

Annex A

Recommendation 1

MOPAC should work with the Met and London boroughs to agree a standardised process for reporting data from each missing-child report, and from Police Prevention Interviews and Return Home Interviews conducted in London, with the aim of publishing a ‘missing children in London’ dataset by the end of 2023, and annually thereafter. The dataset will improve understanding of the causes of children going missing and help services to better allocate resources towards prevention.

Met Response

The Met welcomes this recommendation. The Metropolitan Police Service are working jointly with MOPAC in developing a “Missing People” profile which includes an in-depth review of missing children and young people by MOPAC’s Evidence and Insight Unit. This will allow the Met’s resources to be better focused on preventing children going missing and protecting those that do.

Recommendation 2

By December 2023, MOPAC should conduct research to understand the overrepresentation of Black children in reported missing children figures. The review should inform targeted interventions to reduce the number of Black children going missing.

Met Response

The Met are working with National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC), local and national partners and communities to develop the London Race Action Plan of which missing is part of work-stream 4; not under-protected against victimisation. A key aspect of this will be understanding the lived experiences of black children and families when reported missing to police. The Met will also draw on the findings of the Missing People charity report; The Ethnicity of Missing People and the missing profile that MOPAC’s Evidence and Insight Unit are developing with the Met.

The NPCC lead for missing has commissioned academic work to better understand the dynamics of the disproportionality of black people who are reported missing, including children.

The results from all of these work-streams as well as our ongoing relationship with the Missing Black People organisation will inform the Met’s response to future missing investigations and prevention strategies.

Recommendation 3

The Mayor should explore the opportunity to declare City Hall a safe haven for all children who feel at risk, threatened or in danger.

No Met response required.

Recommendation 4

As part of its review into Safer Schools Officers (SSOs), MOPAC should assess whether all Safer Schools Officers are fully trained to recognise risk factors for missing children; and are able to deliver an effective safeguarding response to at-risk children in partnership with children's services.

Met Response

The Met-led review of Safer-Schools Officers has resulted in improved training for officers in this role. There is mandatory training which includes topics on completing Merlin reports, managing risk and identifying safeguarding concerns including harmful practices, exploitation and gang-related concerns. There is a focus on the understanding of Adverse Child Experience and child trauma and the need to have effective prevention work with the child. From a missing specific perspective workshops and webinars have been organised regarding The Philomena Protocol and the importance of a multi-agency approach.

Officers are due to receive further training on the London Protocol on reducing unnecessary criminalisation of looked-after children and care leavers and a training video is being launched in Summer 2023 [Training Video](#)

Recommendation 5

The Mayor, government and relevant partners should work to minimise the use of hotels to accommodate unaccompanied children seeking asylum, in a way that protects them from exploitation.

Met Response

Whilst there are no hotels in London that currently accommodate unaccompanied asylum seeking children the Met are working with NPCC, NCA and Home Office partners to ensure that any intention to do so is planned for.

Recommendation 6

By December 2023, MOPAC should conduct a review of the experiences of parents, carers and staff in reporting children missing in London. The results of this review should be used to shape a joint MOPAC-Met strategy to improve the process for reporting missing children, including how it will upskill 999 and 101 call handlers to provide appropriate and accurate advice

Met Response

The Met will await the review by MOPAC and work closely once results are established to shape our call handling processes.

Recommendation 7

The Met should attend all multi-agency strategy meetings for children who are missing or at risk of missing, or who have a history of missing incidents.

Met Response

Strategy discussions and meetings with key partners in missing children incidents remain an important part of the Met's investigative and problem-solving response. The Met seeks to adhere to the London Safeguarding Children Partnerships '[London Child Protection Procedures](#)' which advise of meetings and discussions taking place within 3 days of an incident.

Obvious challenges can present however where partners across 32 different local authorities who seek to initiate strategy meetings at different timeframes and this expectation to address each meeting can be a logistical and practical impossibility for officers. Missing Person Unit officers are responsible for attending strategy meetings and they attend hundreds of strategy meetings across the Met each week. MPU officers however are also responsible for the progression of live high risk missing cases and cases open beyond 48 hours; resources therefore are often stretched meaning partner-initiated meetings are sometimes prioritised over others due to competing demand.

The Met Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) review is nearing the implementation stage which will result in new working practices and increased capacity due to an investment of further posts. This will increase the availability of officers to attend strategy discussions in the initial stages of investigation of missing children.

Work is ongoing across the Met to meet the challenges of partnership and problem-solving approaches with joint agency working remaining a key priority. We're advising that across London, each of the 12 BCU Missing Person Units liaise with council partners to better understand the roles and perspectives in meeting the demand for strategy meetings. Currently, this is being addressed in joint agency workshops between BCUs and local authority partners. To date 7 such workshops have taken place with huge benefits being reflected on both sides. We will continue until all 32 local authorities have been covered.

We have developed and are delivering a 3-day training course dedicated to the role of the missing person unit. Within this, alongside investigative expertise, we cover attendance and coverage of strategy meetings and other joint agency response opportunities. We will continue to review the role and resourcing of missing person units to ensure strategy meetings are attended and we fulfil the expectations of the London Child Protection Procedures.

Recommendation 8

By December 2023, MOPAC should develop comprehensive guidance on how BCUs can work with voluntary sector services to enhance responses to missing children, including more active use of the text-safe service.

Met Response

The Met are progressing plans for a Centralised Vulnerability Hub which, as well as providing front line officers with tactical advice on responding to Mental Health calls, will replace the initial handling stage of all missing incidents across the 12 BCUs. This will include informant engagement, risk



assessment and the initial prioritised response to missing incidents within a dedicated unit for the Met. As a centralised, specialist role it is intended this will address consistency of service, responses and decision-making. Here, services such as Missing People's 'TextSafe' can form part of a comprehensive response. The Met continue to develop the relationship with the Missing People Charity and Missing Black People to improve our response.

For the last three years the Met has partnered with the Children's Society in delivering training packages across London children's care homes to spot the signs of exploitation and provide educational literature and toolkits to disrupt child exploitation. This continues as part of the Met's wider County Lines programme. The Met's Missing Person Coordinators play a key role in these partnerships.

Recommendation 9

By December 2023, the Met should review how it assesses risk in missing child cases and how different thresholds trigger different police responses. This review should be conducted with London boroughs, care providers and relevant voluntary organisations, with the aim of producing a jointly agreed risk assessment that is made available to all relevant services.

Met Response

The Met handles the highest volume of missing incidents of any UK police force and so we must ensure the initial handling and response to cases is assured and consistent, regardless of who is seeking to report a child as missing. We know however that across social care, levels of knowledge of the child in question or the preparedness of the informant can leave gaps in allowing officers to adequately risk assess and determine an appropriate and proportionate response.

We appreciate also that over-reporting and unnecessary reporting can criminalise normal behaviours and have a negative impact on the child's care and relationship with their carers – this is why the Met are a key partner in developing and progressing MOPAC's work to reduce unnecessary criminalisation of looked after young people.

The Met are planning to launch the Centralised Vulnerability Hub which will provide a single front door for incident handling. For the first time, officers and staff will be trained to perform a dedicated role in determining the initial response to all missing incidents.

Before this however, we have developed officer and call handler guidance around informant engagement; this seeks to enhance the approach of officers in listening to the informant to understand the concern and vulnerability of the individual.

Under continued delivery of the Philomena Protocol, we seek to work across the care sector to improve how care placements maintain and share accurate detail pertaining to the risk and vulnerability of children in their care; this is a critical part of joint working, without which, policing can't hope to accurately risk assess individual incidents. We will utilise the planned data profile and ongoing partnership days with London councils to develop good practice in risk assessing missing child incidents.

Recommendation 10

The Met should write to all London boroughs, children's care services and relevant voluntary organisations to clarify its policies that inform safeguarding and operational responses to children who are both missing and wanted.

Met Response

The Met is committed to a Child First approach to all areas of policing and where a child is both missing and wanted officers will be alert to enhanced concerns such as child criminal exploitation and prioritise the safeguarding of that child. The guidance in place for officers follows that of the College of Policing's Authorised Professional Practice. We will seek to address awareness and application across the Met and write to the referenced parties to outline our approach

Recommendation 11

By December 2023, MOPAC and the Met should review the implementation of the Philomena Protocol to assess whether it is having its desired impact and whether any improvements can be made.

Met Response

The Met notes and welcomes the acknowledgement of the positive collaboration between the MPS and MOPAC (described in the report as brilliant joint working) in the implementation of the Philomena Protocol. The Met has refreshed their version of the Philomena Protocol and are building towards a further push to ensure this supportive strategy continues to underpin joint working, prevention, information sharing and good responses by police and social care providers when a looked after child is reported missing.

The Met will work closely with MOPAC's oversight to assess the impact of the Philomena Protocol and identify if there are improvements that can be made to this a long-term strategy.

Recommendation 12

For children in care who are placed within London, but outside their home area, the Met should establish clear processes between the home BCU and the destination BCU, or neighbouring police service, to facilitate effective information exchange and joint attendance at strategy meetings; and to ensure that, in the event of any future missing incident, there is an effective joint response.

Met Response

The impact of out of the area placement of looked after children is a longstanding issue which can affect joint working. This is primarily a national issue, and we must consider the scale and complexity of the issue before accepting the responsibility to fix as a single force.

However, we should absolutely look to review process and seek to pursue workable options which could improve joint working in London.

The Met already operates a number of strategies centred on effective information gathering; namely the Philomena Protocol information sharing form, maintained by the care placement, and joint agency trigger plans which are created by police. The nature of the Philomena Protocol already

emphasises the prompt sharing of child-specific risk assessments and care plans with ‘hosting’ authorities and the care placement, and we must remain robust in our expectation that this is done by placing authorities to enable effective care planning and responses.

Local authority partners are primarily responsible for ensuring the timely sharing of information when a child is placed outside of their area.

Recommendation 13

The National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC) should maintain a national directory of phone numbers and emails for missing-children’s teams in each police service across England and Wales. MOPAC should write to the NPCC to request this.

Met Response

The Met recently led on a national piece of work to improve the process of case transfers and cross-border tasking requests for missing incidents between Forces. This policy will mitigate some of the concerns raised by having clear guidelines and process for requesting forces to take ownership for a missing investigation or action from another force.

Whilst the Met does have a dedicated Missing Person Unit in each force this is not replicated across all of the forces nationally. Therefore the Force Control Room is the most appropriate 24/7 point of contact.

Recommendation 14

By December 2023, the Met should conduct a review of Police Prevention Interviews delivered in 2022-23, to include:

- the number of children who received an interview
- whether they were conducted face-to-face or over the phone
- whether they were conducted with the young person, or the parent or guardian
- whether a child willingly engaged
- whether a child made a significant disclosure
- the outcome of the interview.

MET Response:

The current Met system; Merlin cannot provide the necessary data for the recommendation to be completed as such the MOPAC data review will be key to understanding more detail. Due to this it will not be possible for the Met to undertake further action until after the publication of the report and the opportunity for the Met to digest the findings.

The completion of Prevention Interviews via telephone and video call function has been a legitimate means of completion as part of several options. The specific circumstances of each case should influence the means of completion and where circumstances dictate, face to face PIs should be delivered by an officer best suited to vulnerability and risk in each case.

Formulaic expectation of face-to-face contact in each case cannot be considered proportionate or assistive in the timely delivery of Prevention Interviews in London. We must however be assured that the most appropriate option is chosen, and we are not choosing the least intrusive because of the challenges of volume.

Recommendation 15

By December 2023, the Met should establish standardised principles for effective delivery of Police Prevention Interviews. This should include:

- specialist, trained officers in plain clothes to conduct each interview
- a child who goes missing on multiple occasions to receive an interview with the same officer, wherever possible
- interviews conducted alongside a child's social worker/support worker where appropriate
- improved sharing of information with borough safeguarding teams and social care partners.

Met Response

Whilst the Met see this recommendation as one which would be best practice and aspirational to achieve it is something that would create challenges to implement with insufficient resource to service this and if done would likely create delays and backlogs which would negatively impact on information sharing with social care partners.

In order that the intention of police Prevention Interviews is delivered in London, the priority should be that each missing child incident is brought to an effective conclusion with the assurance of police that their well-being is ascertained, and that we have the opportunity to 'debrief' the missing incident.

To be effective therefore, efforts should continue to be around how equipped Met police officers are in their 'tradecraft' of executing a Prevention Interview, to elicit key information and to spot the signs of abuse, coercion or criminality.

Since 2016 the Met has developed a 'Prevention Interview aide-memoire' and this exists within a widely accessible resource page around managing the return of a missing child. We will continue to pursue opportunities to upskill frontline officers to deliver professional and empathetic Prevention Interviews by the most appropriate means in each case.

Recommendation 16

In 2023, MOPAC should work with the Met, London boroughs and organisations involved in the delivery of Return Home Interviews in London to establish a standardised approach to this delivery, to ensure every returning child is guaranteed a consistent experience that is based on best practice.

Met Response

Return Home interviews are conducted by local authorities under whose care each child is under at the time of the missing occurrence. The Met supported 31 local authorities with training in Return Home Interviews in 2022 and continues to work in partnership led by the Missing Person Coordinators.



Recommendation 17

To fulfil commitments in the Mayor's Police and Crime Plan, MOPAC should fund projects designed to provide longer-term support for children who have returned from a missing incident.

No Met response required.