

Internal governance

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Forces should ensure that their missing persons strategies and responses are focused on multi-agency working and preventing people from going missing. It is important to understand the reasons why individuals go missing. A greater understanding will enable more effective prevention strategies to be implemented. By applying a preventative approach at a strategic level, police forces may be able to help safeguard vulnerable people and reduce the number of missing person incidents.

Governance and strategic direction

Effective governance structures are important elements in supporting delivery of high-quality service to missing persons, their families and those who may be responsible for their care.

Police forces should have nominated (suitably senior and easily identifiable) strategic and tactical leads for missing person investigation work with clearly stated roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability. Professional experience suggests that where this occurs, the force will be more effective in dealing with the challenges posed by missing people and in encouraging innovative solutions.

Missing persons specialists fulfil important responsibilities and can assist the force in understanding the challenges associated with this work.

Appropriate performance frameworks to support safeguarding work for missing people should be in place within each police force. Performance data should be used to build understanding of the nature of problems and drive improvements in services.

Police forces should, where possible, have integrated recording and intelligence systems that support those involved with the risk assessment in missing persons cases to make informed decisions. For further information, go to [Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub \(MASH\) guiding principles](#).

Strategic leadership

It is common for the strategic lead for missing persons to have a senior role in leading the force response to dealing with vulnerable people. Senior leaders are responsible for building and developing partnerships through multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASA) and local safeguarding adult boards (LSABs), together with other statutory and non-statutory partners.

A senior officer in this role is required to develop an understanding of what links the investigation and response to missing persons cases to other areas of safeguarding work. Senior leaders should be prepared to hold partners to account and be held to account themselves for any shortfalls in service delivery. They should make the pathways that support a transparent and effective response.

Ownership

Forces should consider the appropriate level of ownership of the investigation.

If a case is risk assessed and there is very low risk, ownership may remain within the control room or contact centre.

In all cases assessed as low-risk, medium-risk or high-risk, there should be a nominated investigating officer (IO) at one of three levels:

- an officer allocated from patrol duties and handed over to subsequent shifts
- in more serious cases, an IO allocated whose sole or primary role is to investigate this incident
- a senior investigating officer (SIO), where the seriousness of the case warrants this

The nominated IO should review the case and the risk reassessed at regular intervals, taking account of any new information. If new information becomes available that indicates an increased level of risk of harm to the missing person, the ownership may transfer from the control room to a response officer, IO or SIO as appropriate.

The time that has passed since the previous review should also be taken into account within each risk assessment.

Review and oversight

Reviewing officers

Reviews should take place regularly throughout the investigation, the frequency of which will be determined by the circumstances of the case.

All reviews should be approached with an investigative mindset. The reviewing officer should bring a fresh perspective, so that the investigation is conducted effectively and that potential lines of enquiry are identified. The responsibility of a reviewing officer is to:

- review the level of risk
- check for any outstanding and incomplete actions
- quality assure actions already taken
- set new actions and enquiries, in order to bring the investigation to a successful conclusion
- confirm parameters of investigation are appropriate
- make recommendations about the management and ownership of the investigation
- set future review date (or dates), as appropriate

Daily management meeting

Where appropriate, cases should be reviewed at the daily management meeting. These meetings provide a forum for determining the level of resources and supervision that cases require.

Cases that have moved beyond initial actions to trace the missing person may be managed through more routine supervision processes. It is important that, whatever the mechanism to manage missing person investigations, there is regular review and supervision.

For further information, go to the [National intelligence model](#).

Senior management team

While the daily responsibility for an investigation normally rests with other ranks, senior management have a responsibility to ensure that:

- the needs of the investigation are met
- policy is followed
- a thorough investigation is carried out

An appropriate level of support must be given and sufficient resources must be made available to carry out an investigation. [Independent Office for Police Conduct \(IOPC\) reports](#) have shown

that understaffing and a lack of appropriate recognition may have contributed to the failure of missing person investigations in the past.

Retention and weeding of reports

Senior officers should ensure that their force has clear guidelines within their policies to address the issue of retaining and destroying missing person records.

Relevant information management policies should dictate retention periods. This should include keeping records of locations where missing persons have been and whom they associated with. This can be important in future criminal investigations. It is a legitimate purpose to retain missing person reports for the following reasons:

- People often go missing on more than one occasion.
- People who go missing more than once often return to the same location.
- Closed reports usually contain information that will be of benefit to future investigations.
- Persons with health issues such as Alzheimer's are known to return to places known to them in their past.

All unresolved cases should be retained indefinitely.

For further information, go to APP on [Review, retention and disposal](#).

Tags

APP Missing persons