and guidance (for example, Scotland's Dementia Strategy 2017-20; and the National Guidance for Child Protection have made the relevant links to going missing. Through this Framework, the Scottish Government will ensure that, where relevant, missing people are accounted for in future national strategies and approaches.

The Scottish Government will ensure that awareness raising about the risks of going missing is included in relevant national guidance.

Case Study: National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland – Children and Young People who are Missing

The National Child Protection Guidance sets out a national framework to help shape local child protection practices and procedures. It aims to improve the way all professionals and organisations work together to give children the protection they need, quickly and effectively at the earliest possible stage. It also highlights the shared responsibility agencies and services have for protecting children and safeguarding their welfare.

A section 618-625 of the guidance covers children missing from statutory services, home or from care, and describes their vulnerabilities and the possible causes of going missing. "Local areas should consider a strategic multi-agency collaborative framework, including relevant third sector agencies and independent schools, to support individual agency procedures for responding to, and tracking, missing children. Collaborative inter-agency and cross-boundary working is crucial in missing children situations. Guidance needs to be clear on specific procedures to be followed for those missing from home and those missing from care, as agencies have specific statutory responsibilities in respect of children missing from local authority care."

'Protect' objective – Roles and Responsibilities

Local partnership	• Identify opportunities for shared learning and training.
Scottish Government	• Ensure messages about the risks of going missing are included in relevant national guidance and strategies.
Local authorities	• Ensure messages about the risks of going missing are included in relevant local guidance and training.
NHS Scotland Health Boards	• Ensure messages about the risks of going missing are included in relevant guidance and training.
Police Scotland	• Ensure messages about the risks of going missing are included in relevant guidance and training.

Conclusion – supporting some of our most vulnerable people

Through this Framework, the Scottish Government is providing for a focus for all agencies with an interest in missing people to work together.

As noted above, it is the first of its kind in Scotland and is intended to provide a basis for all agencies to consider their role in supporting some of the most vulnerable people within our communities.

The Framework clarifies responsibilities and sets out a clear set of objectives and supporting commitments. It also includes and Implementation Plan (**Annex E**) and makes a commitment to review progress. Through this, it will improve the way we deal with the issue in Scotland and bring more consistency to bear on how we protect and support missing people and their families.

Ultimately, however, it will be for all of us to look out for vulnerable people in our communities. Whether they are our neighbours, our friends or people that we know of otherwise, we all have a duty to spot the signs and seek help for those who need it. This Government believes that if we do this, and our agencies continue to work together, we will be able to provide people at risk of going missing and their families with the help, protection and support that they deserve.

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Risk Assessment

When a person is reported missing, a risk assessment will be undertaken by Police Scotland and thereafter categorised as high, medium or low. This risk assessment will be carried out jointly with partners, when they are involved, to capture all information that will assist in determining the correct category of risk. Police officers have been issued with an aide memoire consisting of 21 questions to assist in determining the most appropriate risk category – the questions are produced below.

Missing Person Low Risk Status

Low Risk is deemed as any person that goes missing where there is low risk of harm to that person or others.

Missing Person Medium Risk Status

Medium Risk is a missing person that is likely to place themselves in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others.

Missing Person High Risk Status

High Risk is a missing person where the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the Missing Person:

1. Is in danger through their own vulnerability; and / or
2. May have been the victim of a serious crime; and / or
3. The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger.

The use of 'Absent' categorisation

There has been discussion about the use of the 'absent' categorisation in relation to instances where it is expected that the missing person – in practice, most usually a young person in care - goes missing but is expected to return unharmed after a short period. We are not proposing that this categorisation is adopted across Scotland at this time as it is important that any proposed changes are based on evidence, and we believe that further work is required into the effectiveness of this category.

Risk Assessment Determination

Vulnerability

1. Is there any identified risk of suicide?

2. What are these vulnerabilities?

3. What are the effects of failure to take medication that is not available to them?

4. Does the missing person have medical or mental health conditions, physical illnesses or disabilities?

5. Can the person interact safely with others when finding themselves in unfamiliar circumstances?

6. Is there a dependency on drugs, alcohol, medication or other substances?

7. Do the current/previous weather conditions present additional risk? Consider all circumstances including age & clothing.

Influences

8. Are there family/relationship problems or recent history of family conflict and/or abuse?

9. Are they the victim or perpetrator of domestic violence?

10. Is there an on-going personal issue linked to racial, sexual or any cultural issues?

11. Were they involved in a violent and/or hate crime incident prior to disappearance?

12. Are there any employment or financial problems?

13. Is forced marriage or 'honour' based violence an issue?

14. Are they the victim of sexual exploitation, human trafficking or prostitution? If so, is going missing likely to place them at risk of considerable harm.

Past Behaviour

Behaviour that is out of character is often a strong indicator of risk.

15. Are the circumstances of going missing different from normal behaviour patterns?

16. Is there a reason for the person to go missing?

17. Are there any indications that preparations have been made for absence?

18. What was the person intending to do when last seen? Did they fail to complete their intentions?

19. Has the person disappeared previously and were they exposed to harm on such occasions?

20. Is the missing person a risk to others? And in what way?

21. Are there other unlisted factors which the officer or supervisor considers relevant in the assessment of risk?

Return Discussion Best Practice

Introduction
After a missing person has been located the underlying causes need to be identified and addressed. There may be multiple complex reasons that lead to an individual going missing and these issues do not simply disappear after a missing person has been located. Individuals who return to circumstances that are unchanged from when they left may be at risk of harm, or may be driven to further incidents of going missing and these will have a negative impact on them and their families.

A return discussion with a person who has been missing is an opportunity to help and support them. It provides a platform to identify, recognise and acknowledge underlying issues so that these can be addressed in an appropriate way to prevent future missing episodes. It is essential to be aware of the fact that a missing person is a vulnerable individual and they may have been exposed to harm and exploitation while missing. Therefore all discussions need to be taken forward with tact and consideration. Current statistics from the National Crime Agency suggest that around one third of missing people have been missing previously.

WHO should be invited to participate in a discussion?
Ideally, a discussion should be available to everyone after being missing, whether from his or her own home or from a formal care setting. The appropriate agency interviewing should be identified by local partnership. If an initial discussion is declined further attempts should be made to engage the person. When declined the reasons for this should be recorded by the leading agency and where appropriate reviewed by that agency and with partners to identify any changes required to the discussion process.

WHAT is the purpose of a discussion?
The purpose of a return discussion is to:
- support the individual who has gone missing and identify the underlying causes so that these can be addressed;
- provide an opportunity for them to talk about the circumstances that prompted them to go missing;
- provide an opportunity for them to talk about their experience when missing and their feelings following their return;
- use relevant information gathered to help prevent further missing incidents for that person by;
  - determining any on-going risk of harm and relevant local risk information;
  - referring the individual to appropriate support services.

WHY hold a discussion?
There are many reasons to hold a discussion. These include, but are not limited to, obtaining information about:
- How the person is feeling;
- What he or she thought about their experience when missing;
- The reasons for going missing;

- What happened, including where they went, and who with;
- Whether any harm was experienced; and
- What could help prevent them going missing again.

This will help inform:

- Any additional help or support (referral) that may be required;
- Assessment of vulnerability;
- Care plan, if applicable;
- Local intelligence of potential risk factors, including exploitation.

Appropriate information sharing may be necessary between partners to adequately support, understand risk and prevent the person going missing in the future. This should be discussed with the person to ensure they understand why confidentiality cannot be unconditional and so they can provide consent to sharing of relevant information.

WHEN should a discussion take place?
There is no set time for the discussion to occur. Each missing person is different, their experience and reaction will be different, and some will need more time and space than others. When possible, first contact should be made within 72 hours of their return and the discussion should take place within one week and at a suitable time for the individual. It is important that a person who has been missing is given the opportunity to speak about it as soon as they are ready to do so.

WHERE should the discussion occur?
A return discussion should occur in an environment in which the individual feels safe with a trained professional or practitioner. This may, for instance, be in school or a neutral venue for a young person who is not comfortable speaking at their place of residence. Equally at home may be the most appropriate place. Each person who has been missing will have their own set of needs and allowing them to input where and when a discussion takes place can help to develop trust.

Local Practice
Provision and approach may differ based on the location and the needs identified for that area but the importance of agreed practice by local partners is paramount to ensure the discussions are:

- available to all,
- conducted, where possible, by a trained professional/practitioner,
- when appropriate, conducted by an interviewer who is trusted and who may have a relationship with the person who has been missing,
- able to sensitively address confidentiality and what information may need to be passed on.

Current practice has shown that engagement is often more positive when a positive relationship already exists. Allowing input from the person who has been missing into who they would like to speak with (or not) can help to avoid issues and increase the value of the discussion. In the absence of a relationship or care or support input with the person who has been missing, local partners should agree on who will be responsible for conducting a return discussion to ensure provision is available for everyone.

Interviewer Approach

Given the importance of the outcomes the interviewer should plan their approach to the discussion. It is good practice to speak with the person and explain the process beforehand. The reason for the discussion should be explained to the person before it begins as well as what will happen to the information they share. Information sharing should again be emphasised at the end of the discussion and consent obtained to share relevant information appropriately and any statutory duty to breach confidentiality is explained. Ideally, and if possible, the discussion should be informal and when vulnerabilities or needs are identified, support made available to the individual. If a referral is made for the person to receive further support the agreed leading organisation should follow this up to ensure action is being taken. This will develop good practice and allow local partnerships to measure the outcomes for people who have been missing following a return discussion.

NATIONAL MISSING PERSONS FRAMEWORK FOR SCOTLAND: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

National Multi-Agency Response					
Action	**Objective(s)**	**Delivery bodies**	**Framework Reference**	**Timescale**	**Comment**
1.1: Develop or strengthen local multi-agency partnership working in all 32 local authority areas across Scotland.	I. To ensure missing people are treated as a priority by all agencies. II. To establish appropriate information sharing protocols to effectively support work with missing people and those at risk of going missing. III. Development of strategies to safeguard vulnerable people and prevent missing episodes recognising that these strategies need to be tailored to respond to local circumstances. IV. Identify a missing persons 'champion' for each partnership.	All agencies working with missing persons including, but not limited to: • Local Authorities • Police Scotland • Education Services • NHS Scotland • Health Boards • Third Sector organisations	**Section:** Prevention **Commitment:** 2	Local partnerships in place with designated 'champion' by January 2018.	The Framework acknowledges the importance of the roles each agency has to safeguard vulnerable people. In each local area the development of multi-agency working focussed on the needs of individual missing people will improve partnerships and awareness of the vulnerability of being missing. Fulfilling this action will ensure that appropriate information sharing takes place to safeguard people who have gone missing and prevent people going missing in the first place.

| 1.2: All agencies adopt the national definition of missing persons and incorporate this into their work. | I. To support the building of a common understanding between all agencies so that language, jargon and terminology does not act as a barrier to working effectively and collaboratively for the benefit of missing people.

II. To have a single overarching definition which will form the basis for building a common understanding.

III. To achieve greater clarity when making an assessment on whether someone should be categorised as having gone missing. | All agencies working with missing persons including but not limited to:

• Police Scotland
• Education Services
• NHS Scotland
• Local Authorities
• Care Inspectorate
• Third Sector organisations | **Section:**
Introduction
Commitment:
4 | Agencies incorporated national definition by May 2018. | The definition is included within the Framework to create clarity and understanding between agencies. |

PREVENTION					
2.1: As part of the care plan for vulnerable children and adults, a risk assessment should be carried out to assess the likelihood of the individual going missing. Where appropriate, this assessment should recommend actions that can be taken to help to prevent the individual from going missing.	I. To identify those at risk of going missing as early as possible so that appropriate and constructive interventions can be made to prevent this wherever possible. II. To record information which may assist in the speedy location of a vulnerable individual if they do go missing. III. Reduce the overall risk of people going missing thereby improving the long-term outcomes for them by minimising their exposure to risk.	Agencies responsible for care plans with vulnerable children and adults including: • Care Inspectorate • Local Authority adult and child care and protection teams • NHS Scotland	**Section:** Prevention **Commitment:** 1	Processes for incorporating risk of going missing into care plans should be completed by May 2018.	Whilst we must find effective ways to ensure we are delivering the best outcomes for missing people, our ultimate goal must be to try and prevent people from going missing in the first place, and thereby ensuring that they do not become exposed to risks which could reduce their life outcomes. A preventative approach has to be centred on the individual to deliver person-centred planning, and we must maintain a focus on those most at risk – vulnerable children and adults. Safeguarding their wellbeing needs to continue to be built into existing frameworks and developed to improve outcomes wherever possible.

| 2.2: Development of our understanding of local issues and circumstances which may impact on people going missing through a multi-agency partnership approach to this issue. | I. To recognise that local factors, which are often difficult to recognise or understood when considering this issue from a national perspective, can have a major influence on an individual's decision to go missing, and to ensure these are identified and taken into account when considering appropriate support for a missing person.

II. To help understand the extent to which local circumstances influence an individual to go missing frequently or regularly.

III. To identify geographical areas where there are particular issues with missing people and how these could be addressed. | A leading organisation, possibly with an academic background, should collate all of the available data about missing people across Scotland and use this to develop the first reliable data on missing people across Scotland and the factors which may influence variance across the country.

Local organisations which can then use this data to improve local delivery include:

• Police Scotland

• Local authorities
• Third sector organisations | **Section:** Prevention
Commitment: 2 | Initial gathering of information and data analysis to be completed by January 2018. | We need to develop our understanding of missing people and why they go missing if we are to effectively prevent them or others from going missing in the future.

Specifically, we need to know why some locations appear to have a disproportionately high number of people going missing and whether the factors that have influenced this are common across the country or are entirely local – in other words, does a specific circumstance in one area have a negative impact in a specific area and not others?

Through building up local pictures of missing people we can both better understand the apparent discrepancies in levels of recorded missing events, build a better national picture based on this information and understand what works where and why. |

RESPOND					
3.1: All agencies develop and incorporate a standardised approach to risk assessment based on the terminology of 'low, medium and high' levels of risk.	I. To achieve a standardise approach to assessing and measuring risk which is appropriate and proportionate to the individual who has gone missing and the particular circumstances in which they went missing. II. To support the building of a common understanding between all agencies so that language, jargon and terminology does not act as a barrier to working effectively and collaboratively for the benefit of missing people. III. To ensure that an appropriate response can be developed to each missing person which is specifically tailored to them and their particular needs.	Police Scotland has a specific role in helping other agencies to develop their understanding of appropriate assessment and categorisation of risk to achieve a more uniform approach to risk assessment. All agencies working with missing persons have an interest including, but not limited to: • Education Services • NHS Scotland • Local Authorities • Care Inspectorate • Third Sector organisations	**Section:** Introduction **Commitment:** 4	Agencies to work with Police Scotland to develop a more standardised approach to risk assessment and incorporate this into their working practices by May 2018.	Directly linked to standardisation of missing persons definition is risk assessment. The effective assessment of potential risk is a critical element when managing missing person investigations. The Framework describes risk assessment levels used in Police Scotland pilots and proposes these are used by all agencies when assessing risk of a missing person to create clear understanding between agencies and ensure appropriate response to all missing persons.

3.2: Support the delivery of a multi-agency partnership approach through the development of an appropriate data sharing protocol, or strengthening of an existing data sharing protocol. Such protocols should be specific to each of the 32 local authority area partnerships and should seek to remove all restrictions which prevent effective working with missing people and those vulnerable to going missing.	I. To recognise that effective services and support can only be achieved if relevant information is shared between partners to allow them to work effectively together. II. To also recognise that data sharing has to be undertaken within the boundaries of appropriate legislation and therefore clear understanding of what can and cannot be shared between partners needs to be clearly understood. III. To ensure that there are no blockages or delays to sharing appropriate data between partners for the purpose of achieving the best outcomes for missing people and those at risk of going missing.	All partners in local multi-agency partnerships, including: • Local Authorities • Police Scotland • Education Services • NHS Scotland • Health Boards • Third Sector organisations Any other local agencies involved in the safeguarding of vulnerable people.	**Section:** Respond **Commitment:** 3	All 32 multi-agency partnerships to have protocols in place by May 2018.	Our approach to delivering positive outcomes for missing people and those at risk of going missing needs to centre around the individual themselves and to achieve this all agencies involved need to continue to share data responsibly with a view to ensuring that there are no hindrances to doing this which could negatively impact on the outcome for the individual. There is no doubt that appropriate information sharing helps to safeguard vulnerable people from going missing and ensures that they can be located as quickly as possible when they have gone missing.

3.3: A review of the outcomes of the three pilot projects run by Police Scotland needs to be undertaken and recommendations made on what learning could be applied either Scotland-wide or within individual local authority areas on an individual basis.	I. To achieve better outcomes for missing people we need to develop, adapt and implement the learning from different approaches that have been tried to support missing people and those at risk of going missing. II. This learning will help to ensure that appropriate responses are made to all instances of people going missing. III. Additionally, applying this learning across Scotland, whenever appropriate, will help us to achieve standardised delivery of service and bring everyone up to the standard of best practice.	Police Scotland should lead on the dissemination of information gathered through the pilots. Agencies involved in learning from the pilot evaluations include: • Local authorities • Care Inspectorate • NHS Scotland	**Section:** Prevention **Commitment:** 2	Information and learning from the pilots to be disseminated by May 2018.	Police Scotland has run three pilot schemes with partner agencies which have looked at missing people in relation to: • Looked after children that go missing from residential and foster care. • Patients who go missing from NHS care • Adults who go missing from carte settings. The learning from these pilots is being fully evaluated and will provide us with information on how we can improve services and support to deliver improved outcomes. The protocols used in these pilots should be discussed between Police Scotland and the relevant partners, based on the evaluations in each area, before increasing use or further implementation is agreed.

SUPPORT					
4.1: Ensure that return discussions are available for everyone who has been missing and returned, and that these are tailored to the individual and used to help prevent them from falling into a pattern of going missing repeatedly.	I. To provide appropriate support to the person who has been missing. II. To provide an opportunity for the person to talk about the circumstances that led to them going missing and their experience when missing, if they wish to do so. III. Identify the underlying causes or reasons why the person was missing. IV. Use the relevant information gathered to assess on-going risk and provide appropriate support services to prevent the individual from going missing again in the future.	All partners in Local Multi-agency partnerships, including but not limited to: • Local authorities • Police Scotland • Education services • NHS Scotland • Third sector organisations	**Section:** Support **Commitment:** 5	Return interviews should be available for all missing persons who return by May 2018.	The importance of return discussions cannot be stressed enough. These are absolutely central to preventing individuals from falling into patterns of repeatedly going missing. A return discussion, carried out by an appropriate person, can help to support an individual following their return, provide a platform to identify underlying issues and obtain information that could prevent future missing episodes or allow for quick location of that individual if they go missing again in the future. How, where and who conducts the return discussion will vary depending on the person who has been missing and lead agency agreement in the local area.

| 4.2: Local missing persons multi-agency partnerships agree a protocol for delivering return discussions. | I. To provide support to the person who has been missing.

II. To provide an opportunity for the person to talk about the circumstances that led to them going missing and their experience when missing.

III. To ensure a return discussion is available within one week with initial contact made with the person within 72 hours of their "return".

IV. To follow up when a referral is made for a person to ensure action is being taken. | All partners in Local Multi-agency partnerships, including but not limited to:

• Local authorities

• Police Scotland

• Education services

• NHS Scotland

• Third sector organisations | **Section:** Support
Commitment: 5 | Return interviews should be available for all missing persons who return by May 2018. | A return discussion should be treated as essential following the return of a missing person. It is intended to identify and help provide support that may be required, understand and reduce risk of future episodes.

However, it is also recognised that these have to be timed appropriately so that the individual does not feel forced into the discussion, and that it is carried out by an appropriate person who is known to and trusted by the individual.

Those leading the return discussion, as identified through the multi-agency partnership, should where possible be trained and aware of the purpose and importance of the discussion and further follow when required. |

			Section:		When someone goes missing
4.3: Support is made available to families of missing people.	I. To provide support to the families of people who are missing.	All partners in Local Multi-agency partnerships, including but not limited to: • Police Scotland • NHS Scotland • Third sector organisations It is likely that the provision of this support will depend on the circumstances of the missing individual.	Section:	All multi-partner agencies to have plans in place to provide this support by May 2018.	it is often not only them who are affected. The families of missing people can face significant emotional turmoil and practical difficulties. Everyone who has a loved one missing should be provided with some form of support, agencies involved should inform families where appropriate and further services are available.
			Support		
			Commitment		
			6		
**PROTECT**					
5.1: Raise awareness of the risks of going missing.	I. Improve awareness of risks of going missing both in education and outwith. II. Improve awareness of where help or support can be accessed aiming to reduce vulnerability.	The Scottish Government should lead on this supported by other agencies working in this field.	Section:	A plan for raising awareness should be in place by May 2018.	It is important that awareness is raised amongst vulnerable groups and those that support them about the risks of going missing, and that adults, children and young people are aware of how and where to access help and support.
			Protect		
			Commitment		
			7 & 8		

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT					
6.1: Develop training for those who will be delivering return discussions.	I. To build capacity and provision within agencies to conduct more effective return discussions and increase the standard of these across Scotland as a whole. II. Create opportunities for professionals to build their own skills by being able to obtain training to conduct return discussions. III. Standardise the approach and method of return discussion across Scotland to ensure that all delivery.	The Scottish Government could lead on the delivery of this by working with partner organisations which have expertise in this field.	**Section:** Support **Commitment** 5	Plans for the delivery of this training should be in place by January 2018.	It is important that return discussions are available for everyone who has been missing and returned to ensure that appropriate support can be provided. It would therefore be helpful to provide training for those who will be involved in conducting them to develop greater awareness of the importance of return discussion and to standardise the practice across the country.

6.2: Map multi-agency working across 32 local authorities and monitor the implementation of the National Framework.	I. To understand how agencies are working together across the country and whether the recommendations in the National Framework are helping to improve this. II. To provide opportunities for learning from good practice and support those working in this field to deliver continuous improvement based on that learning. III. To link work being delivered at local level within the 32 local authorities to the implementation of the National Framework.	This work should be led by the Scottish Government working closely with partner organisations including COSLA And Police Scotland.	**Section:**	A mapping and review plan should be ready by May 2018.	Work to support and protect missing people varies across the country and needs to be developed in response to local needs and circumstances. It is not only important to understand what works and does not work in different areas, but also important to understand how local good practice can be developed and adapted in different areas to improve the response to missing people.
			N/A		
			Commitment		
			N/A		

6.3: Educate children and young people about the risks of going missing.	I. Improve awareness among children and young people about the risks of going missing and the fact that there are services that they can turn to for support if they need them.	Education Scotland should lead on the development of this work to ensure it is appropriate for school-age children.	**Section:** Protect **Commitment:** 8	Plans for the development of appropriate materials which can be delivered in schools should be underway by May 2018.	It is important that awareness is raised amongst vulnerable groups and those that support them about the risks of running away, and that adults, children and young people are aware of how and where to access help. Such awareness raising has to be appropriate for the age group it is being delivered to and should also be compatible with national standards such as the Curriculum for Excellence and Getting it Right for Every Child.
6.4: Reviewing the administrative options for handling missing persons' estates.	I. Scottish Government to review administrative options for handling of missing persons estates to ensure that they are safeguarded until the return of the individual with a view to making the process as straightforward as possible while protecting the individual's rights.	This work may require some legislative changes and it is therefore appropriate for the Scottish Government to take this forward by seeking appropriate legal advice.	**Section:** Support **Commitment:** 6	An assessment of what changes are needed should be complete by May 2018.	Where an adult is missing for a long-time, there can be practical implications for family members, such as having to manage finances or mortgages. In Scotland, applications can be made to the courts to appoint a Judicial Factor 'in loco absentis', to provide control over the missing persons' affairs, including finances.

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