

Missing persons team

Solving missing person cases by creating a coordinated team to deliver a consistent approach.

First published

3 July 2024

Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Organisational
Topic	Adults at risk Missing persons Investigation
Organisation	Derbyshire Constabulary
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Region	East Midlands
Partners	Police Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services) Education Health services Local authority
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	February 2022

Key details

Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Children and young people Communities Families

Aim

The aims of creating MPT is to:

- reduce calls for service in relation to missing persons
- reduce demand for a policing response in relation to missing persons
- reduce the time taken to find individuals who have gone missing (decreasing the risk that the individuals will be subject to harm)
- improve the longer-term outcomes for individuals going missing

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of MPT are to:

- improve data sharing and partnership working between police and partner agencies
- improve partnership working with other internal police teams
- provide dedicated analytical resource
- provide a consistent, coordinated and dedicated response
- reduce the number of cases
- improve trust and confidence in the police

Description

Background

Missing persons was a significant problem and an increasing source of demand for policing in Derbyshire. There was also increasing concern that provisions for individuals going missing lacked clarity and consistency from the police and other relevant agencies. There were two MPTs covering the force, one for each division. This led to potential inconsistencies in approach and resourcing across the force area. There were variable and sometimes disjointed links with partner agencies and other parts of the force, particularly specialist support. There was also no dedicated analytical support in relation to missing persons.

Planning

Using a [SARA \(scanning, analysis, response, assessment\)](#) approach, the force identified the need for one coordinated MPT to deliver a consistent approach to missing persons. This team would focus resources on distinct groups of missing people who represented high numbers of missing persons cases. These groups included:

- people who go missing on more than one occasion
- under 18s who go missing (also more than once)
- those in care and those in foster care who go missing

Delivery

The MPT went live with a soft launch on 14 February 2022 and became fully operational on 14 March 2022. The team is led by a detective chief inspector (DCI), with a detective inspector (DI) managing the team. Reporting to the DI are three detective sergeants (DS) each with five staff. The team also has a dedicated analyst, a dedicated intelligence officer (especially important in linking with the exploitation team, including County Lines) and a coordinator. The team works from 8am to 10pm every day to maximise coverage.

The introduction of one MPT has resulted in a more focused, consistent approach to calls about missing people. The team have made changes across missing persons cases, from dealing with the initial report, first response and house searches.

- All high risk incidents require an immediate visit and search, and each missing persons incident is also allocated to a MPT officer and a supervisor.
- All high risk cases are reviewed by the DI and medium risk cases are reviewed by a DS.

- Three missing episodes by the same individual in a 30 day period triggers a review meeting to revisit why individuals are going missing and consider suitable responses.
- A daily missing persons tasking meeting takes place, chaired by the DCI, to monitor progress and highlight any emerging issues.

New approach

The new approach by the MPT recognises the importance of working with partners regarding missing persons, and has paid specific attention to the development and maintenance of closer and better partnership working. Communication with relevant partners is now much clearer and effective.

Changes

- Ongoing contact for "live" cases. This involves daily contact and weekly meetings while someone is missing.
- Identifying the top six individuals who go missing are the subject of a more intensive, individual case focused approach.
- The Philomena Protocol (PP) has been introduced to reduce repeat missing episodes from under 18s. This protocol asks carers to record key information about young people who are at risk of going missing. The information is then used to help find the young person.
- The DI attends meetings of the care home support network and single points of contact (SPOCs) are now in place for all children's homes in the county.
- Improved data-sharing with partners which enables faster and more tailored responses. This improved data-sharing includes using a pro-forma that is filled out and added to the force missing persons IT system (COMPACT). The COMPACT system is set up to send a redacted but comprehensive missing report to relevant partners when a child is reported missing.
- Regular meetings have been established with partners to highlight problems that are being encountered (operationally and organisationally) and to consider potential solutions, for both the police and partners. The DI attends a monthly tactical meeting, and the DCI or superintendent attends a quarterly strategic meeting. These meetings are arranged by the police.

Other changes have also been made since the creation of the MPT.

- Working with information services to explore how initial data capture of missing persons incidents can be modified to improve data accuracy.

- Continuing professional development (CPD) training days are now held for the MPT three times a year.
- Work is ongoing to improve the rigour of initial home visits and searches by response officers. All student officers now have to complete a shift with the MPT prior to their sign off.
- Monthly performance meetings are now held with the DCI where the tactical delivery plan is discussed. This is replicated with the DS's on the team to ensure compliance with the plan and discuss progress and highlight any issues that need to be addressed.

Overall impact

The works of the MPT is monitored six monthly by an external party and three monthly by in-force analysts. Yearly, the whole approach is reviewed with partners through a focus group.

The number of reported incidents of missing persons has actually risen since the introduction of the new approach. It is felt that two factors are driving this.

- A greater focus on missing persons as a result of the new MPT, leading to increased reporting/attention on missing people.
- A "rebound" from COVID-19 restrictions. The problem appears to be coalescing around distinct groups, particularly people who go missing on more than one occasion, under 18s who go missing (also more than once), those in care and those in foster care who go missing. This is likely to reflect the work of the MPT in a problem solving sense, through the targeting of the main problem causes. There has been a relative reduction in the number of "one-off" missing persons reports.

Joint working

Improved joint working and communication with partners has resulted in a more efficient operation which speeds up responses. Partners engage well with the new approach and are supportive and engaging, contributing to better joint working. Internally, missing person investigations are now taking less time and individuals who are going missing are being found more quickly. The force has reduced the average time a person is missing by two hours. Now 77% of under 18's are found within 12 hours, whereas previously this figure was at 70%.

There is also now a closer working relationship with other forces, particularly those neighbouring Derbyshire. Direct contact details for members of other force MPTs, particularly neighbouring forces, are now stored within MS Teams to enable shared group access to all of the teams.

Learning

A difficulty with establishing the MPT was around partner buy-in and engaging services.

- In terms of external partners, the force found that it took a while to persuade partners to share information and trust that the MPT would use information sensitively as part of the investigation. Their hesitancy arose from concerns that young people would lose their trust in them. However, partner buy-in was achieved through the improved joint-working and communication with partners that has been set up through the creation of the MPT, for example, through improved data-sharing arrangements and regular meetings with partners to highlight problems.
- In terms of partnership working learnings, the force has found it beneficial to have direct contact details for members of other force MPTs. This is especially the case for neighbouring forces. The MPT have access to these details through MS Teams. Using MS Teams to store this information enables shared group access to information.
- There were also challenges in force around buy-in from other departments. It took regular meetings, ongoing review and honest feedback for divisions to become fully comfortable with releasing staff to support the work of the MPT to problem solve.

Forces looking to implement an MPT will need to consider how to overcome barriers to partnership buy-in, especially with regard to engaging services when there are funding limitations.

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Tags

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