

SI0423

Missing Persons Investigations

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This Service Instruction provides detailed operational guidance on how the Police Service of Northern Ireland should investigate Missing Persons.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
1. Introduction	4
2. Objectives	5
3. Legal Basis	5
4. The definition of a Missing Person	9
5. Risk Assessments.....	10
6. Roles and Responsibilities	12
7. Return and Closure.....	23

Table of Appendices

Appendix A – Risk Assessment Considerations.....	27
Appendix B – Investigative Plan and Steps.....	31
Appendix C – Evidence Gathering.....	35
Appendix D – Search.....	37
Appendix E - Circulation of Details / Alerts / Cancellations.....	40
Appendix F - Sightings.....	42
Appendix G – Family Engagement and Communication	43
Appendix H – Immediate safe and well check / Return Home and Safeguarding Discussion	45
Appendix I – Linked Exploitation and Crime.....	47
Appendix J - Patients who Absent Themselves / Escape Detention.....	49
Appendix K - Persons Lost at Sea (and other defined bodies of water).....	50
Appendix L – Transferring / Receiving a Missing Person to / from another UK Police Service or Requesting / Receiving a tasking.....	56
Appendix M - International Investigations	59
Appendix N – Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Undocumented Migrants	64
Appendix O - Unidentified Body or Body Part/s.....	66
Appendix P - Working with Other Agencies.....	68
Appendix Q - Records Management.....	70
Appendix R - Contact Us	71

1. Introduction

Missing Person investigations should be regarded as a high risk area of policing and given appropriate levels of priority and resources. A Missing Person investigation has the potential to become a Critical Incident.

Missing Person investigations are also listed as one of the College of Policing's key strands of vulnerability rated risks, as vulnerability related demand has increased for police.

All police involved in the investigation of a Missing Person, whatever part they play, should give it their full attention, and complete the relevant documentation correctly and comprehensively giving a full description of all their actions, in accordance with this Service Instruction on Missing Persons investigations.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) has adopted The National Decision Model (NDM). Use of the NDM should be considered throughout any Missing Person investigation. Additional guidance can be accessed at: [National Decision Model](#).

Missing Person investigations encompass a wide range of circumstances including being lost due to being disorientated, or from the effects of Dementia. However, when a person goes missing, they can be doing so for a reason – the *push /pull factors* – something within their life that they are trying to escape or resolve by removing themselves, *or* something external that is pulling them away from their home environment. Being reported missing is generally a consequence, symptom, indicator of another problem, or vulnerability. Such incidents may lead to uncovering exploitative and criminal behaviour against vulnerable children, young people and adults.

Understanding the circumstances as to why a person goes missing can create an opportunity for police and other relevant agencies to identify intervention and safeguarding measures that can stop or minimise further disappearances, and assist in the identification and investigation of linked crimes.

A Missing Person investigation may also be the first stage in a serious crime investigation of which all officers involved should be cognizant. A number of high

profile murders within recent years in Northern Ireland started as a Missing Person investigation.

However, it should also be noted that for an adult to go missing is not a crime, and Police are not a tracing service for relatives or friends who have simply lost contact with someone. Any Missing Person investigation needs to be carefully balanced with the right to private and family life (Article 8, Schedule 1, Part 1, Human Rights Act 1998), as due to their very nature can involve a considerable intrusion into these areas.

2. Objectives

This Service Instruction sets out the minimum standard expected in investigating reports of Missing Persons. Investigating and recording Missing Person reports effectively will ensure that solid foundations are laid should a criminal investigation follow.

3. Legal Basis

Human Rights Act

The Human Rights Act (HRA) 1998 places a positive obligation on police Officers to take reasonable action within their powers, to safeguard the rights of individuals who may be at risk. Those rights found in Schedule 1, Part 1, that may be relevant to missing persons are:

- The right to life (Article 2);
- The right not to be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Article 3);
- The right to prohibition of slavery and forced labour (Article 4);
- The right to respect for private and family life (Article 8).

PSNI Code of Ethics

Article 1 (relating to Professional Duty) of the PSNI Code of Ethics (2008) outlines the ethical standards expected of police officers in conducting their duties.

Legislation

The general duties of the police are set out in [Section 32\(1\) of the Police \(Northern Ireland\) Act 2000](#):

“It shall be the general duty of Police Officers:

- (a) To protect life and property;
- (b) To preserve order;
- (c) To prevent the commission of offences;
- (d) When an offence has been committed, to take measures to bring the offender to justice.”

Section 32 (1) (a) sets out a general duty on police to protect life. This can require a positive police action in relation to Missing Persons in certain cases. While police do not owe a general duty to protect life in all circumstances once police receive and accept an individual Missing Person report they could be considered to have assumed a duty of care towards the Missing Person and need to take reasonable steps to mitigate the risk. At this stage the reporting person may be considered to be reliant upon the specialist skills that police possess in regards to locating a missing person and police have undertaken to apply those specialist skills. Throughout the course of a Missing Person investigation police should be clear on what activities they are agreeing to undertake,

and carefully document the level of any shared responsibilities.

An assessment of reasonableness in relation to the scope of those activities will likely consider what is known about the circumstances, risk, and whether obvious and proportionate lines of enquiry have been followed. Any steps taken by police to discharge themselves of a duty of care should be documented and the rationale provided.

For more information see:

- *Capital & Counties PLC v. Hampshire County Council* [1997] EWCA Civ 3091;
- *Kent V. Griffiths (No.3)* [2000] 2 WLR 1158;
- *Sherratt V. GMP* [2018] EWHC 1746 (QB).

Human Rights Act

Schedule 1, Part 1, Article 2 of the Human Rights Act 1998 further sets out that everyone’s life shall be protected by law. It is often referred to as the “positive obligation” and looked at in conjunction with the “Osman ruling”. One aspect of the right to life is that it requires the State to take feasible operational measures within

its power to avert a real and immediate threat to life of which it was, or should have been, aware.

In *Osman v. the United Kingdom* (judgment of ECtHR 28 October 1998), the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) held that the obligation to protect life arises where “the authorities knew or ought to have known at the time of a **real and immediate** risk to the life of an identified individual or individuals from the criminal acts of a third party.” The question then arises, whether the authorities took measures within the scope of their powers, which might have been expected to avoid such a risk (*Osman*, paragraph 116).

‘Real and Immediate’

The leading case concerning a ‘**real and immediate**’ threat is [Officer ‘L’, United Kingdom House of Lords \(2007\)](#). In this case the House of Lords said that a real and immediate threat is one that is:

- (a) “Objectively verified; and
- (b) Present and continuing. The threshold is a high one and will require an objective basis of specific risks or threats. In making this

assessment, Police Officers should consider all relevant sources of information and ensure that all decisions are justified and recorded.”

In the context of missing persons, it would be necessary for there to be information that the person is under a real and immediate threat or risk of serious injury or death when applying this wording.

‘Feasible Operational Steps’

In the event that it is established that a real and immediate threat exists, the next issue is what, if anything, the police are required to do. The legal requirement is for the police to take measures within the scope of their powers which, judged reasonably, might have been expected to avoid the risk to life. Accurate and detailed recording of relevant decisions and the decision-making process can assist in this regard.

It is not possible to give definitive advice, which would cover every situation. The options set out in this Service Instruction should assist in ensuring that lawful and defensible decisions and actions are taken in-line with the legally defined terminology.

European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) rulings directly applicable to Missing Person Investigations

In [Lazarov v. Bulgaria](#) (judgment of 26 August 2014), the ECtHR held that the positive obligation to protect life can extend to vulnerable persons in the care of the State. In this case, a schizophrenic female detained in a secure institution was able to leave the premises due to a gate being left open, and was reported as a Missing Person. The female was located deceased a few weeks later. This greater obligation was triggered because the person had been assessed as vulnerable and was detained. This creates a similar obligation to care as those in police custody.

In [Dodov v. Bulgaria](#) (judgment of 17 January 2008), a person suffering from Alzheimer's disease was able to leave a secure home, despite orders that she should not be left alone. Police efforts to find her (involving discussions with staff at the home and basic checks of the general area), although ultimately unsuccessful, were deemed to be in compliance with the positive obligation under Article 2 (Schedule 1, Part 1, HRA 1998).

In [Gonçalves Monteiro v. Portugal](#) (judgment of 15 June 2022), an 18-year-old

school girl who suffered from schizophrenia had been dropped off by her mother at the school bus, but never returned home. She had no longer been taking the medication that enabled her to live a stable life and avert the threat of suicide. The Court found that the police measures taken to try and locate the Missing Person, which included some physical searches, interviewing witnesses, CCTV checks and TLU enquiries, had been appropriate to the circumstances of her initial disappearance. The body of the 18-year-old school girl has not been recovered, and she is presumed dead by the Court. The court drew the distinction between the disappearance and the death. The Court deemed the police had failed to carry out a prompt and effective investigation in order to establish the circumstances of death with some follow up actions not taking place until more than three years after the initial Missing Person report. As the scenario of death by suicide appeared increasingly likely, this had compromised the gathering of physical evidence that might have shed light on the circumstances surrounding the disappearance and death. Investigators should take note of the different aspects of the investigation and seek to satisfy both requirements when applicable.

All decisions when considering the legal basis for any actions should be recorded and reference should be made to Human Rights, Domestic Legislation, or Police Service Instructions when appropriate.

4. The definition of a Missing Person

The Definition of a Missing Person is:

‘Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established

AND

- the circumstances are out of character

OR

- the context suggests the person may be the subject of crime

OR

- at risk of harm to themselves or another’

(Association of Chief Police Officers, 2013).

This means that in order to determine that a person is missing an Officer should ascertain the following:

- A person’s whereabouts cannot be established. Consideration will be given to the steps that have already been taken to locate the person and reasonable efforts to find them having been made by persons with knowledge of or responsibility for the person. **AND**
- Are the circumstances out of character and why? **OR**
- Is there information or does the context indicate that the person may be subject to a crime? **OR**
- Is there information to suggest that the person may be at risk of harm to themselves or others and why?

Wanted vs Missing Person

Where a person is ‘wanted’ for a crime, breach of order / bail conditions, or revocation of licence etc., they should be considered as a ‘wanted person’ and not a Missing Person and an investigation commenced by the department who have circulated them as ‘wanted’.

There may be exceptional circumstances where there is clear and compelling evidence that suggests the wanted person has become a victim of a crime or that they

pose a risk to themselves or others (e.g. there is information at that time to indicate that they are suicidal) and are missing as a result, but in each case the circumstances must meet the definition of a Missing Person.

If it is the case that a person is considered to be missing (as well as 'wanted'), then supervisors MUST clearly record why they believe the person is both wanted and missing along with the information supporting that decision. Further information on wanted persons can be found in SI0118 Wanted Persons.

5. Risk Assessments

Factors to Consider when Assessing Risk

Officers who are conducting risk assessments should carefully consider each criterion of the risk definitions and outline their rationale clearly in the Missing Person Report before assigning a classification of risk. For example, in assessing potentially high risk cases there should be an assessment of:

- Is the risk posed real and immediate, why, and what is its nature?

- What are the substantial grounds for believing that the subject is in danger through their own vulnerability and what is the nature of their vulnerability?
- Has the victim been the subject of a serious crime?
- Are there substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger and why?
- Has NICHE been checked to ascertain if the person is highlighted as being at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) or under threat?

For more information on assessing risk see: [Appendix A - Risk Assessment Considerations](#)

Classification of Risk and Response

Risk must be assessed on the merits of the individual case. Risk can change with the passage of time and new information coming to light. Therefore the risk assessment must be regularly reviewed throughout the time the person is missing. The reasons for the risk remaining the same, or changing, must be recorded by the officer conducting the review.

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<u><i>Risk Level</i></u>	<u><i>Risk Definition</i></u>	<u><i>Action</i></u>	<u><i>Investigating Officer</i></u>
<i>High</i>	The risk of harm is assessed as real and immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the subject is in danger through their own vulnerability or ill health; or may have been the victim of a serious crime involving a real and immediate threat of harm; or the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in real and immediate danger.	Requires the immediate deployment of resources. A member of the District senior management team or similar command level must be involved in the examination of initial enquiry lines and approval of appropriate staffing levels. Such cases should lead to the appointment of an IO and possibly an SIO and a PoISA. There should be a press/media strategy and/or close contact with outside agencies. Family support should also be considered.	<u><i>Inspector</i></u> (appointed by the District)
<i>Medium</i>	The risk of harm is assessed as likely to place the subject in material danger to their life or safety or they are a significant threat to themselves or others.	An active and measured response by Police and other Agencies in order to trace the missing person and support the person reporting.	<u><i>Constable</i></u> (nominated by the District)
<i>Low</i>	Risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as possible but minimal.	Proportionate enquiries should be carried out to ensure that the individual has not come to harm.	<u><i>Constable</i></u> (nominated by the District)

6. Roles and Responsibilities

Responsibilities of Recording an Initial Report of a Missing Person – Call Management Centre (CMC)

Initial information and Call grading – CMC

On receiving a report of a Missing Person the details will be taken at the relevant CMC by the call taker. Once the criteria for reporting a Missing Person has been met assessment information will be captured by the call taker and used to determine the dispatch priority. This information captured will include the relevant details needed to complete the THRIVE process and the missing person form on ControlWorks (CW).

It will normally be obvious on receipt of a report of a Missing Person the degree to which they are at risk. On initial indication that the risk may be **HIGH** (e.g. very young or actively suicidal), the incident must be brought to the attention of a CMC supervisor immediately. This assessment must include a review of any flags held in respect of the Missing Person.

The call taker will then generate the serial on CW. The dispatcher will then make the

CMC supervisor aware of the missing person report.

Missing from a care setting or Emergency Department

Should the missing person report concern a child missing from a care setting or come from an Emergency Department then the procedure for each should be followed:

A child from a care setting

Due diligence: “The police are entitled to expect parents and carers, including staff acting in a parenting role in care homes, to accept normal parenting responsibilities and undertake reasonable actions to try and establish the whereabouts of the individual.” [College of Policing, APP, Missing Persons, 2021.](#)

As per the *Interface Protocol between HSC Trusts and the PSNI (Where a child is reported missing and other police interactions with residential children’s homes)*, (2023), the additional questions on the CW Missing Person report and the Philomena Protocol form must be fully completed before the PSNI will accept responsibility for the missing child from another statutory agency. The relevant

HSC Trust is expected to demonstrate due diligence in attempting to locate the child and act as a responsible parent would do in such a situation, and have that process documented.

Emergency Department

“Before reporting a person as ‘missing’ to the PSNI staff must assure themselves that the person fits the definition of a “missing person” and that all appropriate actions have been taken to try and locate that person” Page 1. *Regional Interagency Guidance on Dealing with Persons who go missing from Emergency Departments* (2016).

As per the *Regional Interagency Guidance on Dealing with Persons who go missing from Emergency Departments* (2016) the additional questions on the CW Missing Person report should be fully completed before the PSNI will accept responsibility of a patient from the reporting hospital who have the duty of care for their patient. The hospital should be able to demonstrate due diligence in their care for their patient, and all actions should be completed.

If the minimum due diligence has not been completed then the reporting party should

be informed that they should carry out their actions as per the *Regional Interagency Guidance on Dealing with Persons who go missing from Emergency Departments* (2016), and the duty of care for that patient remains fully with them. They should be advised that they can further contact police once the actions have been completed and be provided with the CW serial number.

If NOT complete, or insufficient information is provided to a call handler, then a CMC dispatcher or CMC Sergeant should make contact with the Emergency Department reporting person to either obtain the relevant information as per their required actions, or inform them of the requirement to complete their required action, and then resubmit the required information, and schedule the call for 1 hour to allow for the minimum due diligence to be actioned.

Over-riding Principle: Real and immediate risk of serious harm

If the reporting person of either a child from a care setting or patient from an Emergency Department, have not complied with their associated due diligence checks, but has informed police of a real and immediate serious concern for that person’s life (i.e. that the risk will be HIGH)

then the call handler should progress the Missing Person report onto the next stage. They should inform the reporting person that they should continue to carry out the expected actions, and should be in a position to update police on their status upon arrival or upon being phoned back.

CMC quality assurance – CMC Sergeant

The CMC Sergeant is responsible for ensuring that the report meets the definition of a Missing Person, as outlined below:

- The person's whereabouts cannot be established. Consideration will be given to the steps that have already been taken to locate the person and reasonable efforts to find them having been made by persons with knowledge of or responsibility for the person; **AND**
- Are the circumstances out of character and why? **OR**
- Is there information or does the context indicate that the person may be subject to a crime? **OR**
- Is there information to suggest that the person may be at risk of harm to themselves or others and why?

Examples which do NOT meet the definition of a Missing Person:

Scenario 1

A hostel reports to police that they have not been in contact with a resident for a few days, and want to report them as a Missing Person. The hostel has tried to contact the resident by phone with no success and cannot establish their whereabouts. The resident normally leads a transient lifestyle, so this is not out of character for them. There is no information to suggest that they are subject to a crime, and there is no verifiable information that suggests the person may be at risk of harm. There are no current flags relevant to the report. This does not meet the definition of a missing person, the hostel should be informed that police will be taking no further action, and should be closed as a contact record.

Scenario 2

A hospital reports that a patient has not discharged themselves properly

(which they are not obliged to do) and has left the hospital with a cannula in their arm. There are no other concerns to suggest that the person may be at risk of harm to themselves. This is not a missing person, and a purely medical matter, not for police to resolve. The hospital should be informed that police will not assume any responsibility for this call and that the right person to remove a cannula is someone with the correct medical training which they should arrange. It is in the patient's best interest that medical staff attend and not police which would only serve to further delay the correct response. The incident should be closed as a contact record.

When the CMC Sergeant is satisfied that the circumstances of a report meets the definition of a missing person they will complete the initial Risk Assessment on the CW Missing Person report, and ensure the additional questions in relation to a child from a care setting or person from an Emergency Department, or the Philomena Protocol form have been answered to the

correct level. Only then will CMC inform the relevant District of the Missing Person. Responsibility for the investigation transfers to District at this stage. Details of the initial risk level and surrounding circumstances including any safeguarding issues should be notified to the Investigating Officer (IO), Duty Sergeant, and if high, the Duty Inspector. Should the Duty Sergeant or Duty Inspector disagree that the definition of a Missing Person has been met and the call type should be changed, e.g. to a Concern for Safety, they should provide a full rationale for this decision.

Should the Duty Sergeant agree that the definition of a Missing Person has been met, but disagree that the additional questions (including the Philomena Protocol form) in relation to a child from a care setting or person from an Emergency Department have been answered to the correct level they will list their concerns and the matter will be referred back to the CMC Sergeant for review and/or in order to make contact with the reporting party and have them completed correctly. Should the reporting party fail to complete the required steps then the CMC Sergeant should make a note in the CW log as to the reason why,

and the investigation be progressed by District.

Location recording and transferring ownership of investigations:

CMC and District responsibilities

The accurate recording of an occurrence location by CMC when a Missing Person is reported is extremely important so that the correct geography and risk associated with it can be properly considered. The occurrence location is also required to be accurately recorded so that the correct policing District is ready to commence an investigation and any searches required at that location and the surrounding area. Bearing this in mind the guidance below is to be implemented so as to avoid any confusion at CMC or District level.

The last known position for the Missing Person should be recorded as the location they are missing from and not their home address as a general rule (see [exception below](#)). If it becomes apparent that the main policing activities will focus in a different District from where the person was reported missing, i.e. that they have been positively observed elsewhere, or relevant information is received, etc., that District, now having the greatest opportunity to

locate the Missing Person or progress the investigative trail, will assume responsibility for the investigation. A brief as to the circumstances and rationale for transferring a Missing Person to another district should be recorded, and a follow up phone call made to ensure a timely handover. CMC should also be notified of any change of District ownership for a Missing Person investigation. If an agreement cannot be reached between Duty Sergeants/Inspectors within District between ownership of a Missing Person then it should be escalated to a member of SMT or the Duty Officer to direct ownership.

The original investigating District, or the District where the person resides, may be required to assist with any local enquiries as necessary. The District that assumes responsibility for the investigation is also responsible for updating any reporting person or next of kin, and should ensure this aspect of the investigation is not neglected. Any deviation from this position, for example where an SIO is appointed, or the District where the Missing Person normally resides actively decides to preside over the Missing Person investigation for operational reasons, should be recorded.

Examples of correct location recording:

1 – The occurrence location should be recorded as the location that the person is missing from, and not their home address. (See exception in point 3).

For example: If a person from Armagh is out for the day in Portstewart, were last observed by their partner walking on Portstewart Strand, and subsequently reported as missing, then the location the person is missing from is Portstewart Strand, and not their home address in Armagh. Similarly, if a person from Dungannon attends a concert with family members in Belfast, gets separated, their family are unable to locate them and subsequently report them as missing, then the location that the person is missing from is the concert venue in Belfast, and not their home address in Dungannon.

In both circumstances above the Missing Person investigation should be managed by the District from which the missing occurrence location is reported. If the managing district requires an address to be checked, etc., in another district then this specific task should be passed to the corresponding district for completion, but the management of the Missing Person investigation is to remain with the District

from which the missing occurrence location is reported.

2 – If a patient goes missing from a Hospital or Mental Health Ward, and staff follow them for a short distance to Main Street, but lose sight of them there, then the address they are missing from is the Hospital or Mental Health Ward, and not Main Street which should be recorded instead as the last known position.

This scenario is significantly different from those in the first guidance point as the patient has only travelled short distance from their place of care from which they are missing.

3 – (Exception to first guidance point). All children who are in care should be recorded as missing from their place of care.

This exception is for statistical purposes so that the PSNI can accurately record repeat addresses in relation to children in care who go missing in order to be able to put in steps to engage with other statutory agencies, and make subsequent missing person investigations more effective and efficient.

However, the last known position should be accurately recorded on CW, and the District with geographical responsibility for the last known position should then manage the subsequent investigation. For example: If a child in care from Lisburn is taken out for the day to Bangor, runs away from their Carers in Bangor, and is later reported missing, while the child will be recorded as missing from their place of care in Lisburn, it is the District with the geographical responsibility for Bangor that will manage the Missing Person investigation.

CMC should make an entry in the CW log to highlight the last known position that the child was last observed and inform the relevant supervisor for that District.

- The only exception to point 3 is if a child in care goes missing from a hospital, in which case the hospital should be recorded as the place they are missing from as further medical information for risk assessment purposes, and the Emergency Department CW questions, may be applicable.

Short Return by CMC

There are 2 circumstances in which a

Missing Person investigation can be managed within CMC:

- If the Missing Person returns whilst the call taker is recording details; or
- If a Missing Person is subsequently reported as returned/found before a crew is dispatched or arrived at the scene.

In these circumstances, there is no requirement to complete an initial CMC Sergeant Risk Assessment or NICHE Missing Person report. An Immediate safe and well check is not required to be conducted by Police unless concerns are highlighted by the reporting party. This does not detract from the police's responsibility to ensure the subject is safe and well which can be done by asking the pertinent questions in the CW return pro-forma of Professionals or Parents or other relevant Reporting Person with the returned Missing Person.

NB: Police should still attend if the information on Operational Policing Systems indicates that a risk to that individual may still exist, e.g. risk of Child

Sexual Exploitation, suicide, very young, etc.

Responsibilities of the Investigating Officer (Constable)

The Investigating Officer (IO) will be dispatched by CMC to speak to the reporting person and will be required to obtain all relevant investigation and risk assessment information. **The IO should consider using their BWV when speaking with the reporting person,** (or any other subsequent relevant person), when obtaining information regarding the missing person's disappearance.

The IO will also assess vulnerability factors of the Missing Person which will assist them in completing the Secondary Risk Assessment and should consider the relevant investigative actions set out in this Service Instruction. The IO should phone the Call Management Support Unit (CMSU) so that a Missing Person report can be commenced. The IO should then ensure that all relevant parts of the Missing Person report are completed (updating each section as necessary), including their Secondary Risk Assessment. The IO should provide as much detail as possible

in relation to not only the risk factors but any other information which may clarify or support the rationale for their Risk Assessment.

Inputting of a new Missing Person report by CMSU will routinely notify the PSNI Gazette office, who are responsible for circulation of Missing Persons alerts on PSNI systems and the Police National Computer (PNC).

The IO will brief the Duty Sergeant of the circumstances and outline their risk assessment. The IO should continue to appraise the Duty Sergeant of any relevant information learnt throughout the investigation that could alter the current risk level of the Missing Person investigation. The IO should ensure that any actions already taken are fully detailed on police systems and the Missing Person report, and will prepare an investigation plan. (In the case of High Risk the Duty Inspector will take over at this stage).

The PSNI has adopted The National Decision Model (NDM). Use of the NDM should be considered throughout any Missing Person investigation. Additional

guidance can be accessed at: [National Decision Model](#).

The Rationale for NOT taking a particular course of action should also be recorded.

Where there is an allegation, or reasonable cause to suspect, that the missing child may be the victim of abuse or CSE, or there is a clear concern for the safety of the child, the IO should contact the Central Referral Unit (CRU), Public Protection Branch (PPB), who will review the details and determine any further appropriate course of action CRU need to take.

Role of Duty Sergeant in Missing Persons investigations

The core responsibilities of the Duty Sergeant are as follows:

- To ensure that a full risk assessment has been completed by the IO, and review the risk assessment including a rationale as to why they have agreed the risk as low, medium or high or changed the risk.
- To ensure that all relevant parts of the Missing Person report are fully completed.
- To supervise and review the investigative plan, applying the principles of quality focused investigation and risk management. To quality assure any actions already taken, and set any further investigative directions and manage tasks/actions relating to the investigation accordingly in order to locate the Missing Person and bring the investigation to a successful and compliant conclusion.
- In order to provide for continuity of the investigation, the Duty Sergeant must ensure that a comprehensive briefing and handover takes place on completion of each turn of duty. Acknowledgment of the handover and the on-coming Duty Sergeant's own subsequent review must be recorded.
- To make referrals to specialist departments and/or outside agencies where appropriate.
- To attend and manage any search areas when appropriate, or when directed by the Duty Inspector.
- To ensure that all outstanding actions have been completed before closing the Missing Person occurrence.

Role of Inspector Rank in Missing Persons Investigations

In the case of low and medium risk Missing Persons, the Duty Inspector for the District within which the person is reported missing from, will be responsible for the supervision of the overall investigation, recording actions, and effective handovers. This overall responsibility will pass to the Duty Inspector of any subsequent District the Missing Person investigation passes to.

The Duty Inspector will become the Investigating Officer for all High Risk Missing Person cases in which no serious crime is involved. The Duty Inspector will direct the actions of dispatched Officers acting on their behalf and take over responsibility for the investigation plan. They should conduct a review explaining their rationale, and each handover and subsequent review by the oncoming Duty Inspector must be recorded.

Should a serious crime be suspected, such as child abduction, then the Duty Inspector should brief the relevant department who will take ownership and manage the investigation. Once the handover occurs reviews by District Policing are no longer required and any further reviews should be

conducted by the relevant managing department.

Missing Person investigations which are still outstanding at twenty-eight days will be considered to be long term. A suitable handover should be prepared by a District Inspector. They will then be assigned to a CID Detective Inspector as the Investigating Officer, who should then conduct an investigative review. The Missing Person flag should be changed to 'Missing Person Long Term'. The investigation should be subject to further reviews at three months, six months, twelve months and annually thereafter. If any significant information comes to light this should trigger an immediate review.

If the Duty Inspector (or SIO) believes that a Missing Person investigation is no longer proportionate due to the circumstances changing (they no longer meet the definition of a missing person, or are satisfied they are safe and well), even though the Missing Person has not been seen by Police or another relevant Statutory Agency, and to continue to progress the investigation would potentially breach the Missing Person's right to private and family life (Article 8, HRA), they may

request the District Performance Chief Inspector (or equivalent) to close the investigation.

Role of Performance Chief Inspector (or equivalent) in District

The Performance Chief Inspector (or equivalent) will have the primary focus of monitoring investigative standards and performance to ensure compliance with the Missing Person Service Instruction.

The Performance Chief Inspector (or equivalent) will:

- Have overall responsibility for the investigation and management of Missing Persons within their District.
- Ensure the requisite standard of active Missing Person investigations is met and that an effective process of investigative review is in place.
- Nominate a District SPOC/S to engage with local residential care facilities and hospitals in respect of issues arising from operational policing matters.
- The Performance Chief Inspector (or equivalent) must authorise the closure of all missing person reports where the person not been seen by Police or

another relevant Statutory Agency.

Should the Performance Chief Inspector (or equivalent) disagree with the requesting Inspector an entry must be made on police systems providing the rationale as to why further investigation is required, and the risk outweighs any potential breach of the Missing Person's right to private and family life (Article 8, HRA).

- Where it is clear that an investigation is convoluted, high profile, requires specific investigative expertise, or is going to be lengthy, the Performance Chief Inspector (or equivalent) should give consideration to appointing a single SIO (LPT / NPT / CID) for ownership and continuity. The rationale for such a decision, or for not appointing a single SIO, should be recorded.

District Commander's Role

The District Commander will have ultimate responsibility for ensuring the progression and resourcing of any outstanding Missing Person investigation within their District.

The District Commander should be aware of the repeat Missing Person data and are at their own discretion as to how it should

be reviewed and used in order to manage repeat Missing Person's within their district.

District Daily Management Meetings

All outstanding active Missing Person reports must be reviewed at the District Daily Management Meetings so as to ensure that the most appropriate investigative resource has been assigned and that investigations are being progressed appropriately.

Role of Criminal Investigation Department (CID)

Where it is clear that an investigation is convoluted, high profile, requires specific investigative expertise, or is going to be lengthy, the Performance Chief Inspector (or equivalent) may consider appointing a single SIO from CID in consultation with a Detective Chief Inspector.

Within normal working hours, and providing that the person is still missing, a CID Detective Sergeant should review all low and medium risk Missing Person investigations after 48 hours of time of report to police, and a CID Detective Inspector should review a high risk Missing Person investigation after 24 hours. The review should centre on the Investigation

Plan, and if there is any suspected criminality linked to the disappearance.

Long term Missing Person investigations at twenty-eight days will be passed to CID to manage.

Role of Public Protection Branch

Public Protection Branch will ensure where a child who is flagged as "At Risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)" is reported missing and returns to their home or placement an Officer from Public Protection Branch CSE team will contact the relevant Trust CSE lead to discuss the circumstances of, and information obtained, following the missing episode for future risk mitigation purposes.

7. Return and Closure

Missing Person Located – Immediate Safe and Well check (ISW)

The role of Police in Missing Person investigations is to protect life and deal with any offences that come to light. Police can also have a responsibility to ensure that the returning person is safe and well.

An ISW (when a CMC short return has not been completed) can provide an important

opportunity to identify ongoing Risk factors that may affect the likelihood of the individual going missing again, or indicate harm suffered during the missing episode. They also provide the opportunity to find out useful information that may assist in helping trace the individual in any future missing episode. An ISW should not be treated as simply administrative procedures to close the missing incident.

Any information obtained by the Investigating Officer in regards to the immediate safe and well check should be recorded in the Missing Person return. Any crimes reported should be dealt with accordingly.

The purpose of the immediate safe and well check will be to:

- Ensure that the Missing Person has been located and is indeed safe and well.
- Discover any factors which led to the missing episode.
- Inform efforts to potentially prevent further missing episodes.

- Provide information that will assist any future investigation should that person go missing again.
- Establish the activities, associates, risks and victimisation involved in the missing episode, and where possible (and with partner agencies where appropriate) address those risks.
- Allow for the consideration of a referral to a PSNI Support Hub.

During the ISW it is crucial that the Investigating Officer consider the wider safeguarding issues that may be present not only during the missing episode but in relation to the environment that the missing person is returning or being returned to. This is relevant to all missing people but particularly relevant to children and vulnerable adults.

Consideration should be given as to whether the missing episode is a potential indicator of abuse or neglect which may be occurring at the place from which the missing person removed themselves. The fact that they may be the unknowing victim of crime, for example, trafficking or exploitation, should not be overlooked and

will generally raise the level of risk when missing on this and subsequent occasions.

It is each officer's responsibility to ensure that they are satisfied the place to which a Missing Person has returned is both appropriate to their individual needs and poses no risk of significant harm. If an officer has concerns which require an immediate response (either singularly or within the multi-agency framework) they should seek advice from their supervisor.

Should the missing person be a child in care then the return process as per the *Interface Protocol between HSC Trusts and the PSNI (Where a child is reported missing and other police interactions with residential children's homes)*, (2023), should be followed.

Further information on immediate safe and well checks can be found at [Appendix H](#) – **Immediate safe and well check / Return Home and Safeguarding Discussion**

Missing Person investigation closure

All information MUST be accurate and linked. If a person goes missing again, police can use previous information to be better equipped to inform the investigation,

decide what action to take, discover what worked or didn't work last time, understand if any vulnerability was identified, and what the immediate safe and well check revealed, to locate that missing person at an earlier stage and prevent potential harm.

The IO must clearly outline their actions regarding how the investigation was brought to a conclusion, and then update CMSU to complete the missing person return tab. When CMSU complete return report on NICHE this will send a task to Gazette to cancel the Missing Person alert on police systems and PNC. No other action is required by the IO other than updating CMSU to remove these alerts.

The Duty Sergeant must review the Missing Person investigation, checking that no further safeguarding issues require action, or crime requires further investigation, before closing the Missing Person return report tab, and occurrence. The closing Officer should note that there is often a close link between the reason a Missing Person leaves and their domestic setting, and where any form of Domestic Abuse has taken place this element of the investigation must not be neglected and the Domestic Abuse guidance must be

followed. Should there be any safeguarding concerns for a child then a referral should be submitted to Social Services which should be recorded on police systems.

Appendix A – Risk Assessment Considerations

Risk Assessments for Missing Persons (and recording of same) are a crucial aspect of our identification of vulnerability and risk. They serve to inform the most appropriate operational response and provide a clear rationale for decisions. The process of conducting Risk Assessments is dynamic as new information comes to light during the course of an investigation.

Risk Assessment

All reports of Missing Persons will be subject to an initial and ongoing risk assessment. **There are three distinct processes:**

- Initial Risk Assessment – CMC Sergeant
- Secondary Risk Assessment – Investigating Officer (IO)
- Secondary Risk Assessment agreement and ongoing review - (Low and Medium risk) Duty Sergeant, (High risk) Duty Inspector

In the case of the Initial Risk Assessment, this should be completed by a CMC Supervisor and in the case of a Secondary Risk Assessment completed by the IO. This should be reviewed by the Duty Sergeant for Low and Medium Risk, and by the Duty Inspector for high risk. The Secondary Risk Assessment Review will be detailed on the Missing Person Report, as well as all further reviews.

Having determined the initial response to the report of a missing person, a full assessment of Risk must be undertaken by the IO attending that incident. A Risk Assessment not only places a priority on the efforts to locate the Missing Person, but also includes a judgement about the likely reason for their being missing and what they reasonably suspect may happen to them while missing based on the information provided to them.

Every Risk Assessment requires a rationale to be recorded. Information gathered from family, next of kin, or close friends regarding the Missing Person's lifestyle or mental health issues, along with research from previous absences, can help shape the risk assessment. Any Supervisor conducting a

Risk Assessment must fully explain why they believe the Risk to meet the threshold or definition of Low, Medium or High based on the circumstances of the Missing Person’s disappearance.

Risk Level Changes

If the Risk level is being raised or lowered (from the initial level of risk or a later assessment), a new Risk Assessment must be completed to provide accurate reports and whiteboards.

Risk level review responsibilities:

Low Risk	The Missing Person will be reviewed and endorsed by the Duty Sergeant after the IO has provided the risk assessment. This should be kept under review during the course of their shift based on additional information received during the course of the investigation.
Medium Risk	The Missing Person will be reviewed and endorsed by the Duty Sergeant after the IO has provided the risk assessment. This should be kept under review during the course of their shift based on additional information received during the course of the investigation.
High Risk	The Missing Person will be reviewed and endorsed by the Duty Inspector. <i>If the Duty Inspector is unavailable due to a Custody Review, Fatal RTC, or similar then the Duty Sergeant can review High Risk. The reasons must be documented on the OEL as to why the Inspector has delegated responsibility. The Duty Inspector retains responsibility for the Investigation and will update NICHE as soon as practicable.</i> This should be kept under review during the course of their shift based on additional information received during the course of the investigation.

A number of factors can be identified that indicate risk to a person and should be considered in any Risk Assessment/Review:

Is the behaviour out of character?

Behaviour out of character is obviously a risk factor that increases concern, particularly when the person is a child or otherwise vulnerable. If the disappearance is inconsistent with previous behaviour it gives cause to consider other explanations and signals caution in accepting accounts being offered. The key to making this judgement is obtaining credible evidence of what represents normal behaviour. Any suspicion should lead to corroboration of normal behaviour from a third party. Investigators should be aware that for children who go missing frequently, although it may appear not to be out of character, they may actually be at more risk due to other factors at play such as criminal or sexual exploitation.

What are the circumstances of the disappearance?

The last sighting or movements of the missing person are of paramount importance. In the few cases that turn out to be homicides the last sighting is often related to the crime and is often the best evidence of demeanour, description and intention. Consider who made the sighting, when and in what circumstances and establish whether it can be corroborated by other means, e.g. by CCTV. Background enquiries in relation to the Missing Person may assist in confirming or reducing suspicion in regards to their lifestyle, and where departure from the norm occurs, this should raise concerns. Likewise, identifying that the missing person is potentially a victim of domestic abuse or child abuse, or is an offender, will determine the type and level of investigation to be undertaken.

Other circumstances such as those below may be considered in the risk assessment:

- The weather (too cold, or hot);
- Their clothing (suitable for the weather?);
- Alcohol or drug consumption – in regards to their decision making abilities, or bodily effect;
- Physical or mental ailments;

- Suicidal ideation;
- Medication the Missing Person may be taking, and the effect of not taking it;
- Any specific dangers linked to the location reported missing from;
- Any specific dangers linked to a person that the Missing Person may be with/attempting to visit;
- Any recent change of circumstances – loss of job, loss of house, relationship breakdown, bereavement, etc.;
- No access to finances.

Did the subject prepare for an absence from home?

Careful interviewing and the search of the Missing Person's home and room should be designed to reveal any clothing and possessions they have taken. Not taking appropriate clothing, glasses, medication, money and means of obtaining welfare or support is sometimes inconsistent with a voluntary departure (unless suicidal) or a prolonged stay away from the domestic environment. Evidence of planning or preparation gives a different message. Often family members will be able to deduce what clothing the person may be wearing from what is missing.

Investigators should take into account the totality of all the circumstances as well as considering their own professional judgement and expertise when assessing or reviewing the risk.

Appendix B – Investigative Plan and Steps

The Investigation Plan should be specific and meaningful, detailing the lines of enquiry and evidence to be gathered, with the level of operational activity matching the level of risk. Adequate resources should be given to the Missing Person investigation and any resourcing issues outlined on police systems. Investigative actions and tactical considerations should ideally be recorded contemporaneously demonstrating decision making as the investigation/timeline progresses, as reviews take place, and for transparency and accountability. This should also include any rationale for investigative actions which were not taken/were not considered appropriate.

The Investigation Plan must be specific and all actions relevant to the individual Missing Person investigation that is being undertaken.

Supervisors should ensure that the tasks generated by investigation plans, both new, or already identified, are being progressed, updated, and completed in a timely fashion.

Outlined below are a number of Police specific investigative steps, or contact with other internal departments, that should be considered throughout the Missing Person investigation. Not every step will be appropriate on every occasion, but consideration should be given to explaining why certain steps have been ruled out. Beyond the Police specific investigative steps below there is are further lines of enquiry to be considered in an investigative plan that can be found in: Evidence Gathering ([Appendix C](#)), Search ([Appendix D](#)), and other relevant appendices.

Police specific investigative steps below include, but are not limited to:

- **The Herbert Protocol** – The Herbert Protocol Form was developed as a risk reduction tool consisting of a pre-completed form that contains vital information about a person living with Dementia. If a person with Dementia is reported missing CMC will ask if the reporting person has completed the Herbert Protocol form. If the Herbert Protocol form has been completed a copy will be provided to the investigating officer by the reporting person, and it should be attached to the occurrence. If a hard copy is provided this should be returned to the reporting party when the Missing Person is located. Information about the Herbert Protocol should be provided to the

reporting party (or any other relevant person) of a Missing Person living with Dementia if they are not aware of it, which can be found [here](#).

- **Air Support Unit (ASU)**
- **Tactical Support Group (TSG)**
- **International Policing Unit (IPU)**
- **Public Protection Branch (PPB)**
- **Dog Section** – Dogs can be a highly valuable resource in searching for a Missing Person. Consideration may be given to area contamination and early co-ordination with Dog Section should be considered for the best possible outcome.
- **Neighbourhood Policing Teams (NPT)** – NPT can provide a valuable source of local information and Community Contacts.
- **Police Search Advisor (PoISA) and Police Search and Rescue Coordinator (PSARCO) advice and tasking** (mainly for high risk cases).
- **Voluntary Search and Rescue Assets** – Tasked through a PoISA. This includes a range of voluntary organisations involved in the delivery of search and rescues services across Northern Ireland. Such organisations can add a large number of resources and specific skill sets to any search operation to locate the Missing Person. More information about some of the organisations can be found at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-search-and-rescue>.

- **Family Liaison Officer (FLO)** – In high profile, or lengthy Missing Person investigations, especially those which are reasonably expected to end with a fatality, consideration should be given to appointing a FLO. If a FLO is not appointed, consideration may also be given to appointing a Contact Officer who can regularly contact and keep the family or other relevant reporting person up to date with the investigation.
- **CCTV** – A CCTV strategy should be outlined on NICHE including locations and timings to be checked.
- **Social Media (POLICE)** - Social media has an extensive reach and should be considered in Missing Person investigations. If social media is used to alert the public to a Missing Person and seek help, it is the responsibility of the IO or an agreed nominated officer to ensure that comments and private messages are monitored in relation to the appeal. If we ask, we must be able to act.

Once the person is located a short message to alert members of the public that the Missing Person has been located and to thank them for their help should be considered. The following words should be used - **‘Thank you for sharing our missing person appeal from earlier. This appeal is now cancelled.’** It must be recorded on police systems that the Missing Person appeal has been deleted.

- **Media Strategy** - The early involvement of local media, e.g. local radio stations and news outlets, should be considered when the lines of enquiry are set. The Officer in charge of the investigation should provide their rationale as to the extent to which publicity is to be used and the form that it will take. The officer in charge of the Missing Person investigation should liaise with Corporate Communications to draft and issue the media release.

The objectives of a media strategy will be to generate information and public awareness to assist the enquiry and to control speculation. When considering publicity in locating a Missing Person, the IO may consider liaising with their senior management in high profile or High Risk cases.

Information relating to the investigation of Missing Persons must be managed. Where Police are required to respond to media requests for information, or when Police use the media to appeal for

information it is important that accurate information is given with regard to details and any photographs must be recent or accompanied by supporting information.

Consideration should be given to the means by which information will be collected following a media appeal and the IO and Supervisor must ensure that appropriate measures are taken to collect and act upon all information received. Where a media appeal is expected to extend to GB or internationally, appropriate arrangements must be put in place.

▪ **Permissions for Social Media / Media appeal**

Where a Missing Person is under 18 years of age, a Parent or Guardian should give permission before issuing a Media or Social Media appeal.

For a child in care consultation should take place with Social Services.

For people over 18, the investigating officer should seek to inform the next of kin or equivalent of our intention to issue a Media or Social Media appeal at the earliest opportunity, particularly when dealing with a High Risk Missing Person.

While the policing requirement (Article 2 issue or CSE concerns) would negate any requirement to inform / seek permission – however, consent and co-operation should be attempted in all cases. Where a situation arises that permission is not obtained, a record must be made of the decision and rationale behind it on police systems.

▪ **Guidance for Social Media and Media output regarding Missing Persons:**

Officers should be mindful of how much information is shared via social media/media and:

- Only reference the relevant locations - consider fully any future risk that divulging areas or locations may present where exploitation and vulnerability are evident;
- Try to avoid the divulging of specific vulnerabilities due to the risk of exploitation – highlighting them can expose or increase risk of harm. Only use information that is relevant.

Appendix C – Evidence Gathering

Police actions in respect of a Missing Person investigation will be generated to obtain and gather evidence as to the circumstances of their disappearance, and to provide useful information which will aide in locating them. The information obtained can alter the level of risk, and can lead the investigation in different directions, so Officers must be robust in gathering evidence and accurately recording it.

The Investigating Officer should consider using body worn video when obtaining the information from those giving it so that should it be required to be reviewed at a later date it can be checked for accuracy and the demeanour of the person giving the information to police observed. This may contain highly important information in relation to any future serious crime investigation, inquest, or complaint received against Police.

The evidence to gather, and the considerations and source of information outlined in this appendix should be considered on a case by case basis, as while some of them may be applicable in all Missing Person investigations, others will not.

Evidence to gather:
Last Known Position
Circumstances / Factors
Clothing / Items taken – Mobile phone (and number) / passport / bank cards / etc.
Physical Description
Preparation to leave?

Previously Missing? / Out of Character?
Suicide Attempts / Threats to Suicide or Self-Harm?
Medication / Mental Health issues, Illnesses, Conditions or Disabilities?
Drugs / Alcohol / Gambling issues?
GP / Hospital information
Social Services / Child Protection Register / Orders
Travel details / Vehicle details
Daily routine / Employment / School / University details
Significant dates or locations
Significant persons – Family and Friends
Physical evidence and DNA samples when appropriate (Missing Person and Familial)
Phone and Social Media Application details

Appendix D – Search

The evidence and information gathered through investigative enquiries will have a direct impact on the search strategy for the Missing Person. Conducting effective searches is incredibly important in relation to locating a Missing Person, as if not conducted effectively then critical items or information may be missed. Therefore the search for a Missing Person is about using resources to look in the right place/s in order to maximise the chance of locating the Missing Person as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Searches should be made of the person's last known position, the surrounding area, any route they may be likely to take, the Missing Person's last known address, and other relevant premises or locations that become apparent as the investigation progresses. The objectives of the search are to discover:

- The Missing Person;
- Evidence relating to their disappearance;
- Information that may lead to their discovery.

Search Strategy

The details of any search strategy should be clearly outlined on police systems detailing why specific locations have been chosen, discounted, or need to be re-visited, taking into account the information gained through the evidence gathering process. An officer's professional knowledge of the area should be taken into account when conducting initial searches – i.e. if there are specific repeat locations that people go to when missing, like a particular well-known café or a park close to a hospital. The search should also take into consideration any physical or mental ailments the Missing Person may have.

Where previous Missing Person reports have been made in the past, any information gleaned from interviews of the person recovered should be considered in Police actions and searches. Information obtained from the reporting person or next of kin, or as a result of Police evidence gathering activities, should also be taken into consideration when conducting searches and selecting locations. Any

search should also take into consideration the evidence and information sought as outlined throughout this Service Instruction.

Investigators may also wish to consider using the map applications to give themselves an overview of any search area in question as quite often an aerial overview, or street view, will identify other areas of search that may not be apparent from a ground view.

If the District managing the investigation tasks another District to conduct address or other searches/checks on their behalf the managing District should be specific as to why the address or otherwise is to be searched/checked.

All searches must be properly documented to show the time, duration and extent of the search, including any areas that were, for whatever reason, inaccessible/consent refused. Where consent to search is refused, objections should be documented on police systems, and ideally recorded on body worn video. Contact should be made with a supervisor and consideration should be given to using Article 19 PACE, or obtaining a search warrant when appropriate.

The extent of any search (premises or otherwise) for the Missing Person should be documented and checked by a Supervisor.

Involvement of a Police Search Advisor (PoISA)

Where initial searches have failed then a fully managed systematic searching of all likely locations/or complex searches to a high level of assurance using search trained teams and/or voluntary assets should be considered using a PoISA – who are mainly tasked for high risk missing person investigations.

Voluntary Search Assets **must** be tasked through the PoISA, and **never** directly by a policing District. More information about some of the organisations can be found at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-search-and-rescue>.

The PoISA (when tasked) is responsible for advising, guiding and assisting the IO with all matters pertaining to search during a missing person case. They will plan a search strategy and assign / manage appropriate search resources.

When a high risk Missing Person is identified (or on any occasion where the Missing Person is made vulnerable by virtue of age (child or elderly); Alzheimer's/Dementia or associated illnesses; despondency or suicidal tendencies where it is appropriate) contacting a PoISA should be considered at the earliest opportunity. A number of organisations and groups collate statistical data about missing persons which can be used to identify likely search areas both initially and in the longer term. The PoISA has access to such statistical data and can provide advice and guidance on immediate actions which can be taken when a search is required, and will link with voluntary and statutory organisations to provide additional resources to carry out the search.

Reasons for not tasking a PoISA for a high risk Missing Person investigation should be recorded. This may include for example, that there is no defined search area when awaiting telephone enquiry results. However, it may also yet be prudent to task a PoISA for them to be able to pre-warn search assets that a search area may be known soon, which can speed the process of deploying search assets when the search area is identified.

Additional Search Considerations

Where an incident occurs in a mountain environment, a Police Search and Rescue Coordinator (PSARCO) must be tasked.

All persons missing in water, whether presumed drowned or otherwise, should be considered to be **High Risk** Missing Persons for the purpose of search.

Appendix E - Circulation of Details / Alerts / Cancellations

PSNI Website (External)

For Long Term Missing Persons wider circulation via the Internet should be considered on the PSNI [Long Term Missing Persons](#) webpage.

The IO must take full cognizance of the facts surrounding the disappearance, the vulnerability of the Missing Person. Where a Missing Person is under 18 years of age, a parent or guardian should give permission before using the PSNI website. For a child in care consultation should take place with Social Services. For people over 18, the investigating officer should seek to inform the next of kin or equivalent of police intention to use the PSNI website. The policing requirement (Article 2 issue or CSE concerns) would negate any requirement to inform / seek permission – however, consent and co-operation should be attempted in all cases. Where a situation arises in which permission is not obtained, a record must be made of the decision and rationale to use it on police systems.

It is the responsibility of the IO to arrange for removal of the individual's photograph when located.

National Crime Agency (NCA) UK MISSING PERSONS UNIT (UKMPU)

The [UKMPU](#) works alongside the police and related organisations to improve the services provided to Missing Persons investigations increasing the effectiveness of the police response. The UKMPU holds the policy lead for the area of missing people on behalf of the government.

Notifications to NCA UKMPU

The UKMPU must be notified:

- Where a person is missing for **72** hours from time of report to Police, or sooner if the Officer in charge thinks that the case warrants urgent attention.
- Where the person reported missing is a Foreign National or
- Where the person is a UK resident reported as missing abroad.

Unidentified persons, bodies or body parts

All unidentified persons, bodies or body parts found in the UK are to be reported to the UKMPU. Notification must be completed and forwarded to the UKMPU within 2 days of discovery of the person, body or parts.

Cancellations

Cancellation of reports of Missing Persons, unidentified person, bodies or body parts must be submitted to the UKMPU within 24 hours of the police service confirming the missing person's return or location.

Circulations to other UK Police Services

If there is information to suggest that a Missing Person may have travelled to another part of the UK it may be appropriate for a circulation email to be sent directly to the relevant UK police service force control room for their own internal circulation.

Missing People

[Missing People](#) is a voluntary charitable organisation used by UK police services when special media help is required for circulation – also see Working with Other Agencies ([Appendix P](#)). Consideration should be given by IO to utilise this facility when appropriate.

Arrangements for publicity and any poster circulation must be cancelled and recalled by the IO when the missing person is located.

Appendix F - Sightings

People will invariably report sightings of Missing Persons. Whilst the majority will genuinely want to assist in an investigation, occasionally sightings, which are misleading, may also be reported. Thus the difficulty exists in distinguishing between those that are valid and those that are not. Sightings should be recorded accurately on police systems. Sightings must be processed efficiently with a mechanism to assess, prioritise and manage reports implemented as early as possible in an investigation.

Officers involved in Missing Person investigations should be careful not to allow sighting reports to unduly reduce the level of risk assessment, unless there is clear and supported evidence to show that the person is no longer at risk. (There have been numerous recorded sightings of Missing Persons, and murder victims, long after they were dead).

A high level of coverage, particularly as a result of media involvement, may generate a large number of sighting reports, therefore, a process and the resources should be put in place to document, and manage the sighting information received. In all cases decisions about the type of Police response which will be made must be considered alongside the existing investigation and search strategy.

If the PSNI or family members have sought help from an outside agency in the investigation, e.g. with the Missing People charity in regards to publicity, then important and relevant sighting reports may have been provided to them rather than police. If this is the case it is important that communication links are established with outside agency to ensure that any information is brought to and managed within the investigation.

Appendix G – Family Engagement and Communication

Consistent communication with the Missing Person's family, next of kin, or reporting person cannot be undervalued. Criticism has been received on occasions that the family cannot contact the IO, don't know who to contact (as it can change on each shift, or when the investigation moves District), or that updates are not given when promised.

This viewpoint is understandable. If we put ourselves in the position of having a loved one missing, the worry and the unknowns could be overwhelming and the reassurance that police are doing as much as they can, consistently, goes a long way to easing a difficult time.

The Investigating Officer, or a supervisor should seek to give the Missing Person's family, next of kin, or reporting person regular updates, or an update if a significant event happens, or significant information is received, and ensure that these are recorded on police systems. It may also be pertinent for investigators to liaise with Missing Person's family, next of kin, or reporting person in relation to verifying images or CCTV of the Missing Person. When such interaction occurs the details should also be recorded on police systems.

For some investigations, especially those which are convoluted, high profile, or going to be lengthy, consideration could be given to appoint a SPOC (Contact Officer) to liaise with the family, and to provide that consistent communication and explain procedures, decisions and actions, during the investigation.

In high profile, or lengthy Missing Person investigations, which are reasonably expected to end with a fatality, consideration should be given to appointing a FLO.

Ambiguous Loss

When speaking with the family or friends of a Missing Person the investigator might find that they are highly distressed. The impact on family and friends of a person going missing can be upsetting and confusing and investigators should be aware that of the concept of ambiguous loss coined by psychologist Pauline Boss. This psychological state for those left not knowing what has happened to

the Missing Person is: 'when the Missing Person is physically absent, yet mentally present.' As such the family and friends can be left in a continual limbo as a Missing Person is unlike a death where there is an official certification of loss, and mourning rituals that allow one to say goodbye. With ambiguous loss none of these marks exist, rather it is an on-going situation that has no closure. Ambiguous loss may be present in any length of a Missing Person investigation, and as such the investigator may find the description above helpful in communicating with the Missing Person's family and friends about what they may be experiencing.

Long Term Missing Person Investigations

In long term cases, it is important that the Missing Person's Family, Next of Kin, or Reporting Person are kept up to date with developments and reassured that enquiries are continuing even if there are over an extended period of time.

They should be:

- Given reasonable expectations about ongoing contact during long-term cases;
- Told about the review process, any further investigative steps, and when the next review is due; and
- Updated on the outcomes.

Family Support

Police can also request assistance from the registered charity [Missing People](#) who can provide support and advice for families left with a sense of unknowns. To make a referral [see here](#). Please ensure the family have consented before a referral is made and the consent recorded on police systems.

Appendix H – Immediate safe and well check / Return Home and Safeguarding Discussion

Should the Missing Person be a child in care then the return process as per the *Interface Protocol between HSC Trusts and the PSNI (Where a child is reported missing and other police interactions with residential children's homes), (2023)*² should be followed.

For all other persons on which an immediate safe and well check is conducted the following should be taken into consideration. The importance of an appropriate, good quality Return Home and Safeguarding Discussion cannot be underestimated.

When a person returns, especially a vulnerable or young person, they may not want to talk, and may not see themselves as having been missing. They also may not be immediately open to speaking with a stranger in a police uniform, and therefore your approach, demeanour and language may determine the quality of the discussion, outcomes and future harm prevention.

People who go missing may sometimes be running from something that places them at risk and may run into or to situations that also place them at risk. They may be reluctant to talk about these issues, however caring professionals need to ask a number of questions in order to safeguard them.

Officers should adopt a professional curiosity, looking beyond what the child is saying and using their investigative skills to record demeanour, clothing, etc. Observations of the Missing Person should be recorded including: state of dress / dishevelled / intoxicated / physical cuts/ injuries/ unexplained new phone or clothing etc.

Social Services and Care Workers

It is recognised that Social Services and Care Workers are professionally trained in respect of looking after children in care and that they are best suited to engage with the children when they return to the home. Police should seek to engage with the Social Services and Care Workers who have spoken

with the child upon their return to see if any additional information on the missing period can be obtained.

Completing the Return

Supervisors must sign off the Return on the missing person report once completed to ensure the quality of information received, that there is sufficient information recorded, and ensure that any information is linked properly to the Missing Person.

Appendix I – Linked Exploitation and Crime

There are a number of linked crimes and exploitation in relation to Missing Person investigations which may not be apparent, but should be looked for during the investigation, and in the responses to questions in the immediate safe and well check. Going missing may serve as an indicator that some form of exploitation is taking place.

Modern Slavery Human Trafficking

Evidence of Human Trafficking has been uncovered in Northern Ireland. Victims of Sexual exploitation, forced/compulsory labour and domestic servitude have been rescued in Northern Ireland and there is evidence the problem is increasing. Northern Ireland is not only a destination country for the victims of trafficking but is also being used as a transit country for the movement of victims in Ireland and the rest of the UK.

Where it is believed that a Missing Person investigation immediate safe and well check has uncovered evidence of Modern Day Slavery or Human Trafficking, advice or guidance can be sought from the Modern Slavery Human Trafficking Unit.

Child Sexual Exploitation

Child Sexual Exploitation may be uncovered through the course of a Missing Person Investigation or the questions asked during an immediate safe and well check.

Child Sexual Exploitation is a form of sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a Child or Young Person under the age of 18 into sexual activity: A) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or B) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

Child Sexual Exploitation is abuse involving one or more abusers and a number of related or non-related abused children or young people. The abusers concerned may be acting together to abuse

children, sometimes acting in isolation, or may be using an institutional framework or position of authority, or other young people to recruit children. Generally, offending takes place within loose networks, connected through informal and formal associations.

The signs that a child is being sexually exploited may not always be obvious, and being reported as missing could be an indication that this may be happening. It is important then that this be considered in the safe and well check. Any concerns that an officer has in relation to potential Child Sexual Exploitation should be discussed with Public Protection Branch.

Appendix J - Patients who Absent Themselves / Escape Detention

Detained patients can be reported as a Missing Person. The compulsory detention at hospital of patients for the purpose of assessment or treatment is permitted by the [Mental Health \(NI\) Order 1986 \(Article 29\)](#):

“Where a patient who is for the time being liable to be detained in a hospital:

- Absents himself from the hospital without leave of absence; or
- Fails to return to the hospital on any occasion on which, or at the expiration of any period for which, leave of absence was granted to him or upon being recalled; or
- Absents himself without permission from any place where he is required to reside in accordance with conditions imposed on the grant of leave of absence.

He may be taken into custody and returned to the hospital or place by any constable or other authorised person”.

The power is conditional and can only be used if the person is found within **28 days** of escaping or the period for which they were liable to be detained has not lapsed. Therefore, when reported absent, the details of the date on which the power to retake the person ceases must be recorded.

The Mental Health (NI) Order 1986 (Article 132:3) further states:

“A person who escapes while being taken to or detained in a place of safety under Article 129 or Article 130 shall not be retaken under this Article after the expiration of the period of **48 hours** beginning with the time when he escapes or the period during which he is liable to be so detained, whichever expires first”.

It is imperative that all aspects of the risk assessment are carefully considered and consultation with the relevant Health and Social Care staff takes place to ensure all information is shared.

Appendix K - Persons Lost at Sea (and other defined bodies of water)

All persons missing in water, whether presumed drowned or otherwise, **should be considered to be High Risk Missing.**

When a Missing Person is lost at sea (and other defined bodies of water) there are two parts to the investigation:

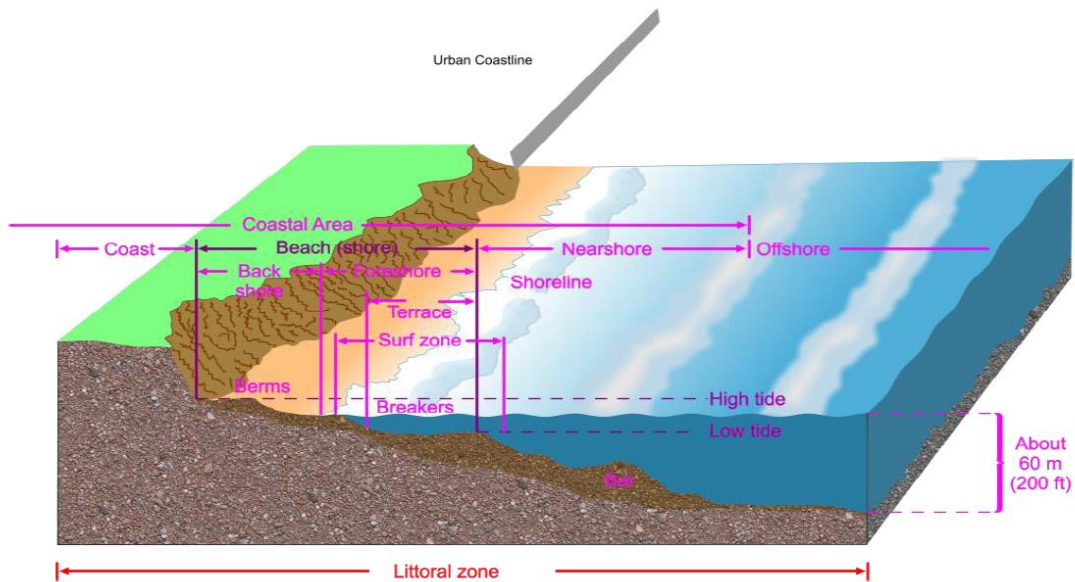
- The Missing Person element - Who, What, Where, Why, When, and How?
- The Search and Rescue (SAR) element.

Unlike land based search and rescue operations for which the PSNI have the statutory responsibility for activating and co-ordinating (including most inland waters), HM Coastguard has responsibility for maritime search and rescue response and co-ordination.

“To avoid duplication of effort between HM Coastguard and the Police Services, which are the two civilian SAR co-ordinating authorities in the UK, it has been agreed that a coastal incident is defined as an incident which develops on the seaward side of the coastline below the level of Mean High Water Spring tides (MHWS) but including sea cliffs, shoreline and other littoral areas. Such incidents will be coordinated by HM Coastguard and those above MHWS will be coordinated by the Police Services. Incidents which develop inland and progress towards the shoreline will be the responsibility of the Police Services and, if requested, HM Coastguard will provide resources to assist. Where appropriate, the coordination of an incident can be handed over from one coordinating authority to the other” ([Strategic overview of search and rescue in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 2017](#)).

Investigators should then take care to consider the location and geography of the location that the Missing Person currently is and then who should take primacy on the search and rescue element. The following diagram of a coastal area, taken from the [Strategic overview of search and rescue in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 2017](#) should help aid any decision taken:

Diagram of Coastal Area



Other Bodies of Water

HM Coastguard are also responsible for the maritime search and rescue response and co-ordination in:

Belfast Lough, Lough Foyle, Strangford Lough, Lough Erne, Lough Neagh, and all Ports and Harbours.

Police Liaison with HM Coastguard

When a Missing Person is lost at sea along the Northern Ireland coastline or missing from the one of the other above defined bodies of water, and HM Coastguard are co-ordinating the Maritime Search and Rescue Response and co-ordination it is important to establish any investigative actions HM Coastguard have/are taking in regards to establishing locations of:

<p>The Missing Person:</p>	<p>HM Coastguard have their own provision for conducting a maritime search.</p>
<p>The Vessel:</p>	<p>Vessels carrying a short-range coastal tracking system to which HM Coastguard have access to.</p>
<p>Voluntary Search and Rescue Assets:</p>	<p>HM Coastguard, just like the PSNI, are able to task Voluntary Search and Rescue Assets. It is therefore important that a record is kept by the PoISA of any Voluntary Search and Rescue Assets tasked by the PSNI and their remit, and when aware, of any Voluntary Search and Rescue Assets tasked by HM Coastguard.</p>

Missing Person Investigations for Persons Lost at Sea (and other defined bodies of water)

While HM Coastguard is responsible for the maritime search and rescue response and co-ordination this does not detract from the PSNI's responsibilities to carry out a Missing Person Investigation to establish the facts of the disappearance. As such the following will be adhered to:

Where persons are reported lost at sea, along the Northern Ireland coastline, a Missing Person report will be completed and an investigation should be commenced. The incident location will normally be the area of the coastline which is nearest at the time the Missing Person was lost at sea, however the investigating District will be as follows:

Commercial Vessels Docking in Northern Ireland

The District with ownership for the Port of Destination of the vessel.

Commercial Vessels along the Northern Ireland Coastline having left Northern Ireland and Docking in Another Country

The District with ownership for the Port of Origin of the vessel.

Non-Commercial Vessels

The District with the ownership for the Port of Origin of the vessel.

A Missing Person investigation and the tasking of HM Coastguard should not be delayed if the Port of origin or destination is not known. The District to which it is initially reported should take the lead until such information is available at which point the investigation can be handed over. Regardless of which location is initially or finally used the three locations: entry into the water, Port of origin/destination, investigation at each should not be neglected, as each may yield valuable information with time-critical investigative elements (such as witnesses leaving a boat in the Port of destination, CCTV, or a note left at the Port of origin, or ship manifest), as to the Missing Person's disappearance and help to locate them.

Where there are reports of numerous Missing Persons from a number of vessels from different Ports of Origin and Destination which are involved in the same incident then this will likely be declared a Major Incident, and the Duty Silver should decide which District are best suited to lead the investigation based on the circumstances.

Where a Missing Person is reported as lost at sea to the PSNI and the specific location (i.e. it is not clear that it is along the coastline of Northern Ireland), and the Port of Origin or the Port of Destination are not in Northern Ireland then careful consideration should be given as to where the owning police service should be and the appropriate referral made to them. This may require consultation with HM Coastguard, Legal Services, and International Maritime Law. The details of the Missing Person and any known circumstances should be passed to the relevant Police Service/s responsible for the Ports concerned for follow up / investigative actions at their end. If the Missing Person is reported as lost at sea within the UK Region for Maritime Search and Rescue ([See Annex A of the Strategic overview of search and rescue in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 2017](#)), then checks should be made to ensure that HM Coastguard are aware and co-ordinating a search and rescue response.

UK Nationals lost at sea

Any UK national reported missing from any vessel outside UK waters and reported to UK will be dealt with by the home police service of the missing person or the closest relative of the missing person. Details should be reported to the National Crime Agency (NCA) UK Missing Person Unit (UKMPU).

Coastal Alert or Maritime Group Circulation

If a Missing Person is lost at sea, or any body of water that has access to the sea, then a Coastal Alert or a Maritime Group Circulation can be issued by the UKMPU to notify other relevant police services, agencies, and countries.

Other Notifiable Bodies

Depending on the circumstances of the Missing Person lost at sea notification may be required to the:

- [Marine Accident Investigation Branch \(MAIB\)](#) under [The Merchant Shipping \(Accident Reporting and Investigation\) Regulations 2012](#).
- [Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland \(HSENI\)](#)

Any liaison with, notification to, or further operational activity with either body should be recorded on police systems.

Appendix L – Transferring / Receiving a Missing Person to / from another UK Police Service or Requesting / Receiving a tasking

When a Northern Ireland resident is reported as a Missing Person and was either last observed in another part of the UK, or travels from Northern Ireland to another part of the UK the following should take place so as to try and minimize the duplication of any fast time actions across the jurisdictions. **It should be noted that not all Police Services in the UK will hold to/or treat someone as a missing person based on the PSNI's definition and we have no power to impose our own upon them.** With any communication to other UK Police Services it is vitally important to communicate well any risks and what specific actions may need to be completed and the urgencies of enquiries.

1. When the Missing Person report is taken it should be established if the Missing Person has already been reported to the local police service responsible for the geographical area in which the Missing Person went missing from/was last observed.

If the Missing Person has already been reported as a Missing Person elsewhere in the UK it will be their responsibility to progress the investigation accordingly, and it can be closed as a contact record.

Should any requests for assistance from the local Police Service progressing the investigation be sought then they should be directed to CMC for the request via a Missing Persons Tasking and Transfer Form to be reviewed and a resource assigned if appropriate.

2. When a Missing Person report is received by the PSNI but the Missing Person is missing outside of Northern Ireland, but within the UK, CMC will record the details, but pass the information directly to the local police service responsible for the geographical area in which the Missing Person went missing from/was last observed. The reporting party will be made aware of this. Should any requests for assistance from the local police service progressing the investigation be sought via a Missing Persons Tasking and Transfer Form then they should be directed to CMC for the request to be reviewed and a resource assigned if appropriate.

3. When a person has reported a Northern Ireland resident as missing in Northern Ireland, an investigation is underway, and the Missing Person subsequently leaves Northern Ireland and travels elsewhere in the UK so that the bulk of the enquiries will now fall outside of the PSNI boundaries:
- a) The relevant force control room for the local Police Service responsible for the geographical area in which the Missing Person has travelled should be notified.
 - b) A Missing Persons Tasking and Transfer Form should be completed and sent to the relevant force control room. This should be followed up by a phone call with the relevant person in the relevant Police Service to clarify any details or questions they may have. Once a formal handover has been completed (the Missing Persons Tasking and Transfer Form has been signed and returned) it will be decided whether a concurrent investigation by the PSNI may also be required depending on the circumstances, or if it will be closed.
 - c) In High Risk cases there may also be an immediate need to make direct contact with another Police Service inside the UK as it may be the most optimal way to try and ensure the safety of the Missing Person.

There should be a professional briefing via telephone, video call, or in person, between the Investigating Officers (Inspector Rank in the PSNI) to ensure all important details of the investigation are communicated. All such actions and details should be recorded on police systems.

4. When someone has been reported as a Missing Person to another UK Police Service, and investigation is underway, and they travel Northern Ireland that the bulk of the enquiries will now fall inside the PSNI boundaries.
- a) When the formal request from another UK Police Service is made they should be asked to complete a Missing Persons Tasking and Transfer Form they should be asked to complete one (if the request has not come by this method). Once this has been received from another UK Police Service it should be:

- Sent to the Duty Inspector responsible for the District to which the Missing Person has either travelled to, or is known to be in (whichever is most appropriate);
 - Followed up by a phone call from the PSNI with the relevant person in the relevant Police Service requesting the transfer of the Missing Person investigation to clarify any details or questions they may have;
 - The Missing Persons Tasking and Transfer Form should then be signed and returned to either acknowledge or decline any formal handover; and
 - Returned to the appropriate force control room or relevant person in the other UK Police Service.
- b) A SPOC in the other UK Police Service should be identified so that any further queries or requests for assistance can be followed up expeditiously.

Requesting/Receiving a Tasking

Should the PSNI require another UK Police Service to conduct a Missing Person enquiry tasking on their behalf (but are not formally transferring the investigation), or vice versa, that another UK Police Service require the PSNI to conduct a Missing Person enquiry tasking on their behalf (but are not formally transferring the investigation) then a Missing Persons Tasking and Transfer Form should be completed and sent to the relevant force control room for review, and a serial to be created and resources assigned if appropriate.

Appendix M - International Investigations

International Missing Person investigations

When a Northern Ireland resident is reported missing abroad there are a number of facts which need to be established to understand the role and extent of enquiries that will need to be undertaken by the PSNI. PSNI officers have no authority or rights to visit another country to undertake investigations or enquiries. **It should be noted that not all countries will hold to/or treat someone as a missing person based on the PSNI's definition and we have no power to impose our own upon them.** With any international communication it is vitally important to communicate well any risks and what specific actions may need to be completed and the urgencies of enquiries. This appendix should be read in conjunction with [Appendix E](#).

1 - As stated at the start of this Service Instruction police are not a tracing service. If a matter is reported to police in which a family member/friend has not been in contact with another family member/friend in another country for an extended period of time this does not mean that they are necessarily missing person, and should not be treated as such. It may be appropriate to direct the reporting person to make their own enquiries in the country in which they knew their family member was last travelling/staying. They may also be directed to the Salvation Army Family Tracing Service as outlined in [Appendix P](#).

2 - If a person reports that a Northern Ireland resident has not been in contact while travelling abroad (outside of the UK) when they would have expected them to be, but there are no other indicators of risk or harm, then a concern for safety address check (e.g. at their hotel/accommodation) may be appropriate first to establish their whereabouts in a foreign country. Should this return as negative then they may be considered to be a missing person depending on the circumstances.

3 - If a person has reported a Northern Ireland resident as missing in Northern Ireland, an investigation is underway, and the Missing Person subsequently leaves Northern Ireland (and travels outside of the UK):

- a) If the destination country is known then the relevant agency for that Jurisdiction should be notified via the International Policing Unit, (or directly if high risk) a briefing document prepared, and formal handover sought. A concurrent investigation by the PSNI may also be required depending on the circumstances.
- b) If the destination country is unknown see below for how to complete an international circulation.

4 - If a person reports that a Northern Ireland resident is missing abroad and the circumstances meet the Missing Person definition then details of any interactions between the reporting person and any foreign jurisdiction should be recorded. Although the initial investigation will normally be undertaken by the relevant agency within the country they went missing, an Investigating Officer from a Neighbourhood Policing Team (NPT) should be appointed from the District in which the Missing Person normally resides to provide any relevant assistance. This does not detract from LPT taking any immediate appropriate actions until the relevant NPT are on duty. Once a NPT IO has been appointed there is no further requirement for the normal Missing Person supervisor reviews, instead the serial should be reviewed in line with the normal case Supervision Standards. The two main reporting structures for a Northern Ireland resident is missing abroad are:

- a) If the foreign jurisdiction are not yet aware of the Missing Person then it may be more appropriate for the PSNI to notify them via the International Policing Unit.
- b) If the foreign jurisdiction are aware of the Missing Person and have started an investigation then the IO may notify them of their details via the International Policing Unit. Any enquiries that any agency outside of the UK request from the PSNI should be requested through the International Policing Unit office and not directly to the IO. Any responses to enquiries requested by an agency outside of the UK should also be returned

through the International Policing Unit office. Requests will be reviewed on an individual basis as to whether the PSNI has responsibility to carry out any requested tasks.

In all cases where liaison is required with an agency outside the UK, officers should seek advice and guidance from the International Policing Unit.

The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)

If appropriate, in regards to a Missing British national, the reporting party may also be advised to contact the FCDO for any further assistance they may be able to offer in the foreign Jurisdiction. Should any police investigator require contact with the Foreign and Commonwealth office this should be directed through the International Policing Unit. To find out more about how the FCDO can potentially assist [see here](#).

High Risk Missing Persons who are Abroad

In cases when a person reports to the PSNI that a Northern Ireland resident is missing abroad and they meet a high risk definition:

- International Policing Unit has a call out system available.
- There may also be an immediate need to make direct contact with another agency outside of the UK as it may be the most optimal way to try and ensure the safety of the Missing Person. It is vitally important to communicate well any risks and what specific actions need to be completed and the urgencies of enquiries. There should be a professional briefing via telephone, video call, or in person, between the investigating officers (Inspector rank in the PSNI) to ensure all important details of the investigation are communicated. All such actions and details should be recorded and International Policing Unit made aware.

Once any initial investigative actions and briefing/handover with the relevant agency outside of UK which has jurisdiction over the geographical location that the Northern Ireland resident has been reported missing from, the Performance Chief Inspector (or equivalent) should decide

whether the investigation will be appointed to a NPT officer, or remain with the Duty Inspector, or other appointed SIO.

Cross Border Cases (Northern Ireland and Ireland)

Due to the close proximity of Northern Ireland and Ireland additional guidance can be found below. This additional guidance is offered to try and minimize the duplication of any fast time actions across the jurisdictions.

Where a person who resides in the Republic of Ireland is reported as missing in Northern Ireland the details must be recorded. Consideration should be given to the circumstances of the disappearance before determining where the investigation should be based and where the bulk of the enquiries are to be conducted. If it is not the An Garda Síochána making the report then it should be clarified with the reporting person:

- If the missing person has already been reported missing to the An Garda Síochána;
- Who is the Investigating Officer;
- What station they are based at; and
- Any relevant reference number for the missing person report.

If those details are available then contact should be made to obtain a briefing from An Garda Síochána on their enquiries so far, and any risk level assigned.

It is probable that the location of the last known position of the missing person would generate the majority of fast time enquiries, and in such cases the District with geographical responsibility for the last confirmed sighting in Northern Ireland will take the lead. International Policing Unit should be informed of Missing Person reports made by the An Garda Síochána, and any future correspondence directed through them.

When a resident of Northern Ireland is suspected to be a Missing Person in the Republic of Ireland the reporting person should confirm:

- If they have already contacted the An Garda Síochána;
- Who is the Investigating Officer;
- What station they are based at; and
- Any relevant reference number for the Missing Person report.

The guidance for International Missing Person investigations should then be followed.

Ensuring an appropriate handover/response from an agency outside of the UK

It is important then when requests are made for assistance or that a Missing Person investigation be undertaken by an agency outside of the UK that timely and adequate responses are obtained to ensure that the appropriate actions are being completed. Confirmation of all requests that have been sent and any acknowledgments should be recorded on police systems. Confirmation of ownership and/or regular updates should be sought via International Policing Unit, and any confirmation of ownership and updates recorded on police systems to ensure that all supervisory levels are able to ensure that any investigation/actions, etc., are either progressing, or have been fully handed over.

If the Investigation for a Northern Ireland resident who is missing abroad becomes a long term investigation then requests should be made from the IO via International Policing Unit for case updates at the regular long term review times, or as deemed appropriate if new information comes to light.

International Circulation

International circulation for a Missing Person can be conducted via INTERPOL.

Appendix N – Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Undocumented Migrants

Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Undocumented Migrants are entitled to the same protection and Human Rights considerations as any other member of the public.

The question of whether to record migrants such as Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Undocumented Migrants who go absent as missing is a challenging issue for police. The Police, Immigration Enforcement (IE), and Asylum and Protection (A&P) are all agencies of the state. Where multiple agencies of the state have legal responsibilities, consideration should be given as to which agency is the most appropriate to intervene.

All migrants who are required to maintain a level of contact with the Home Office (as part of their entry, leave, or immigration bail conditions) that subsequently fail to do so are deemed 'out of contact'. There is no requirement to notify the police of these incidents, and the reporting party should be directed to Asylum Support who will consult the Asylum Safeguarding Hub to decide whether the risk level justifies contacting the police as it is the responsibility of Asylum and Protection to locate these migrants.

Those that have been served as immigration offenders, or have an outstanding application, will usually have been granted some form of bail with conditions. When someone who is on Immigration bail fails to adhere to a condition (i.e. report at a designated time, fails to attend a pre-planned interview or meeting), Immigration Enforcement will undertake a series of checks to locate them. If they are not located, they will be deemed to be 'absconders'. There is no requirement to notify the Police of absconders as it is the responsibility of Immigration Enforcement to locate them.

If beyond the examples above migrant meets the criteria for being recorded as a Missing Person to the police, i.e. there is beyond their whereabouts not being known, 'the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be the subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another', then police should take responsibility for recording them as a Missing Person, and conduct a proportionate investigation to locate that individual.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

Within the children in care population there is a growing number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC), some of whom may be at risk of or victims of modern slavery. Modern slavery encompasses human trafficking, slavery, servitude, and forced or compulsory labour. Such children are likely to remain under the influence of traffickers or those that may seek to exploit them following arrival into Northern Ireland (NI) and whilst in care.

When UASC are reported as a Missing Person the PSNI should co-ordinate with the relevant Trust, and follow in all cases HSC Trust staff and PSNI should follow the *Interface Protocol between HSC Trusts and the PSNI (Where a child is reported missing and other police interactions with residential children's homes), 2023*, and the current *NI Guidance on Working Arrangements for the Welfare and Safeguarding of Child Victims and Potential Child Victims of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery, HSCB/PSNI, 2018*.

Undocumented Migrant

When an undocumented migrant is reported as missing then it is important to try and obtain any personal documentation, such as a passport, or national identification card, birth certificate, etc., that would provide police with as much information as possible to confirm the identity of the Missing Person.

Immigration Enforcement National Command and Control Unit (IE NCCU)

The IE NCCU team is the first point of contact for policing in respect of Immigration matters.

Modern Slavery Human Trafficking

Where it is believed that a Missing Person investigation has uncovered evidence of modern day slavery or Human Trafficking, advice or guidance can be sought from the Modern Slavery Human Trafficking Unit. Screening questionnaires are also available.

Appendix O - Unidentified Body or Body Part/s

Where an unidentified body, or body part/s, have been located, the initial response should be to treat the incident as suspicious until proved otherwise, with the scene preserved and evidence secured pending a full investigation. The processes outlined in SI0216 Death Investigation should be followed.

The Duty Officer should be informed of any such discovery. With health hazards associated with handling unidentified body or body part/s, consideration should be given to the deployment of the Body Recovery and Identification Team (BRIT) for recovery of the body (via CMC).

Notifications / Circulations

Where an unidentified body or body part/s have been found and local enquiries have proved unsuccessful, details should be passed to the NCA UK Missing Persons Unit (UKMPU) within 48.

Cancellation of reports of an unidentified body or body part/s must be submitted to UKMPU within 24 hours of any identification taking place.

To circulate an unidentified body or body part/s internationally this can be done via INTERPOL

DNA

DNA from the unidentified body or body part/s should be submitted to Forensic Services NI (FSNI) and checked against the UK Missing Person DNA Database.

All DNA for an unidentified body and body part/s which are held on the UK Missing Person DNA Database are automatically uploaded onto [Interpol's I-Familia programme](#) (which is a global database for identifying missing persons based on international DNA kinship matching) to be checked against kinship DNA already held. A Missing Person's family's kinship DNA can also be loaded onto the I-Familia Database if deemed appropriate to the investigation via the UKMPU.

Emergencies or Major Incidents that may result in mass fatalities

The processes and procedures for death investigations (including recovery and identification of the deceased and the support given to family and friends throughout the process) is known as Disaster Victim Identification (DVI). The DVI process is delivered according to [Authorised Professional Practice](#) provided by the College of Policing. For further information see the Disaster Victim Identification (body recovery and identification) section of SI0216 Death Investigation_and SI3317 Major Incidents on the application of Joint Emergency Interoperability Principles (JESIP).

Appendix P - Working with Other Agencies

There are a number of additional organisations that can play a role in Missing Person cases. The list below is not exhaustive, but the interaction with the following organisations may be considered in any Missing Person investigation. Permission should be sought and recorded for any direct referral to a non-governmental organisation.

Missing People

[Missing People](#) is a Registered Charity which can give additional media support for Police and provide support and advice for families during a Missing Person investigation. Please ensure the family have consented before a referral is made and the consent is recorded on police systems. Missing People can also provide help to the Missing Person through their TextSafe services in which they can send text messages offering support to three categories of Missing Persons: under 18, 18 and over, and suicidal adults (run in conjunction with the Samaritans). The Textsafe referrals are a supportive strategy and not investigative. To make a referral to Missing People or see the services they offer Police Services [see here](#).

The Salvation Army Family Tracing Service

Since 1885 the Salvation Army Family Tracing Service has been helping to reconcile family members who have lost contact with each other, and facilitating the rebuilding of these relationships. For a full range of the services they offer [see here](#).

Reunite International Child Abduction Centre

Founded in 1987 Reunite International Child Abduction Centre is a UK charity specialising in international parental child abduction and the movement of children across international borders. They provide advice, support, and mediation, on the issues surrounding the international movement of children. For more information [see here](#).

Victim Support NI

Victim Support NI is an independent charity which helps people cope with the effects of crime. It provides a free service to victims in supporting them deal with their experiences. For more information about Victim Support NI [see here](#).

Registered Intermediaries Scheme

Should an investigation into a Missing Person lead towards a criminal justice process, the use of the Registered Intermediaries Scheme may be considered if dealing with vulnerable persons who have significant communication difficulties.

Appendix Q - Records Management

Where a Missing Person investigation remains ongoing all documentation should be retained indefinitely.

Further guidance in relation to Records Management can be found in Service Instruction SI0419 Records Management.

Further guidance in relation to Property can be found in Service Instruction SI2417 Property.

Appendix R Contact Us

Branch Email

zLocalPolicing@psni.police.uk