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**POLICE  
SCOTLAND**

Keeping people safe

**POILEAS ALBA**

## **Missing Person Investigation**

### **Standard Operating Procedure**

**This SOP provides clear direction and procedural instruction to provide a consistency of response in accordance with force policy, however it is recognised that policing is a dynamic profession and the standard response may not be appropriate in every circumstance. In every situation, your decisions and actions should be supported by the National Decision Model and based on the values and ethics of Police Scotland. You may be expected to provide a clear and reasonable rationale for any decision or action which you take.**

#### **Notice:**

**This document has been made available through the Police Service of Scotland Freedom of Information Publication Scheme. It should not be utilised as guidance or instruction by any police officer or employee as it may have been redacted due to legal exemptions**

<b>Owning Department:</b>	SCD – Safer Communities
<b>Version Number:</b>	8.00 (Publication Scheme)
<b>Date Published:</b>	07/01/2021

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### 1. Purpose / Scope

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) supports Police Scotland's Local Policing Policy.

This SOP provides front line operational officers, tactical supervisors and strategic managers with instruction, direction and structures around the management of all missing person (MP) investigations. The SOP covers all missing, wanted and found persons including absconders and escapees and aims to provide an appropriate graded response with ongoing ownership, roles and responsibilities.

### 2. Definitions and Exclusions

A **Missing Person** is defined as anyone whose **whereabouts is unknown** and:

- Where the circumstances are out of character; or
- The context suggests the person may be subject to crime; or
- The person is at risk of harm to themselves or another.

In all investigations they will be considered missing until located and their wellbeing or otherwise is established.

- **High Risk:** the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the missing person is in danger through their own vulnerability; or may have been the victim of a serious crime; or the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger.
- **Medium Risk:** the risk posed is likely to place the missing person in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others.
- **Low Risk:** the apparent threat of danger to either the missing person or the public is low (a child should not be graded as low risk).

A **Concern for Person** is defined as a person, whose whereabouts are **known or believed known** and:

- There are concerns of risk of harm to the individual.

The incident recorded on command and control will be classified as a Concern for Person until their safety / wellbeing or otherwise is established.

If another agency has an existing responsibility or duty of care for a person, a local Police Scotland supervisor should assess and decide the extent of police involvement and ownership. This must be discussed with the relevant agency and appropriately documented before starting a missing person investigation.

Police Scotland is not a tracing agency (e.g. estranged family members) and other organisations are better placed to do this, for example the national charity Missing People, the Salvation Army or internet tracing services. Where there is a risk of harm, enquiry should be made to identify or resolve it.

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**3. Roles and Responsibilities**

<b>Public Counter – Police or Staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify MP report required</li><li>• Give reporter opportunity to make MP report in private</li><li>• Commence interview without delay</li><li>• Inform Supervisor immediately and discuss risk assessment</li><li>• Complete MP Report</li></ul>
<b>Service Centre Call Taker</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assess whether incident is a ‘Concern for Person’ or ‘Missing Person’</li><li>• Identify MP Report required</li><li>• Create call handling system record</li><li>• Establish appropriate call grading (e.g. Immediacy of risk, vulnerability, danger posed, etc.)</li><li>• Create ‘Missing Person’ Command and Control Incident</li></ul>
<b>Area Control Room (ACR) Controller</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Take control of ‘Missing Person’ incident</li><li>• Task Officers to attend</li><li>• Notify Divisional Inspector (High Risk – Immediately)</li><li>• Circulate MP details on appropriate talk groups (e.g. home address, last seen etc.)</li></ul>
<b>Initial Attending Officer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Receive notification of assignment and attend</li><li>• Obtain initial information and complete risk assessment (as per MP Aide Memoire)</li><li>• Obtain statements from family, friends or significant witnesses that have been in contact with MP recently</li><li>• Identify Single Point of Contact (SPOC) within family</li><li>• Update Supervisor immediately</li><li>• Ensure all relevant Police systems checked</li><li>• Circulate lookout request for MP via ACR</li><li>• Obtain a recent photograph</li><li>• Make a thorough search of MP’s home address / place of residence, place last seen and place missing from (includes grounds, outbuilding and surrounding areas)</li><li>• Search any vehicle MP may have access to</li><li>• Identify items that are missing that could have been taken by MP</li><li>• Submit Police National Computer (PNC) marker for MP and any vehicle they may be using (Consider Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR))</li><li>• Assess levels of support required for family / MP and give info on support services</li><li>• Carry out checks with local transport and hospitals</li><li>• Check all relevant CCTV for possible sighting or other pertinent info</li><li>• In all High Risk and appropriate Medium Risk, consider</li></ul>

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	<p>capture of all electronic equipment (e.g. Telephony, smart phone applications, social media etc.). Where possible obtain account / log on details, user names, passwords, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider immediate and appropriate actions (as per Missing Person – Additional Investigative Considerations Guidance)</li> <li>• Update National Missing Persons Application (NMPA) to record above information</li> </ul>
<p><b>Investigating Officer</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assume operational responsibility</li> <li>• Refer to the Missing Person – Additional Investigative Considerations Guidance for possible line of enquiry</li> <li>• Ensure all checks and circulations have been completed</li> <li>• If not already done, obtain a current photograph of MP (return on completion)</li> <li>• Brief Supervisors on progress and any concerns</li> <li>• Keep initial informant / family members updated with progress of investigation and ensure they are provided with appropriate levels of support</li> <li>• Ensure continuity of investigation is maintained by briefing any 'new' investigating officer and record</li> <li>• If MP is not found within 72 hours, inform UK Missing Persons Unit (MPU). Notification can be sooner if required (Missing Person Notification Form (UK Missing Persons Unit) 096-002 )</li> <li>• Notify UK MPU immediately if the MP is a UK resident missing abroad or a foreign national</li> <li>• Arrange a SPOC so family / relevant persons can provide / request information</li> <li>• Address any immediate medical / welfare needs on return, make sure 'safe and well' and 'return' discussions are conducted</li> <li>• Cancel circulations and submit referrals for support</li> </ul>
<p><b>Supervisor (Sgt)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure Initial Attending Officer is deployed</li> <li>• Review and assess initial risk assessment carried out by Initial Attending Officer</li> <li>• Review all actions carried out to ensure appropriate response (Guidance contained within Missing Person – Additional Investigative Considerations Guidance)</li> <li>• Ensure an immediate and longer term plan in place</li> <li>• Ensure all decisions are recorded along with rationale</li> <li>• Appoint an investigating officer (in many cases, will be Initial Attending Officer) and ensure ownership clearly recorded</li> <li>• Notify Inspector of all High Risk MPs <b>immediately</b> (Medium and Low risk as soon as practicable)</li> <li>• Consider media release</li> <li>• Consider specialist services (e.g. Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Police Licensed Search Advisor (PoISA),</li> </ul>

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	<p>Communications Investigation Unit etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct effective briefing with oncoming Sergeant</li> <li>• Advise CID of Low and Medium MP if not traced within 48 hours to allow for review, where applicable</li> </ul>
<b>Inspector</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and evaluate all information available and agree or amend initial risk assessment</li> <li>• Ensure proportionate response to risk</li> <li>• Ensure appropriate ownership has been allocated Maintain overview of actions / enquiries</li> <li>• Ensure all actions / decisions with rationale are recorded</li> <li>• Review the risk assessment at the start of duty</li> <li>• Ensure Local Area Commander briefed</li> <li>• Ensure Divisional Supt. (or on call Supt.) is informed of <b>all</b> High Risk MPs as soon as possible (Det. Supt. If a serious crime is suspected)</li> <li>• In all High Risk cases, ensure early contact with PoISA / Search Manager</li> <li>• Ensure CID made aware of all High Risk MPs</li> <li>• Consider Community Impact Assessment (Community Impact Assessment SOP)</li> <li>• Consider partner agencies</li> <li>• Maintain appropriate records</li> <li>• If circumstances merit it, ensure CID give consideration to reviewing all Low and Medium risk MPs within 48 hours, and in any case, within 14 days</li> </ul>
<b>Senior Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain oversight of all missing persons</li> <li>• Lead investigation of High Risk missing persons</li> <li>• Convene and chair 'Gold' meeting structure</li> <li>• Ensure that Police Scotland procedures are followed</li> <li>• Set and document investigation strategy</li> <li>• Assign ownership in cross-border enquiries</li> <li>• Maintain overview of actions / enquiries</li> <li>• Ensure all actions / decisions with rationale are recorded</li> <li>• Consider Community Impact Assessment (Community Impact Assessment SOP)</li> </ul>

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### **4. Police Scotland National Missing Person Application (NMPA)**

Missing person investigations will be recorded on NMPA when there is a police response to an incident of someone going missing including the deployment of resources. Where a case is being investigated by Police Scotland and enquiries are being carried out, irrespective of which force has ownership, the enquiry must be managed on NMPA and a form raised.

### **5. Ownership/Transfer**

Where another force indicates a desire to transfer ownership of a MP enquiry to Police Scotland, there must be clear and unambiguous ownership and responsibility for the investigation. Transferring cases should be done in a timely manner using an auditable process. An investigation should not be closed without clear confirmation that all information and intelligence has been transferred and received and Police Scotland has taken ownership of the case.

In cases where the appropriate ownership is not clear, the matter should initially be discussed between supervisors within each relevant force to determine who should own the investigation.

Where agreement cannot be reached at this level it should be referred to a senior officer from Police Scotland, who will discuss the matter with a senior officer from the other force. Where an agreement on primacy for an investigation has not been resolved, all necessary enquiries should continue with the originating force.

Likewise, when Police Scotland wish to transfer ownership of a MP enquiry to another force, the aforementioned process must apply.

### **6. Key Contacts**

For further advice and assistance, please contact:

**Information has been removed due to its content being exempt in terms of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, Section 30, Prejudice to effective conduct of public affairs.**

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**OFFICIAL****Compliance Record**

<b>Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EqHRIA): Date Completed / Reviewed:</b>	07/01/2021
<b>Information Management Compliant:</b>	Yes
<b>Health and Safety Compliant:</b>	Yes
<b>Publication Scheme Compliant:</b>	No

**Version Control Table**

<b>Version</b>	<b>History of Amendments</b>	<b>Approval Date</b>
1.00	New addition to Police Scotland Record Set	28/03/2013
1.01	Amendment to appendices to remove mention of local instruction in Appendix 'D' where national record sets replaced instruction(Section 7.2) and addition of protocol document in Appendix 'E'	29/03/2013
1.02	Amendment to remove reference to superseded ACPOS document.	19/04/2013
1.03	Amendment to Appendix 'G' to include guidance in relation to specific searches via OMIS.	17/06/2013
1.04	Amendment to Appendices 'D' and 'E'. 'D' to highlight protocol document and 'E' due to divisional restructuring and removal of enquiry officer role.	17/06/2013
2.00	Formal document review. Amendments throughout the document.	12/11/2013
2.01	Amendment to Appendix 'E' to include introduction of new Vulnerable Persons Database and process around this. Removal of reference to superseded Concern Forms.	25/03/2014
2.02	Amendment to Appendix 'G' to update process for Long Term Missing Persons	20/05/2014
3.00	Formal document review. Numerous amendments throughout the document including an updated definition of a 'Missing Person', which will be applied consistently throughout the organisation.	16/06/2014
3.1	Numerous changes throughout the document to clarify instruction to the reader and significant inclusions of definition of "child" at paragraph 2.6, responsibilities for public counter staff at paragraph 4.1 and a section on risk assessment (Section 11).	06/10/2014
3.2	Amendment to paragraph 7.3 providing direction in relation to release of information to the media.	17/10/2014
4.00	Change of email address at paragraph 17.3	17/02/2015
5.00	Updated to include Schengen	09/04/2015

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6.00	Under the direction of DCC Johnny Gywnne the amendments noted in this SOP are in relation to grammatical changes only from the wording 'police office' to 'police station'.	12/07/2017
7.00	Rifer added to the front page of the SOP to advise of the changes to the way Police Scotland will operate in relation to EU systems post EU exit on the 31/12/2020	31/12/2020
8.00	SOP content reviewed and fully revised in line with SOP Review Principles.	07/01/2021

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