

National Missing Persons Framework for Scotland 2025

September 2025

National Missing Persons Framework for Scotland

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National Missing Persons Framework for Scotland

Ministerial Foreword



The Scottish Government's Vision for Justice aims to deliver a just, safe and resilient Scotland in which people feel, and are safer in their communities.

We published the National Missing Persons Framework for Scotland in 2017 (the Framework), setting out roles and responsibilities of respective agencies and standardising key practice from a wealth of good practice across Scotland, while understanding that this issue cuts across all strands of vulnerability. The Framework's aim is to improve practice and enhance multi-agency working that helps and safeguards vulnerable people.

This refresh of the Framework follows on from the 2024 HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) [Thematic inspection](#) of police response to missing persons in Scotland. Police Scotland remain the key organisation to respond, investigate and locate a person who goes missing. HMICS are clear that Police Scotland's response to missing persons is robust and effective and demonstrates consistent success in resolving missing person episodes.

I would like to acknowledge and thank Police Scotland for the excellent work they do every day to locate people who have gone missing but we must not assume that Police Scotland can do this work on their own. Many statutory and voluntary services work with people who go missing including child and adult protection, education services, NHS Scotland and third sector organisations. In 2017, the Framework provided guidance and placed value on multi-agency working between all agencies who work with people who go missing. This refresh restates that the importance of working together remains fundamental to preventing people from going missing and limiting the harm when they do.

It is clear that through Police Scotland's response to missing persons and the joint working of many partners across Scotland, numbers of people going missing has reduced and crucially fewer people are going missing repeatedly. In 2017-18 Police Scotland conducted 22,966 investigations for people who were missing with one in two of those investigations for a person who had been missing previously. This has reduced to 14,670 in 2024-25 with a drop to one in three investigations involving a person who had previously been missing.

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Of course many factors can play a part in the reduction of people going missing but increased multi-agency collaboration plays an important part and although figures remain high, we should all be encouraged that the work that is being done is helping reduce harm and trauma for people in Scotland's communities. The HMICS inspection should be seen as an important milestone to now move forward.

This Framework looks to build on the multi-agency work conducted and developed, highlighting where good working practices have been implemented and emphasising the importance of developing a local multi-agency protocol, working together in partnership and raising the profile of the issues connected with people going missing.

It doesn't propose to change policy direction from the 2017 National Framework or create new systems alongside those that already exist. Rather, its purpose is to ensure that, by identifying successful practice, and adapting it for different local areas, the impact of our existing systems and partnerships can be increased. It also sets out organisational roles and responsibilities to deliver the best outcomes possible for missing people. This remains a shared Framework; it has been enhanced using the developing practice of organisations and agencies working in this area over the last eight years.

I would like to thank the Working Group for Missing People who have continued to oversee the implementation of the Framework's aims and provide guidance to Scotland's two National Coordinators taking forward the Framework Implementation project.

Through the continued implementation of this Framework, families, friends and communities can be confident that, when people go missing in Scotland, the agencies responsible for finding them already work together to minimise the likelihood that they will come to harm. These same agencies are highly effective in resolving episodes as quickly as possible and provide - or guide people to - specialist services to support them and their families.

Siobhian Brown MSP

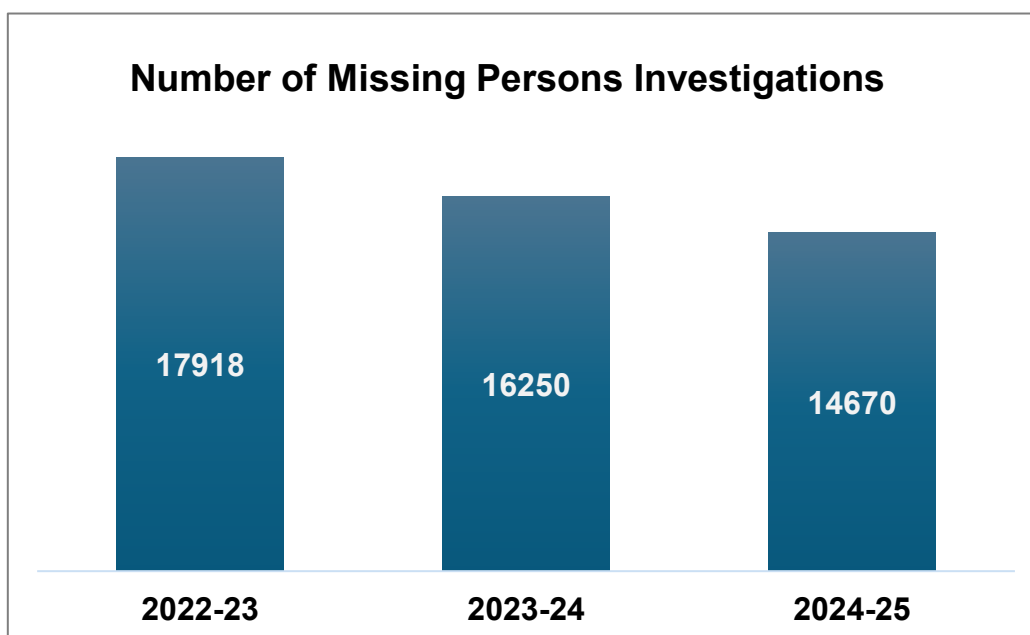
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Introduction

The National Missing Persons Framework for Scotland was published in 2017, through the Framework Implementation Project tailored support has been provided to multi-agency partners in all of Scotland’s local authorities since then. The work that has been taken forward has helped enhance the response to the issue of people going missing and provided examples of good practice and improvement that has informed this updated Framework.

Multi-agency groups have been formed between partners within local authority areas, the use of the joint definition of missing and risk assessment levels outlined in the Framework have been adopted, and where a multi-agency group has focussed on the specific issue of missing people in their area, clear reductions of missing episodes have been recorded.

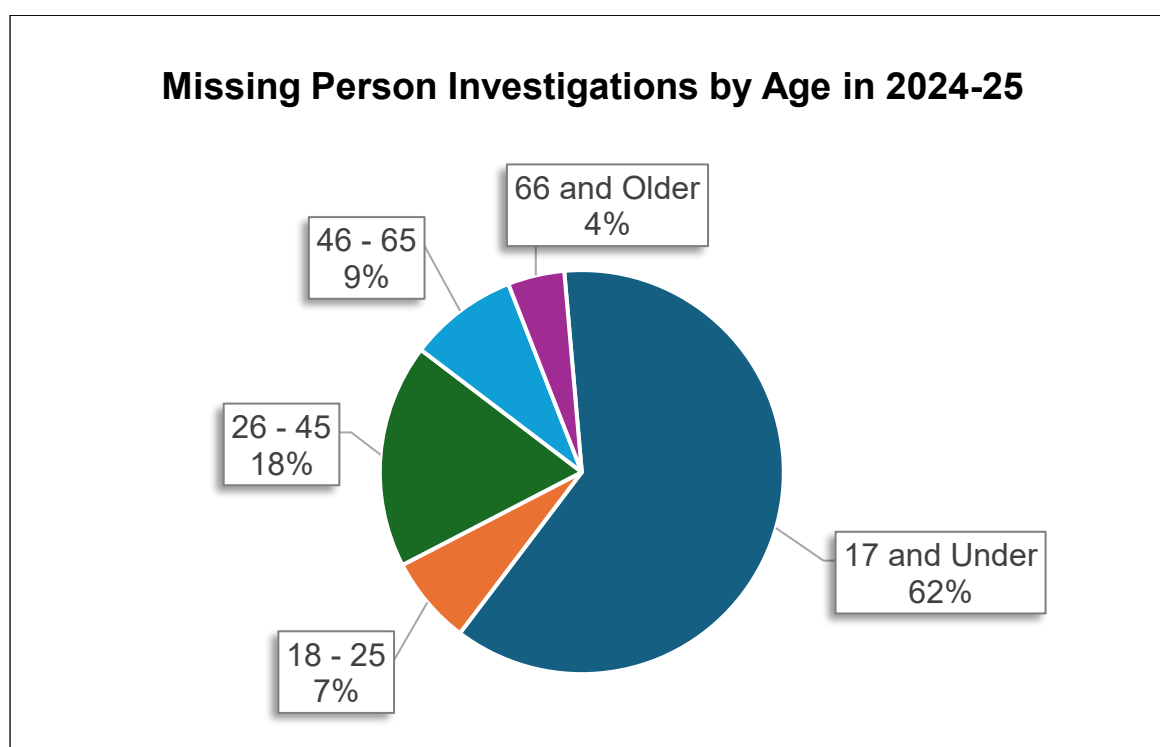
However, the number of people who go missing in Scotland remains a significant social issue and cause for concern. From 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025, 14,670 missing person investigations were launched by Police Scotland – around 40 per day. This has reduced from 16,259 and 45 investigations per day in 2023-24.¹



Most people are in crisis when they go missing – this could be due to a wide range of issues including mental health problems, relationship breakdown, personal safety and exploitation.² When people are missing, they are at higher risk of coming to harm – with research showing that up to 75% of adults can come to harm while missing, and over 3 in 10 are a victim of a sexual or physical assault. Furthermore, 4 in 10 missing adults made an attempt to take their own life while missing.³ All individuals who go missing are at risk of harm. However, for some individuals, this harm can be exacerbated by their circumstances:

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- In Scotland, 62% of missing persons investigations involve children, with just under a third (33%) of those investigations relating to care experienced children, who are at a higher risk of going missing more than once.
- People living with dementia, although only making up around 4% of the people who are reported missing, remain one of the groups who are most at risk of serious harm when missing.
- 31% of police recorded missing persons investigations have a mental health flag. However, the proportion of missing adults who self-report mental health issues as a factor in going missing is as much as 80%.

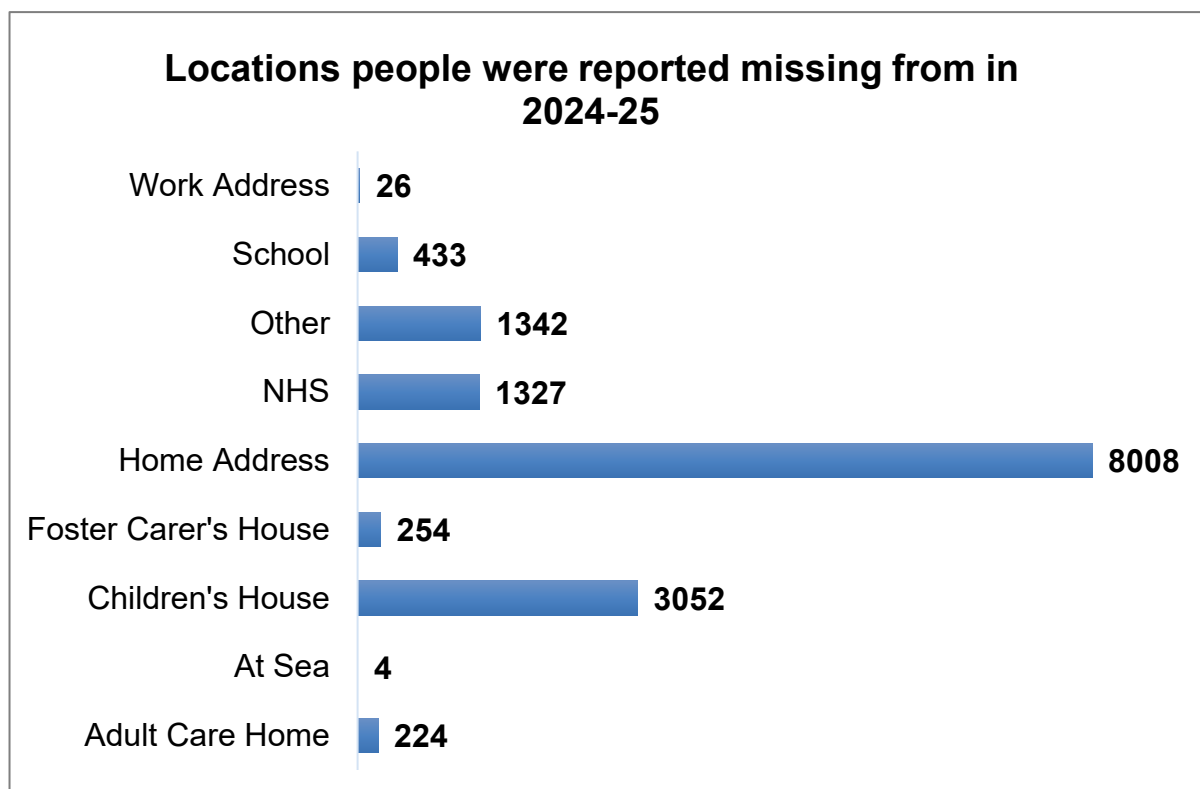


Concerningly, the number of people dying following a missing report increased to 145 people in 2021-22 but has been falling since, to 137 in 2022-23, 125 in 2023-24 and 97 in 2024-25.⁴ A person being found deceased is the worst possible outcome in a missing person investigation, and it is clear that being able to support individuals and prevent a missing episode is the key to avoiding such a devastating outcome.

One in three people reported missing in Scotland have gone missing before – this has reduced from one in two in 2017.⁵ Evidence shows that if people have an opportunity to discuss the issues surrounding them going missing, with a trained professional after being missing (known as a ‘return discussion’), there is the opportunity to identify risks they face and address any support needs they have.⁶ If a return discussion is followed by referrals to tailored support to help the person address the cause of their missing episode and deal with any trauma experienced while missing, they will be less likely to go missing again, and the risk of harm can be reduced.⁷

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Although the number of missing persons episodes remains high, it has reduced significantly since the Framework was published in 2017. Importantly, the vast majority (99%) of people reported missing in Scotland are found or return, with 94% within 48 hours. This is a significant achievement for Police Scotland and all other safeguarding and support agencies. However, it remains important that we strive to prevent people from going missing, even if a person is only missing for a few hours, they are at increased risk of experiencing trauma or coming to harm.



Up to 20 people on average are not located within a year and there are around 700 people classed as long term missing. Many of these people are believed to have died but have not yet been found and therefore the police investigations are not closed and remain open.

The National Missing Persons Framework for Scotland (2017) outlined how agencies should work together to prevent people from going missing and to reduce the harm linked to people who are missing. This provided the first attempts to standardise good practice and offered guidance to professionals on how to align priorities and build processes for multi-agency working to achieve positive outcomes.⁹

Following the Framework's publication, work to prevent, locate and safeguard missing people has continued to be developed across the country by many agencies and local partnerships. The [National Working Group on Missing Persons](#) has overseen the work of the Framework Implementation Project, led by Missing People, to embed the Frameworks guidance across Scotland.

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The Framework Implementation Project has worked with agencies across all 32 local authority areas and been instrumental in the development and support of effective multi-agency working in line with the Framework's aims and objectives and has:

- Developed an online [good practice toolkit](#) and host good practice conference annually.
- Provided training for multi-agency professionals on support for people returning from having been missing.
- Introduced a resource to educate young people on staying safe.

The Framework Implementation Project, working closely with partners across local authorities to establish and enhance effective multi-agency working to prevent people from going missing, as well as the national roll out of the Not at Home protocol by Police Scotland, are likely to have played a significant role in the reduction of people going missing.

This revised and updated Framework builds on the original Framework by highlighting where progress has been made since 2017, as well as identifying current priorities, challenges and next steps. In doing this we aim to ensure that the Framework is up-to-date and reflects the good work that has been delivered by all agencies over the past eight years. The Scottish Government, through the Framework Implementation Project, will continue to work with agencies in local authority areas to embed good practice across Scotland as part of our ambition to improve support and services for missing people and their families and keep people safe in their communities.

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Aim

The Framework aim is to prevent people from going missing and reduce the harms associated with missing when they do.

The Framework maintains four key objectives that are mutually supportive and underpinned by a series of commitments. Through a multi-agency approach nationally and locally, the goal is:

- To **prevent** people going missing.
- To **respond** consistently and appropriately to missing persons episodes.
- To provide the best possible **support** for missing people and their families.
- To **protect** vulnerable people to reduce the risk of harm.

Good Practice

Missing persons is a thread that runs through so many different areas of public policy. To positively make a difference it is necessary to be able to look at the reasons why an individual has gone missing to understand their journey. Following the publication of the Framework in 2017, a similar journey has been taking place across local authorities in Scotland, to learn and understand the issue of people going missing locally, the response to people going missing and what is required to achieve our ambition to keep people in our communities safe.

Good practice is key to build progress towards achieving the aims of the Framework. Good practice was in place prior to the Framework and has been developed, identified and shared since the publication of the Framework in 2017 through the Framework Implementation project. We want to build on that work to continue to prevent people from going missing and limit the harm when they do.

Through this Framework update, key areas of practice that are important in preventing harm related to missing have been identified. We encourage partners in all thirty-two local authority areas to consider how each of the following can help or enhance their missing response.

Oversight

Oversight and support of local multi-agency groups and missing practice is vitally important. Preventing and limiting the harm when people go missing crosses many areas, including public protection. It is important that missing is seen as a priority in each local authority area. We encourage Public Protection Chief Officer Groups to engage with local missing practice and ensure child and adult protection committees include missing as part of their public protection agenda to provide support, link resources and enhance protection for vulnerable individuals through multi-agency working.

Missing Persons Multi-Agency Group

Agencies who work with people who go missing and people at risk in each local authority area should establish a missing persons multi-agency group for their area where one does not exist and continue to review the purpose and members for gaps where a group is already established. The multi-agency group can meet weekly to monthly depending on local need and build necessary relationship and partnership working to identify current issues, hotspots or individual patterns. The group can build its response to missing and support for missing people, identifying responsibilities and develop or update a local missing persons protocol.

Missing Persons Protocol

A multi-agency group can aid local missing practice by developing, reviewing or updating a local missing persons protocol to ensure procedures, responsibilities and actions are clear for all agencies when a person goes missing. A protocol aligned with and outlining the aims of this Framework can provide a consistent approach for agencies when a person is missing and ensure understanding of roles and responsibility. There are a number of excellent protocols that have been developed across Scotland with examples provided in the [good practice toolkit](#) which can be used to adopt good practice from elsewhere. Further advice can also be provided from Missing People National Coordinators - scotland@missingpeople.org.uk.

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Standardised Practice

This Framework standardises missing practice across Scotland in a number of areas that remain essential to the development of local multi-agency working and multi-agency protocols, improving practice and protecting those at risk of harm. The areas of standardised practice remain key and should be incorporated by agencies if not already done so, these are:

Definition of a “missing person”

The following definition of a missing person is used across Scotland and remains key to assessing when a person is missing:

A missing person is anyone whose whereabouts are unknown and:

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

Risk Assessment

It is, of course, vital to assess the level of risk involved when someone goes missing and to be able to communicate that to others.

Therefore, to provide professionals working in different settings with a consistent definition of risk, this Framework maintains that the current ‘**low**’, ‘**medium**’ and ‘**high**’ risk assessment continues to be implemented and used across Scotland and aligned with Police Scotland. A more detailed guide to the ‘low’, ‘medium’ and ‘high’ levels of risk can be found in **Annex C**.

Return Discussions

A return discussion can provide an opportunity to work with an individual and help to prevent future missing persons episodes. It offers the opportunity to support a person following their return, provide a platform to identify underlying issues and obtain information that could prevent future missing episodes.⁷ This should occur following and separate to a safe and well check. A more detailed guide to return discussions can be found in the **Support** section.

Return discussions are key to identifying support that may be necessary to prevent future missing episodes. It is important that we plan for potential missing episodes to limit the time a person is missing and hopefully limit the harm that may occur when

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they are missing. Three key protocols have been developed and are being used across Scotland - agencies in all local authorities should consider use of these protocols where appropriate. Discussion with Police Scotland National Missing Persons Unit can help to provide more information on these protocols - Missingpersonunit@scotland.police.uk. The three protocols are detailed below.

Herbert Protocol

In 2021, the [Herbert protocol](#) was launched across Scotland. The Herbert protocol helps family and carers gather and store relevant information about a person living with dementia that can then help Police Scotland locate the person quickly and prevent them coming to harm if they go missing. In some areas the Herbert protocol has also been used to gather and store relevant information relating to people who may not have dementia but have otherwise been identified as being at risk of going missing. When used, the information stored cuts down on information gathering time for Police Scotland and aids the response time.

Not At Home Protocol

The [Not At Home protocol](#) enables care staff to determine when to contact the police should the whereabouts of a child be unknown and can help care experienced children to experience a similar outcome to children who are living at home. When a comprehensive care plan is in place for an individual, a tolerable risk can be carried by care providers to try and locate the individual prior to contacting Police Scotland, if they are late for a curfew for instance, thus reducing unnecessary police contact for the child.

If, and when the risk becomes intolerable, the child will be reported as missing to police by the care provider. For some children Not at Home will not be appropriate due to individual vulnerabilities or risk. These risks should be assessed to form part of their personal care and prevention plan to determine whether the use of Not at Home is appropriate. Police Scotland are working with the Care Inspectorate to assist in knowledge and training of care staff in using the protocol. Police Scotland missing persons divisional coordinators can be contacted through the national unit - Missingpersonunit@scotland.police.uk - to help implement the protocol.

Philomena Protocol

The [Philomena protocol](#) was launched by Police Scotland in 2023. It is a standardised form that carers and parents can use to collate all relevant information in relation to a child which can help to minimise the time officers spend gathering relevant details about the child. The form is similar to the Herbert protocol and utilises a person centred approach as each child is consulted and encouraged to have input in the form completion. The protocol is now being used for individual children and also as a bolt-on to the Not at Home Protocol.

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Professional Training

It is important that where necessary, training is provided to those who work with people who go or have been missing. Through a multi-agency partnership, training requirements can be identified and provided either internally or brought in externally. Police Scotland divisional co-ordinators have provided training to partners in the use of the Herbert, Philomena and Not at Home protocols. HMICS in their recent inspection have recommended that training for police officers should be reviewed and Police Scotland are taking this action forward. Missing People charity provide return discussion training for partner agencies who are engaged with the Framework Implementation Project within a local authority area and the Working Group for Missing People will continue to review this training to develop and improve delivery.

Framework Implementation Project (National Coordinators)

In 2019, The Scottish Government worked with Missing People charity to develop the [Framework Implementation Project](#) to proactively enhance and highlight the aims of the Framework, learn from the work going on in local authorities to protect and prevent people going missing and promote good practice.

The Framework Implementation Project has enabled two National Coordinators to work with partners in local authority areas, providing consultancy, training and good practice sharing. The project has now worked with partners in all 32 local authority areas, sharing knowledge as well as providing in-depth and light touch support. This has been essential to embed the aims of the Framework and hugely valuable to partners in local areas. It is important that we continue to try and improve our response to missing, therefore the National Coordinators will continue to engage with partners across local authorities in 2025-26.

This work has highlighted good practice across all local authorities. Key elements will continue to be collated and used to refresh and update the [good practice toolkit](#). The toolkit contains resources and multi-agency good practice from across Scotland for reference to support and respond to missing children, adults and their families.

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Objectives – Prevent, Respond, Support and Protect

The Framework aim is to prevent people going missing and reduce the harms associated with missing when they do. The shared objectives and commitments of this Framework are interlinking and require action from all partners to progress:

Objective 1: To prevent people going missing.

Commitments:

- 1) Develop Multi-agency partnerships to ensure local prevention planning for vulnerable individuals and groups takes place.
- 2) Multi-agency partnerships and agencies understand their role and responsibility to ensure that people at risk of going missing are treated as a priority locally.

Objective 2: To respond consistently and appropriately to missing persons episodes.

Commitments:

- 3) Multi-agency partnerships establish and review information sharing pathways for agencies to exchange proportionate information to ensure that missing people are located quickly.
- 4) Multi-agency partnerships and local agencies to adopt a consistent approach to risk assessment when someone goes missing.

Objective 3: To provide the best possible support to both missing people and their families.

Commitments:

- 5) Multi-agency partnerships to identify and agree agencies responsible to hold return discussions with children and adults after they have been missing.
- 6) Support is made available to people who have been missing and their families.

Objective 4: To protect vulnerable missing people and reduce the risks of harm.

Commitments:

- 7) Scottish Government to oversee a programme of activity to raise awareness of support available for missing people and their families.
- 8) Scottish Government and partners to ensure that links to missing and the harms and risks of being missing are highlighted in all relevant strategies, plans, training and guidance for professionals.

Objective 1: Prevention

'I was only allowed half an hour time out from the ward. So I thought if I went down in my slippers, if I bugged off they wouldn't know I was gone and half an hour would give me a good start' – Adam

[\(Geographies of Missing People – Processes, experiences, responses\)](#)¹⁵

Background

Working to prevent people from going missing and limiting the harm when they do is key to protecting people. Each missing persons episode is unique and prevention planning can take place for an individual if there is a known risk, vulnerability or previous history of going missing. Similarly, when episodes are grouped and analysed within a local authority area, patterns or hotspots may emerge and can be identified. Establishing a local missing multi-agency partnership will help agencies to work together to build local knowledge.

Building local knowledge can be aided by Police Scotland missing persons divisional coordinators who can analyse the National Missing Persons Application for relevant information from missing investigations. Awareness of patterns can then be raised within a local multi-agency partnership where agencies may have further intelligence if, children are going missing repeatedly from a school or care facility, or adults are continually being reported missing from a hospital or, indeed, if an individual is repeatedly being reported missing from their home for example. Multi-agency partnerships are key to local prevention by identifying issues, sharing relevant information and developing joint action. We encourage Police Scotland to establish local missing person statistical sharing data protocols.

This type of local knowledge is essential in allowing multi-agency partners to build an understanding of where focus and resources can be best used to make a positive impact on the areas of greatest need. Police Scotland data from April 2024 to March 2025 shows that 1,795 people who went missing have gone missing on more than one occasion.

The work of multi-agency groups and partnership agencies in local authority areas has seen the number of people going missing on more than one occasion reduce from 56% in 2016-17 to 29% in 2024-25.⁴ Prevention may take different forms, and can be targeted at different groups of people or individuals.

We have to be aware that there are many reasons people go missing and these can include mental health issues, abuse and exploitation, identifying patterns can prevent harm or criminality. There is compelling evidence on the value of conducting a well-structured and reflective discussion with the person who has gone missing after they have returned (see Commitment 5). The information discussed during a return discussion can be used, first and foremost, to protect the individual and potentially prevent them from going missing again in the future but could at times also lead to information of exploitation.⁷

Commitment 1

Develop multi-agency partnerships to ensure local prevention planning for vulnerable individuals and groups takes place.

When a person goes missing they will be in a vulnerable place. Being able to prevent a person going missing can reduce harm and trauma they may experience when missing. Establishment of a local multi-agency group will enhance closer working practices that will help to understand people going missing in the local area, where people are going missing from and whether there are patterns that can be identified.

Notably, the importance of taking such a partnership approach to protection is already established by both Child and Adult Protection guidance. Local circumstances will differ, but establishing a multi-agency partnership with a remit inclusive of missing can ensure individuals who are vulnerable can be identified and potential harm can be prevented.¹⁰ As a minimum, missing multi-agency partnerships within a local authority should:

- Develop a local missing persons protocol, linked to this Framework, setting local priorities and responsibilities for missing practice.
- Convene regular multi-agency meetings for effective joint working to share necessary information, including statistical data, on local missing persons and issues to ensure adequate safeguarding and support – bringing together Police Scotland’s divisional missing persons coordinator with social work, NHS Scotland, third sector partners and education and reviewing the use and practice of the protocol and any changes needed.

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

- **In Aberdeen City** - there is a focus on multi-agency planning and prevention. In cases where a child is repeatedly missing, multi-agency meetings and trigger plans allow for additional responses beyond an initial response to a missing episode to be considered.
- **Shetland Islands Council** - adult services, Police Scotland and the NHS, including mental health services and occupational health, work closely together to put in safety measures for adults with cognitive impairments or those lacking capacity who are at risk of going missing.
- **In South Lanarkshire** – the local Missing Young Person’s Group meets weekly and involves representation from relevant statutory organisations. The group focuses on those with the highest number of missing episodes and those who are assessed as being the most vulnerable or at highest risk of harm.

In both North and South Lanarkshire, we have seen the Chief Officers Group sign off the local missing protocol recognising the non-statutory guidance of the National Missing Persons Framework alongside Child and Adult protection provisions. Across three local authorities of Forth Valley, work to implement the Not at Home protocol has been led by child protection leads alongside adult protection lead officers

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revising adult support and protection guidance to include and reference the new Forth Valley Missing Persons protocol.

Targeted prevention protocols referenced under good practice above can also play an important role in planning and safeguarding individuals who may be at risk of going missing and help both family and carers. Partners within a multi-agency group can work together with Police Scotland to recommend and implement the Philomena protocol for children who may go missing, the Herbert Protocol for people living with dementia and the Not at Home protocol with care providers for care experienced children.

In 2021, the Herbert protocol was launched across Scotland. The Herbert protocol helps family and carers gather and store relevant information about a person living with dementia that can then help Police Scotland locate the person quickly and prevent them coming to harm if they go missing. The form and more information can be [found here](#).

Since then, Police Scotland have developed further initiatives designed to provide support and preventions. Working with Alzheimer Scotland, a Return Discussion referral process has been developed to ensure that, following on from a missing episode, a person living with dementia is referred to a specialist Dementia advisor to provide support and preventative advice to the person and their families.

Each protocol can play an important role in helping to plan for a missing episode before it occurs, particularly if a person is at risk or vulnerable or has been missing before. Using the protocols pro-actively can reduce the time it takes to locate a person when they are missing and potentially limit the harm or trauma they may experience. Each protocol is being used in areas across Scotland, they can provide an opportunity to discuss going missing with an individual and the risks associated with going missing. It is important that the protocols are considered for use where appropriate by agencies and multi-agency groups.

Action:

- Through the Framework Implementation Project, we will work to establish multi-agency partnerships with partners within local authorities with a remit for missing and work collaboratively with partnerships to develop local prevention planning focussed on safeguarding children and adults.
- The Scottish Government – in close collaboration with the National Missing Persons Working Group - will develop a self-evaluation tool to provide local partnerships – including Chief Officer Groups responsible for local oversight of public protection – with indicators to monitor the Framework implementation; to review missing practice; and to track progress and improvement on a multi-agency basis.

Commitment 2

Multi-agency partnerships and agencies understand their role and responsibility to ensure that people at risk of going missing are treated as a priority locally.

Local multi-agency partnerships are a vital space in which relevant and proportionate information about individuals of concern can be discussed. Agencies within a multi-agency partnership will work separately with individuals who are vulnerable and at times share responsibility with other agencies to safeguard an individual. It is important that responsibilities are understood and relationships are developed within and between agencies to protect children and adults from going missing.

Practitioners and managers in statutory services and the voluntary sector should be aware of the issue of missing people and the risk going missing can pose for an individual. There is a need to understand when and how to engage or intervene with an individual at risk of going missing, when to contact Police Scotland, and determine who has responsibility to conduct a return discussion and provide or refer individuals to further support and follow up intervention where that is appropriate. All of this is necessary, on a multi-agency basis, to provide support for individuals at risk of going missing.

The West Lothian Missing Young Person's Review Group and Missing Adult's Review Group both meet monthly and involve representation from relevant statutory, private, and voluntary sector organisations. The groups focus on those with the highest number of missing episodes and those who are assessed as being the most vulnerable or at risk of harm. This enables partners to better understand and monitor performance and interventions relating to missing people within the local area.

Development of a local missing protocol will help support and outline this understanding and should fit in with local priorities and structures. There are a number of local multi-agency protocols that have been developed and are being used by agencies in local authorities across Scotland. Further information and guidance can be found within the [good practice toolkit](#) but all local protocols should include:

- Consideration of adult and child protection guidance.
- Definition of a missing person.
- Risk Assessment guidance.
- Return Discussion process and who is responsible.

Forth Valley have implemented a missing protocol across all three local authorities and established an operational group to discuss missing persons current practice and individuals who present high risk of harm. To support the operational group the Forth Valley partnership have also established a review group to provide wider oversight, monitoring performance, interventions and examining opportunities to prevent people from going missing. The work taken forward has seen a 42%

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reduction in missing episodes across Falkirk, Stirling and Clackmannanshire local authority areas of Forth Valley between 2022 and 2024.

Oversight and support of local multi-agency groups and missing practice is vitally important. Preventing and limiting the harm when people go missing crosses many areas, including public protection. As it is important that missing is seen as a priority in each local authority area, we encourage Public Protection Chief Officer Groups to engage with local missing practice and ensure child and adult protection committees include missing as part of their public protection agenda to provide support, link resources and enhance protection for vulnerable individuals.

Action:

- Through the Framework Implementation Project we will work collaboratively with multi-agency partnerships to develop and implement local missing protocols and oversight.

Objective 2: Respond

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

‘I kept thinking if I go get on a bus somewhere half the buses now have CCTV, so they’ll know where I’m going. So that’s why I started walking. No one will know where I’m going, they can’t follow me” (Trish).

([Geographies of Missing People – Processes, experiences, responses](#))¹⁵

Background

Each agency responsible for an individual should take reasonable steps to contact and locate the person who may be missing. When it is believed a person is missing Police Scotland should be contacted and provided with all available information. Police Scotland will make a risk assessment when an individual is initially reported missing to them using available, or lack of, evidence and review that assessment as the investigation progresses. Good quality information about the individual is therefore important in gauging the level of risk.

A local missing persons protocol can help all agencies respond to a person going missing. A protocol can set out the respective roles and responsibilities of agencies to respond when a person goes missing, contain information sharing agreements and highlight national guidance such as [missing from education](#).

Response to a person going missing can also be aided by the use of the Herbert, Philomena and Not at Home protocols outlined above. Both the Herbert and Philomena protocols are designed to contain relevant information about the individual, when used this can minimise the time police officers need to gather information about the individual and aid the process of locating them.

Where the Not at Home protocol has been established, the risk can initially be assessed by the care provider. If contact can be made with the young person a decision can be taken to not report them missing to Police Scotland immediately, if low risk is established, but it needs to be continually assessed so that the most accurate level of risk can be determined for the individual. Good quality information about every missing person is important in assessing the level of risk.

Commitment 3

Multi-agency partnerships establish and review information sharing pathways for agencies to exchange proportionate information to ensure that missing people are located quickly.

While the need for information sharing to effectively locate people who have gone missing may seem self-evident, we need to recognise that we live in a society which

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rightly places importance on protecting the data relating to us. Our laws restrict the amount of information we can share and the circumstances in which we can share that information. Our approach to locating people who have gone missing needs to centre around the individual themselves and, while that is our aim, agencies need to continue to share information responsibly.

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

A range of agencies may hold important information which can be used to ensure an appropriate response is made in the event someone goes missing. This might, for example, be about health issues, previous instances of a person going missing, or concerns about abuse or exploitation at home or elsewhere, which will have been captured in a prevention plan.

Police Scotland generate a Risk and Concern Form when a missing person is found. This form details the circumstances of the missing episode which is shared with the appropriate partner agencies, providing the known causation(s) and circumstances of each missing episode. The Risk and Concern form enables an appropriate safeguarding response to provide support and intervention and safeguard the individual in an effort to reduce the risk of further missing episodes.

It is vital that local multi-agency groups establish clear information sharing agreements and procedures within a multi-agency missing person protocol that outlines roles and responsibilities to help safeguard people at risk. Time should be taken to consider scenarios in which data may need to be shared in which case it is important that agencies determine the appropriate lawful basis for their data sharing. It is for individual agencies to assess and ensure compliance with the law on data sharing, including the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018. There is agency specific guidance available on information sharing including [The National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland](#)¹¹ and [Adult Support and Protection \(Scotland\) Act 2007](#).¹² The Information Commissioners Office also provides a [10 step guide to sharing information to safeguard children](#).¹³

Legislation and guidance set out the crucial nature of information sharing to safeguard and prevent harm. Good practice in Scotland has seen information shared between agencies through operational working groups depending on need. Through data sharing and best use of the information held by Police Scotland and a range of agencies, potential harm for individuals can be identified and safeguarding measures can be put in place.

Separately, Police Scotland contribute to the UK wide discussion around missing persons. Police Scotland are represented within the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) missing persons group and attend regular UK wide meetings where shared best practise and developing threats and trends are discussed. Police Scotland have adopted NPCC missing persons guidance documents on topics such as tasking other forces to conduct missing person enquiries and the transfer of investigations as well as guidance to police forces on missing migrant children. These documents have

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clear cross-border implications and it continues to be important that all UK forces work together in these areas and Police Scotland continues to be involved in updating and maintaining those parts relevant to Scotland within these documents.

Police Scotland also ensure that where required, missing persons investigations are referred to the National Crime Agency UK Missing Person Unit who maintain national nominal and forensic databases specific to missing persons. This allows for a UK wide platform for shared forensics data and databases that are able to reach nationally and internationally.

Action:

- Multi-agency partnerships to ensure that relevant and proportionate information about missing children and adults is shared in accordance with local information sharing pathways to safeguard, support and promote their safety and wellbeing.

Commitment 4

Multi-agency partnerships and local agencies to adopt a consistent approach to risk assessment when someone goes missing.

To achieve consistency of approach across Scotland, 'low' 'medium' and 'high' levels of risk were introduced by the National Framework in 2017. This Framework maintains that where this measure of risk has not been adopted that it should be adopted by all agencies. A guide to the 'low' 'medium' and 'high' levels can be found in **Annex D**.

Action:

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

Objective 3: Support

He made it very easy for me to relax a little and talk to them and we spoke about other things that helped. I think that all has to contribute to my getting better' (Sophie).

'Everybody wants you to explain yourself and I couldn't. For days afterwards I was still the same so, you know, it was on the verge sort of 'I can still walk out' I still threaten it' (Trish).

[\(Geographies of Missing People – Processes, experiences, responses\)](#)¹⁵

Background

When a person is located or returns from being missing, a safe and well check will be conducted. As discussed above, it is important that where possible we try to protect the person and prevent further or repeat missing episodes by identifying the potential cause of their missing episode and providing necessary support for the individual. In the days following a safe and well check, a return discussion should be offered to an individual who has been missing.

A return discussion with a person who has been missing is an opportunity to help and support them. It provides a platform to identify, recognise and acknowledge underlying issues so that these can be addressed in an appropriate way to prevent future missing episodes. A person who has been missing is often vulnerable and they may have been exposed to harm and exploitation while missing. Therefore, all discussions need to be taken forward with tact and consideration. Current statistics from the National Crime Agency and Police Scotland suggest that around one third of missing people have been missing previously.⁴

After a missing person has been located the underlying causes or reasons for going missing need to be identified and addressed. There may be multiple reasons that lead to an individual going missing and these issues do not simply disappear after they have been located.⁷ Individuals who return to circumstances that are unchanged from when they left may be at risk of harm, or may be driven to further episodes of going missing and these will have a negative impact on them and their families.

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

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Police Scotland provided statistics covering the years 2021 to 2024, which showed that 56% of male missing persons and 42% of female missing persons indicated poor mental health.¹ Mental health issues were the most commonly cited vulnerability experienced by adults reported missing in research conducted by Missing People.²

Commitment 5

Multi-agency partnerships to identify and agree agencies responsible to hold return discussions with children and adults after they have been missing.

WHO should be invited to participate in a discussion?

Ideally, a return discussion should be available to everyone after being missing, whether from their own home or from a formal care setting. The appropriate agency responsible for conducting a return discussion should be identified and agreed by local multi-agency partnership and ideally outlined within a local missing protocol. If an initial discussion is declined, further attempts should be made to engage the person. When declined, the reasons for this should be recorded by the leading agency and where appropriate reviewed by that agency and with partners to identify any changes required to the discussion process.

WHAT is the purpose of a discussion?

The purpose of a return discussion is to:

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

WHY hold a discussion?

There are many reasons to hold a return discussion. These include, but are not limited to, obtaining information about:

- How the person is feeling;
- What they thought about their experience when missing;
- The reasons for going missing;
- What happened, including where they went, and who with;
- Whether any harm was experienced; and
- What could help prevent them going missing again.

This will help inform:

- Any additional help or support (referral) that may be required;
- Assessment of vulnerability;
- Care plan, if applicable;

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- Local intelligence of potential risk factors, including exploitation.

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

WHEN should a discussion take place?

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

WHERE should the discussion occur?

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

Local Practice

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

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

Current practice has shown that engagement is often more positive when a trusted relationship already exists. Allowing input from the person who has been missing into who they would like to speak with (or not) can help to avoid issues and increase the value of the discussion. If there is no existing relationship, care, or support in place for the missing person, local partners should agree on who will be responsible for conducting a return discussion to ensure provision is available for everyone involved.

The work of Barnardo's, as an independent organisation working with children who have gone missing from care and home, has been shown to provide benefits for the child who has gone missing, their family and statutory agencies, if already involved. The independence and expertise of the Barnardo's worker, alongside provision of a supportive, confidential space for a child, has been highlighted as key in delivery, building trust and contributing to both child and families [feeling valued](#).

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Interviewer Approach

Given the importance of the outcome, the interviewer should plan their approach to the discussion. It is good practice to speak with the person who has been missing and explain the process beforehand and the reason for the discussion. It is also helpful to outline what will happen to the information they share and re-state this at the end of the discussion. Consent obtained to share relevant information appropriately and any statutory duty to breach confidentiality should also be explained.

Ideally, and if possible, the discussion should be informal and when vulnerabilities or needs are identified, support highlighted and made available to the individual where possible. If a referral is made for the person to receive further support, the agreed leading organisation should follow this up to ensure action is being taken. This will develop good practice and allow local partnerships to measure the outcomes for people who have been missing following a return discussion.

In Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray, Police Scotland have two dedicated Risk and Harm Reduction officers who conduct missing person reviews for cases involving children and arrange return discussion meetings with the children in a location where they can be comfortable and best supported. They are able to provide support and build relationships with the children concerned and local children's homes. The officers also work with the wider local partnership groups to try and reduce the risk of further missing episodes.

Action:

- Multi-agency partnerships to agree responsibility for providing return discussions and outline this in their local missing persons protocol and regularly review whether these discussions are taking place.
- Scottish Government, through the Framework Implementation Project will continue to deliver return discussion training.

Commitment 6

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

When a person returns from a missing episode a return discussion may identify that further support is required. When a referral is made for a person who has been missing to receive further support or protection, the leading organisation, agreed within the multi-agency partnership, should follow this up to ensure action is being taken.

As discussed under commitment 3, it is vitally important that information sharing is done appropriately and proportionately. If a referral is made for further support for an

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individual only relevant information is shared. Multi-agency groups in local authority areas should establish clear information sharing agreements and procedures within a multi-agency missing person protocol that outlines roles and responsibilities to help safeguard people at risk.

When someone goes missing, the families of the missing person can face significant emotional turmoil and practical difficulties. Everyone who has a loved one go missing should be provided with some form of information or support, particularly as the length of the missing episode increases. Police Scotland, as well as any other agencies involved with the missing person, should refer people to the appropriate services available, that may include voluntary services such as Missing People, Barnardo's, Samaritans and ChildLine. This will at the very least allow them to consider further information in their own time.

For the families of those who are missing, practical information is available from the [UK Missing Persons Unit](#) which has developed a range of factsheets. Missing People, the national charity dedicated to bringing missing children and adults back together with their families also provides support services across the UK including a free and confidential [helpline](#), and the National Trauma Transformation Programme has information on the impact of [trauma](#).

Where an adult is missing for a long-time, there can be practical implications for family members, such as having to manage finances, tenancies, or caregiving responsibilities. In Scotland, applications can be made to the courts to appoint a Judicial Factor 'in loco absentis' to provide control over the missing person's affairs, including finances.

The Judicial Factors (Scotland) Act 2025 which modernises the law on the appointment and supervision of judicial factors was passed by the Scottish Parliament on 10 December 2024. The Act is not yet in force and the Scottish Government will be working together with all relevant stakeholders to produce guidance for families seeking to appoint a judicial factor to manage a missing person's property ahead of implementation.

Actions:

- Local multi-agency partnerships will develop relevant referral pathways that practitioners can use following a return discussion to support the individual and prevent repeat missing episodes.
- Local multi-agency partnerships will promote support services available nationally and locally for families with a missing loved one.
- Scottish Government will introduce guidance for judicial factors following the enactment of the Judicial Factors (Scotland) Act 2025.

Objective 4: Protect

'I got there they started to inhale heroin and I have never ever seen that before. I didn't know where I was, they locked the front door and they wouldn't let me out. Then I ended up jumping out the window trying to get away' (Jasmine).
([Geographies of Missing People – Processes, experiences, responses](#))¹⁵

Background

People go missing for varied reasons that can be linked to mental health, relationship breakdown personal safety and exploitation. Research conducted by Missing People found that the majority of people who went missing did so because of their own feelings or mental health with two thirds of adults surveyed concluding that going missing had then impacted their mental health² while wider research showed that going missing can increase a sense of isolation for children who are experiencing family conflict.¹⁴

A missing episode could be the first indicator that a crime has occurred. Many serious crime investigations begin as a missing person investigation. Missing episodes can be an indicator of crime related issues such as, homicide, abduction, domestic abuse including honour based abuse, forced marriage, harassment, child sexual or criminal exploitation, human trafficking or other high-risk concerns.

The shared definition ensures these associated risks are always considered and recognised by Police Scotland as part of the missing person investigation decision making process. The actions of Police Scotland alongside agencies locally and nationally each day help to prevent and support people who may and have gone missing. Those actions and multi-agency working are required across Scotland to protect people who go missing and those at risk of going missing from experiencing and coming to harm.

Ninety-nine percent of people who go missing are located and return from a missing episode, it is likely that further support will be required for some following an initial safe and well check. A well-structured return discussion can be the first step in identifying the cause of the missing episode and support that may be required.

Missing People charity provides free to access, confidential national helplines for children and adults who are missing or have recently returned and for the families left behind. All Missing People services can be accessed for free by calling or texting 116 000, or emailing 116000@missingpeople.org.uk.

The charity also provides advocacy, casework and specialist counselling support and a wide range of online information and guidance for missing people, their families and professionals which can be found on the [Missing People website](#).

Commitment 7

Scottish Government to oversee a programme of activity to raise awareness of support available for missing people and their families.

The high number of people going missing in Scotland can be a surprise to some people. There is also a relatively limited understanding of what going missing entails and the dangers that it can involve.

By raising the profile of missing persons, this Framework can help to build a better awareness and understanding of people going missing and the harm associated with it. Going missing is often a crisis for the person but stigma of being missing for a person can remain from other people believing that going missing is a selfish choice.

Missing People and Barnardo's worked with children who have been missing to develop an education [resource to improve awareness of the risks of missing](#). Alongside the risks of missing the resource aims to increase understanding of options, services and organisations that can be turned to for support.

Organisations and agencies linked to safeguarding and community safety can also become part of the Missing People [Safeguarding Briefing Network](#). Being part of the network ensures that when public facing publicity is not safe for an individual, that they are still being searched for in public facing places and organisations such as youth facilities, foodbanks, homeless shelters and social services can become part of the safeguarding network.

Police Scotland are connecting closely with Missing People to maximise the use of their services. Focussed work has enabled the development of an Information Sharing Agreement between Police Scotland, Missing People and Samaritans with key services such as Textsafe, Suicide Risk Textsafe being actively promoted within key areas of policing alongside other available services to safeguard vulnerable people.

Action:

- Through the Framework Implementation Project, the Scottish Government will raise awareness of the scale of missing, associated risks and support available for missing people and families.

Commitment 8

Scottish Government and partners to ensure that links to missing and the harms and risks of being missing are highlighted in all relevant strategies, plans, training and guidance for professionals.

Missing is a symptom of crisis that cuts across many policy areas such as: mental health and dementia; suicide prevention and exploitation including domestic abuse,

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harassment and abduction, so it's vital that missing is considered within strategies, policies and plans in all connected areas.

There are already relevant statutory frameworks, guidance and training for professionals, at both a national and local level to protect children and adults. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which grants all children and young people a comprehensive set of rights including the right to health and education, fair and equal treatment, protection from exploitation and the right to a voice in decisions that affect them. Scotland has incorporated the UNCRC into domestic law through the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 and Police Scotland have adopted the UNCRC definition of a child.

Alongside legislation, strategies and guidance, public protection is important to provide a joined up approach to missing. Although missing is rarely the main focus of attention in a local authority area it is important that it is not ignored and we continue to establish oversight of missing practice and ensure the risks of going missing and the guidance within this Framework are recognised within adult and child protection. Missing features in key areas such as Keeping the Promise, the National Guidance for Child Protection, mental health, suicide prevention plan, exploitation and education policy and will be an area of interest to the National Public Protection Leadership group as it takes forward its work on all strands of public protection.

The National Guidance for Child Protection 2021 (updated in 2023) sets out guidance to help shape local child protection practices and procedures. It aims to improve the way all professionals and organisations work together to give children the protection they need, quickly and effectively at the earliest possible stage. It also highlights the shared responsibility agencies and services have for protecting children and safeguarding their welfare.

[Part 4 – Specific Support Needs and Concerns](#) of the guidance covers children missing from statutory services, home or from care, and describes their vulnerabilities and possible causes of going missing and the child protection concerns that may relate to the risk of harm which may have caused a child to go 'missing'.

Action:

The Scottish Government will continue to include missing within policy work that link to and are relevant factors in people going missing in Scotland.

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Good Practise and Actions

This Framework sets out key actions to help prevent, locate and safeguard people who have gone missing. To continue to enhance missing practice across Scotland and working with Police Scotland, relevant agencies in local authority areas should develop and establish local multi-agency partnerships with a remit for missing, focused on safeguarding children and adults.

Each multi-agency partnership should develop and implement a local missing protocol which includes:

- Information sharing pathways to safeguard, support and promote children and adults' safety and wellbeing.
- Standardised approach to risk assessment based on the terminology of 'low, medium and high' levels of risk.
- The definition of a Missing Person.
- Agency responsibility for providing return discussions for children and adults.
- Relevant referral pathways which practitioners can use following a return discussion to support an individual and prevent repeat missing episodes.
- Implementation of the Herbert, Philomena and Not at Home protocols.

The Scottish Government will:

- Introduce guidance for Judicial factors following the enactment of the Judicial Factors (Scotland) Act 2025.
- Raise awareness of missing, the scale of the issue and the risks associated with going missing.
- Include missing within policy work that are relevant factors in people going missing in Scotland.
- Work with the Working Group for Missing People to oversee the Framework Implementation Project and Framework progress.
- Fund the Framework Implementation Project to work collaboratively with agencies in local authority areas to:
 - Provide support to establish missing multi-agency partnerships.
 - Develop local missing protocols and oversight.
 - Build and enhance good practice.
 - Provide and deliver return discussion training.

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Roles and Responsibilities

Prevention, Response, Support and Protect

The following sets out the roles and responsibilities for key partners based on the best practice that has been gathered from multi-agency groups across local authorities in Scotland.

Local Multi-Agency Partnership

- Develop and implement local Multi Agency Missing Persons Protocol which includes:
 - The definition of missing and risk assessment (Low, Medium and High) in this Framework;
 - Agreement on who will conduct return discussions from relevant settings in the local area;
 - Agreement on information sharing protocol with partners.
- Ensure that people going missing is a priority in local structures, for example in Public Protection Chief Officer Groups and/or adult and child protection.
- Establish regular strategic and operational multi-agency meetings focused on missing persons and opportunities for shared learning based on local need.
- Review local support services available and build reference file to refer and sign post when appropriate.

Multi-Agency partnerships should include representatives from key partners, statutory bodies and agencies working with people who go missing, these include:

Local Authorities

- Engagement with local multi-agency group and development of local missing persons protocol.
- Ensure responsibilities within local missing person protocol are known to:
 - Try to locate the missing person;
 - Report the person missing;
 - Agree information sharing pathway with partners;
 - Work to the single definition of missing persons with local partners;
 - Adopt common understanding of the risk assessment (Low, Medium, High);
 - Support the family/loved ones of the missing person.
- Ensure messages about the risks of going missing are included in relevant local guidance and return discussion training.

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Private Care Providers

- Engagement with local multi-agency group and development of local missing persons protocol.
- Ensure responsibilities within local missing person protocol are known and:
 - Missing person guidance in place within the organisation including prevention planning and when to share information with partner agencies;
 - Care plans developed to include information to prevent and respond to future missing episodes;
 - Staff participate in training on how to respond to someone at risk of going missing and appropriate reporting to Police Scotland.
- Work with partners to build awareness of support services available.
- Ensure staff providing support to those at risk of going missing are trained to conduct a return discussion and use appropriate protocols regarding children missing from care (Not at Home protocol and Philomena protocol), and people living with dementia (Herbert protocol).
- Review the effectiveness of current prevention strategies following a missing episode.

NHS Scotland Health Boards

- Engagement with local multi-agency group and development of local missing persons protocol.
- Ensure responsibilities within local missing person protocol are known and:
 - Prevention planning takes place for patients at risk of going missing;
 - Information sharing protocol agreed with partners;
 - The definition of a missing person is in place with local partners;
 - The risk assessment (Low, Medium, High) is adopted.
- Work with partners to ensure adults and children in their care receive an appropriate return discussion.
- Ensure staff are trained on how to conduct a return discussion.
- Review the provision of appropriate follow on support for the returned person.
- Ensure messages about the risks of going missing are included in relevant guidance and training.

Police Scotland

- Engagement with local multi-agency group and development of local missing persons protocol.
- Ensure responsibilities within local missing person protocol are known and Missing Persons coordinator is engaging with local partners to:
 - Establish and implement local missing person protocol;

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- Provide local analysis and data for partners about people going missing in the area;
- Agree information sharing protocol with partners;
- Agree roles and responsibilities with partner agencies for actions taken to;
- Co-ordinate and establish protocols with local partners regarding children missing from care (Not at Home protocol), and people living with dementia (Herbert protocol) who may go missing and (Philomena protocol) for people who have or may go missing.
- Work with partners to ensure adults and children receive an appropriate return discussion.
- Ensure relevant staff are trained on how to complete a safe and well check and conduct a return discussion.
- Ensure organisations are aware of where to refer/signpost a returned person and families for follow on support following a return discussion.
- Review the effectiveness of current prevention strategies following a missing episode.
- Ensure messages about the risks of going missing are included in relevant guidance and training.
- Support the family/loved ones of the missing person.

Education

- Engagement with local multi-agency group and development of local missing persons protocol.
- Ensure responsibilities within local missing person protocol are known and:
 - Prevention planning takes place for pupils who have or are at risk of going missing;
 - Information sharing protocol with partners is understood;
 - The definition of missing persons is used with local partners;
 - The risk assessment (Low, Medium, High) is adopted.
- Ensure guidance includes [Children Missing from Education](#).
- Ensure that the pupil is referred to specialist support, where appropriate and/or wider education is provided about missing [Resources Archive - runaway-helpline-scotland \(runawayhelpline.org.uk\)](#)
- Work with partners to ensure children receive an appropriate return discussion.
- Ensure relevant staff are trained on how to conduct a return discussion.

Third Sector

- Engagement with local multi-agency group and development of local missing persons protocol.
- Ensure responsibilities within local missing person protocol are known and there is organisational missing person guidance in place that:
 - Includes information sharing protocol with partners;

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- Uses the single definition of missing persons in this Framework with local partners;
- The risk assessment (Low, Medium, High) is adopted;
- Agrees roles and responsibilities with partner agencies for actions taken to try to locate a missing person and when to report a person missing.
- Training for relevant staff on how to respond to someone at risk of going missing.
- Work with partners to build awareness of support services available.
- Ensure staff providing support to those who have or are at risk of going missing are trained on how to conduct a return discussion.

Scottish Government

- Work with partners through the Framework Implementation Project to achieve the aims of the National Framework and help deliver the commitments.
- Through the Framework Implementation Project ensure training for practitioners is appropriate and up to date for return discussions.
- Continue to support a national working group to review the operation of guidance for missing persons in Scotland.
- Ensure messages about the risks of going missing are included in national guidance, policies and strategies.

Conclusion – Supporting some of our most vulnerable people

It is clear, through local and national practice, progress is being made to limit the harm associated with people going missing. Multi-agency working practices are being implemented by agencies across Scotland's local authorities, building understanding of people going missing in their areas and responding when people of concern have or may go missing.

Information sharing when necessary is key to preventing and limiting harm of individuals. The National Framework and national conferences have highlighted the importance of information sharing and the positive pro-active work of partners in local agencies. The Framework Implementation Project has helped to build this practice with agencies, aiming to safeguard people at risk within our communities but we must strive to do more and ensure more consistent information sharing pathways are in place.

As has been highlighted through the HMICS inspection, the policing response is robust and effective but the inclusion of partner organisations including local authorities, education, health and third sector are crucial to achieving positive outcomes for people who go missing. Multi-agency working and practice is being implemented and taken forward in local areas but it is not universal across Scotland and we can improve particularly through the wider inclusion of chief officers groups, child and adult protection.

That is why we have brought this Framework up to date with what has been learned over the last eight years. Positive steps have been taken but it is important that we continue to try and improve our working and develop practice. It has been noted that where good partnership practice is occurring it can, at times, regress when an influential individual moves on.

Through this Framework, the Scottish Government is encouraging all agencies linked to people going missing to work together. This Framework is guidance but we must ensure that we do not reduce our focus on people going missing, it requires our constant attention to prevent harm and provide support to people who are vulnerable and at risk of going missing.

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Annex C - Risk Assessment

When a person is reported missing, a risk assessment will be undertaken by Police Scotland and thereafter categorised as low, medium or high. This risk assessment will be carried out jointly with partners, when they are involved, to capture all information that will assist in determining the correct category of risk. Police officers have been issued with an aide memoire consisting of 25 questions to assist in determining the most appropriate risk category – the questions are produced below.

Missing Person Low Risk Status

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

Missing Person Medium Risk Status

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

Missing Person High Risk Status

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

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

Tolerable Risk

The Not at Home Policy was adopted nationally in 2019, and captures the considerations around the absent category for children who are care experienced. Not at Home categorises circumstances where a child or young person living in care is absent, and there are grounds to believe that this absence involves *no apparent risk*, or where the level of risk is a *tolerable* one not meeting the threshold for a Police led missing person's investigation.

Where a child is "*Not at Home*" and their absence carries a tolerable risk, or no apparent risk, the Care Provider should record and conduct investigations to locate the child. There is no requirement to contact the Police. A child should only be placed in this category if previously agreed with the case holder that this might be an appropriate response.

All episodes of a child being "*Not at Home*" must be recorded and made available when the child's situation is being reviewed – this information may also be valuable in assessing the risk during a missing episode. If there is any escalation of either frequency or concerns then consideration must be given to having this reviewed with partners.

National Missing Persons Framework for Scotland

Risk Assessment Determination

Vulnerability

1. Is there any identified risk of suicide?
2. Is criminality suspected to be a factor in the disappearance?
3. Is the Missing Person vulnerable due to age, infirmity or other similar factor?
4. Are there any known adverse effects if prescribed medication is not available to the Missing Person?
5. Does the missing person have dementia, medical or mental health conditions, physical illnesses or disabilities?
6. Does the missing person have problems interacting safely with others when finding themselves in unfamiliar circumstances?
7. Is there a dependency on drugs, alcohol, medication or other substances?
8. Is the Missing Person on the Child Protection Register?
9. Do the current/previous weather conditions present additional risk? Consider all circumstances including age and clothing.

Influences

10. Are there family/relationship problems or recent history of family conflict and/or abuse?
11. Is the missing person a victim or perpetrator of domestic violence?
12. Is there an on-going personal issue linked to racial, sexual, homophobic, the local community or any cultural issues?
13. Was the missing person involved in a violent and/or hate crime incident prior to disappearance?
14. Are there any school, college, university, employment or financial problems?
15. Is forced marriage or 'honour' based abuse an issue?
16. Is the missing person the victim of sexual exploitation, human trafficking or prostitution? If so, is going missing likely to place them at risk of considerable harm.

Behaviour

17. Are the circumstances of going missing different from normal behaviour patterns?
18. Is there a reason for the missing person to go missing?
19. Are there any indications that preparations have been made for absence?

National Missing Persons Framework for Scotland

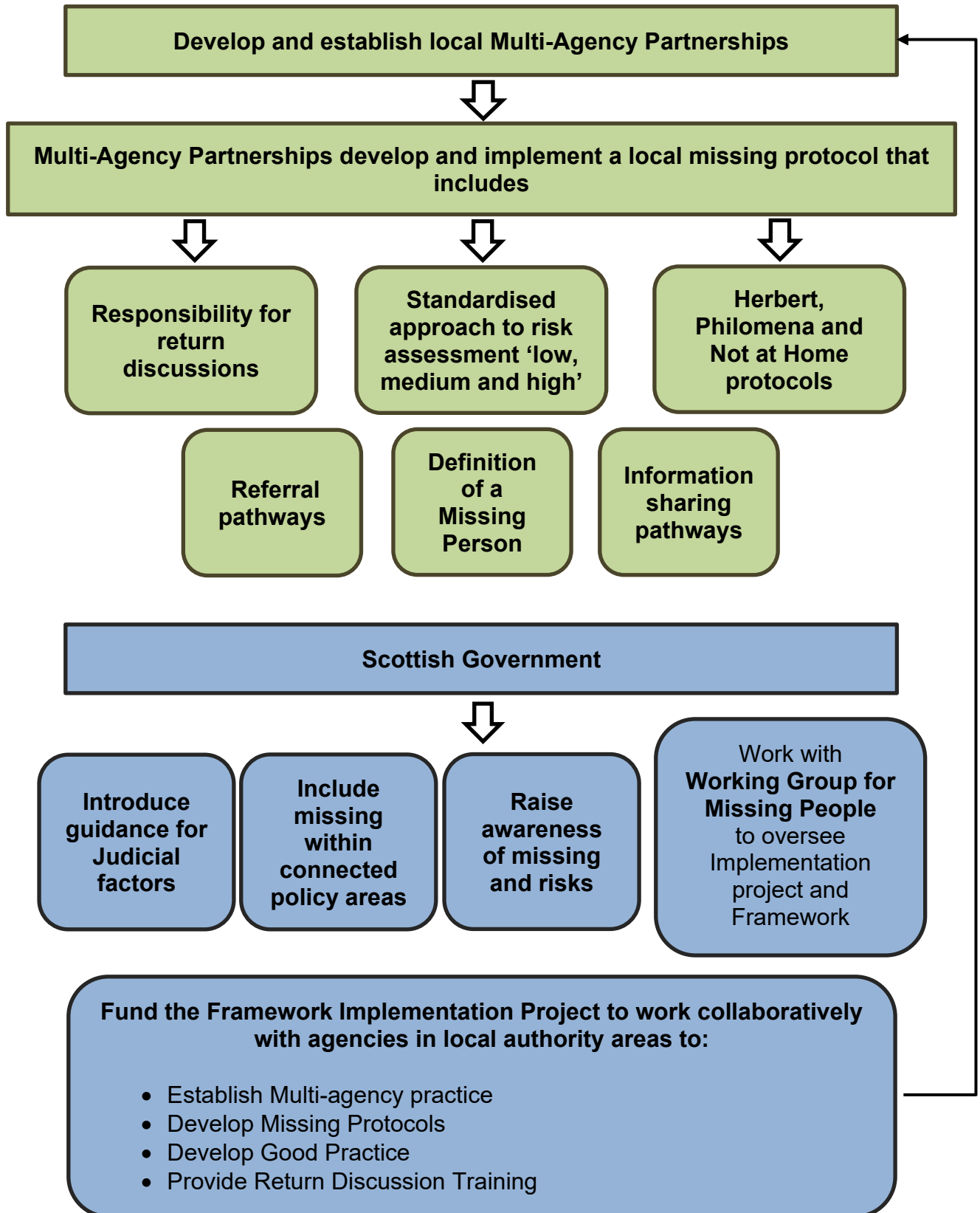
20. What was the missing person intending to do when last seen? Did they fail to complete their intentions?
21. Has the missing person disappeared previously and were they exposed to harm on such occasions?
22. Is the missing person a risk to others? And if so, in what way?
23. Are there other unlisted factors which the officer or supervisor considers relevant in the assessment of risk?

Mental Health

24. Does the Missing Person have a mental health condition (excluding dementia)?
25. Does this Missing Person have dementia or a specific progressive neurological disorder?

Annex D – Good Practice and Actions Diagram

This Framework sets out key actions to help prevent, locate and safeguard people who have gone missing. To continue to enhance missing practice across Scotland and working with Police Scotland, relevant agencies in local authority areas should:





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