



**Oldham's Strategy for Children and Young
People who go
Missing from Home or Care
2022 – 2025**

Introduction

Children who go missing from home or care are an extremely vulnerable group of children and young people. The Children's Society's identify that around 144 children go missing or run away every day with 2 in 3 children not reported to the Police. Every year 100,000 children and young people go missing or run away from home. When a child goes missing or runs away from home or care setting, they are at risk and therefore this is a safeguarding issue.

When missing, children may experience physical and/or emotional abuse or sexual abuse, be exposed to risk of harm or exploitation by perpetrators. They may feel fear and loneliness and may also find themselves in dangerous situations such as having to sleep rough or be forced to commit crimes. Family and social relationships may suffer, education may be affected, and life chances may be at risk of being adversely affected.

Missing children are in a position of vulnerability from trafficking, violent crime, drug and alcohol misuse and exploitation amongst other crime types. Additionally, research shows that the level of risk to the individual child escalates with each episode they go missing and repeat episodes have been identified as a significant indicator of high risk to the child or young person.

Children Missing from Education

Children missing education (CME) is defined as those who are of a compulsory school age but are either not registered at a school or else not receiving suitable education in place of a school setting.

Research suggests that children missing education may be at a significant risk of:

- not meeting their academic potential and underachieving
- becoming NEET (not in employment, education or training) in later life
- being victims of harm, abuse or exploitation
- involvement in criminal or gang-related activity.

There is also a higher proportion of children recorded as missing education when there is a link to poverty, deprivation or involvement with social care.

Our strategic fit

This strategy aligns to our wider [Contextual Approach to Complex Safeguarding Strategy](#), and aims to set out how we will achieve an effective and coordinated, multi-agency response to those children and young people who go missing from home or care or education.

It is developed in line with [Greater Manchester Runaway and Missing from Home or Care Protocol](#) which all safeguarding practitioners across Greater Manchester are expected to be aware of and follow. The term 'children who go missing' refers to children or young people whose whereabouts is unknown, up to the age of 18, up to the age of 19 if looked after, or up to 25 if they are the responsibility of the local authority and in receipt of full-time education.

Oldham's missing response includes:

- children living at home with parents or in a family environment where parental responsibility is with another party within that home setting,
- children living under the care of the Local Authority within the geographic boundaries of that authority, and
- children living in our geographic area having been placed by other local authorities who are 'Accommodated'/'Looked after' by that authority (COLA's)

Our Vision

“For everyone to work together to ensure that all children and young people are safe and feel safe within their homes, schools and communities.”

Our Values and Principles

1. Treat Children and Young People with compassion and understanding, be non-judgemental, and treat people with dignity and respect
2. Actively listen to the voice of the child and their lived experiences
3. Foster a culture where professional challenge is acceptable and encouraged
4. Approach each case with an open mind and make objective and ethical decisions
5. Take a holistic approach to support the child and their family, including giving consideration to wider factors
6. Recognise the diversity across the borough and incorporate this into our approach



Our Journey

Developing a strong multi-agency response to children and young people who go missing is a key priority for our Safeguarding Partners.

Key professionals from across the Safeguarding Partnership came together with a lead from the Children’s Society to assess our current response to children who go missing from home or care against their [benchmarking tool](#).

Based on the outcome of the initial assessment, partners identified the following five areas that they felt would have the biggest impact on our multi-agency response to children who go missing:

- Children who go missing from home
- Risk and harm assessments
- Children looked after who go missing
- Children who go missing from care homes
- Data collection on missing children

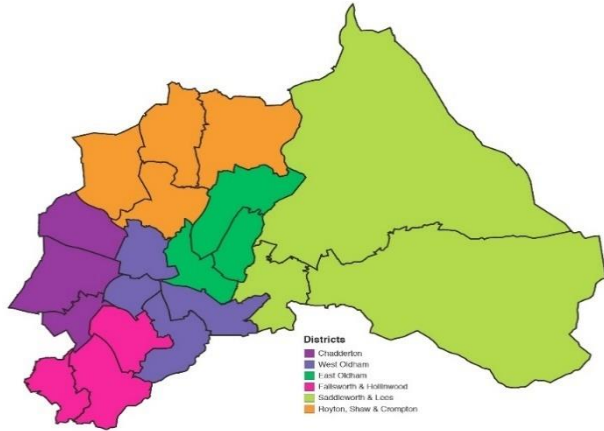
These five areas will be embedded within the priorities and actions developed as part of this strategy.

What do Oldham’s children and young people tell us?

“I don't like it when just anyone is sent to do this, I prefer to just speak to you about it” (Male, 15, relating to having the consistency of the same worker)

“I want to move to social housing but there is none available”, (Male, 17, who wants to move on from care)

Oldham Context



Oldham has a population of 224,900 people making it the 6th largest borough in Greater Manchester.

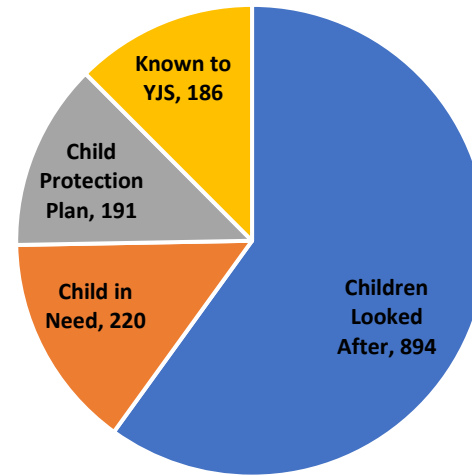
There is a high proportion of Oldham residents under the age of 16 years (22.5%)

Oldham has a diverse population with 22.5% of residents and 46% of school pupils from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds.

38% of children in Oldham are living in poverty – this is the highest figure in the UK

Oldham is ranked 298 lowest out of 317 local authority areas on the indices of deprivation. Five areas within Oldham are ranked amongst the top 1% of the nation's most deprived areas.

In 2021:



58% of missing incidents involve females

61% of young people going missing are White British

Our priorities for 2022-2025

Prevention: Reduce the number of children and young people who go missing from home or care

We will do this by:

- Using the risk reflection guidance to support practitioners in early identification and conversations
- Monitoring issues relating to children going missing such as known individuals and hotspot locations
- Listening to children and young people to understand why they go missing and recognising their wishes and feelings with regards to decision making and planning
- Working closely with our educational establishments to promote awareness and help to identify those children and young people who go missing during the school day, and/or considered children missing from education.
- Working with residential homes and foster carers to help to identify concerns, de-escalate situations and support placement stability

Protection: Reduce the risk of harm for children and young people who go missing from home or care

We will do this by:

- Establishing regular missing from home meetings to share information with partners and support a timely and effective response
- Reviewing and refreshing triggers plans and ensuring they are shared with all relevant partners
- Developing a joint data profile which develops an analysis of children who go missing and the circumstances
- Analysing the return home interviews in order to better understand the young person's needs and wishes

Provision: Provide the right support at the right time for children, young people and their families

We will do this by:

- Introducing a mechanism which supports the OSCP to review the operational response to children going missing and the follow up support that they receive
- Listening to children and young people about the right types of support for them
- Ensuring clear links with Complex Safeguarding Hub and GRIP to support holistic planning and support
- Mapping the support offer across the Partnership and providing guidance on the support offer across the continuum of need.
- Ensuring a clear return home interview offer for those outside of the Oldham geographical remit.

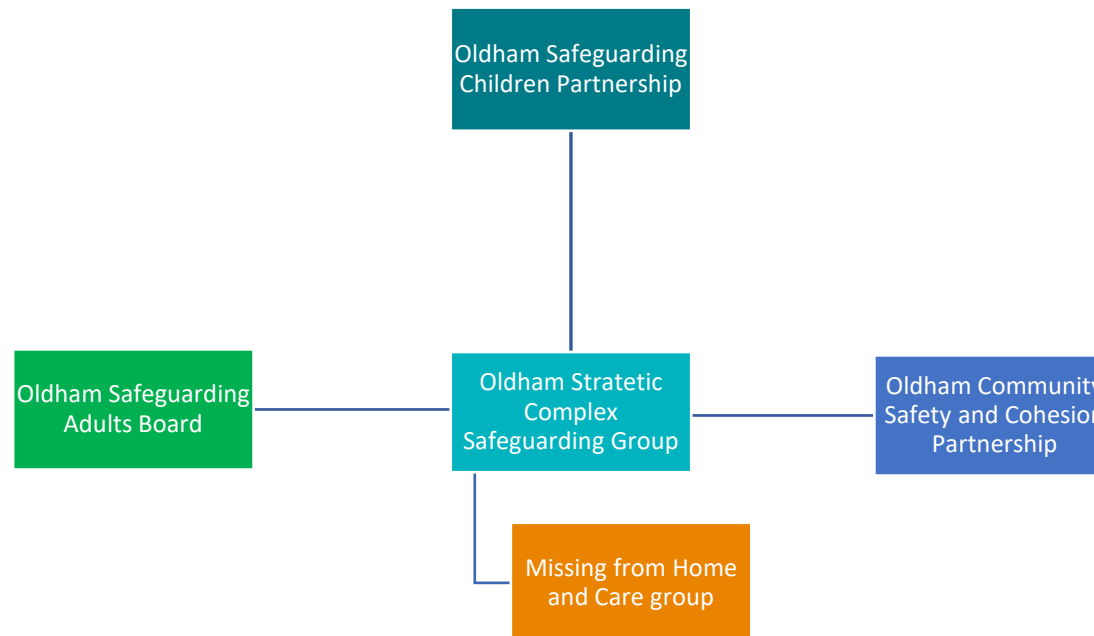
Governance Arrangements

Strategic Governance

Oldham's Children and Adult's Complex Safeguarding Strategic group will oversee the strategy and work plan and the Chair will report primarily to Oldham Safeguarding Children's Partnership on a quarterly basis. The group will also report to Oldham Safeguarding Adults Board and Oldham Community Safety and Cohesion Partnership on request.

Operational governance

The Children Missing from Home and Care Group will meet on a monthly basis to implement the Strategy, drive the work plans beneath and hold solution-focused discussions on individual young people missing. The lead representative of Children's Social Care will report the delivery of this group into the Strategic Complex Safeguarding Group on a bi-monthly basis.



Appendices

1. GM Protocol

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

2. Missing From Home and Care Group - Terms of Reference



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Home and Care.doc