

Missing Children Response Benchmarking Tool

Information Sheet

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November 2020



Missing children benchmarking tool

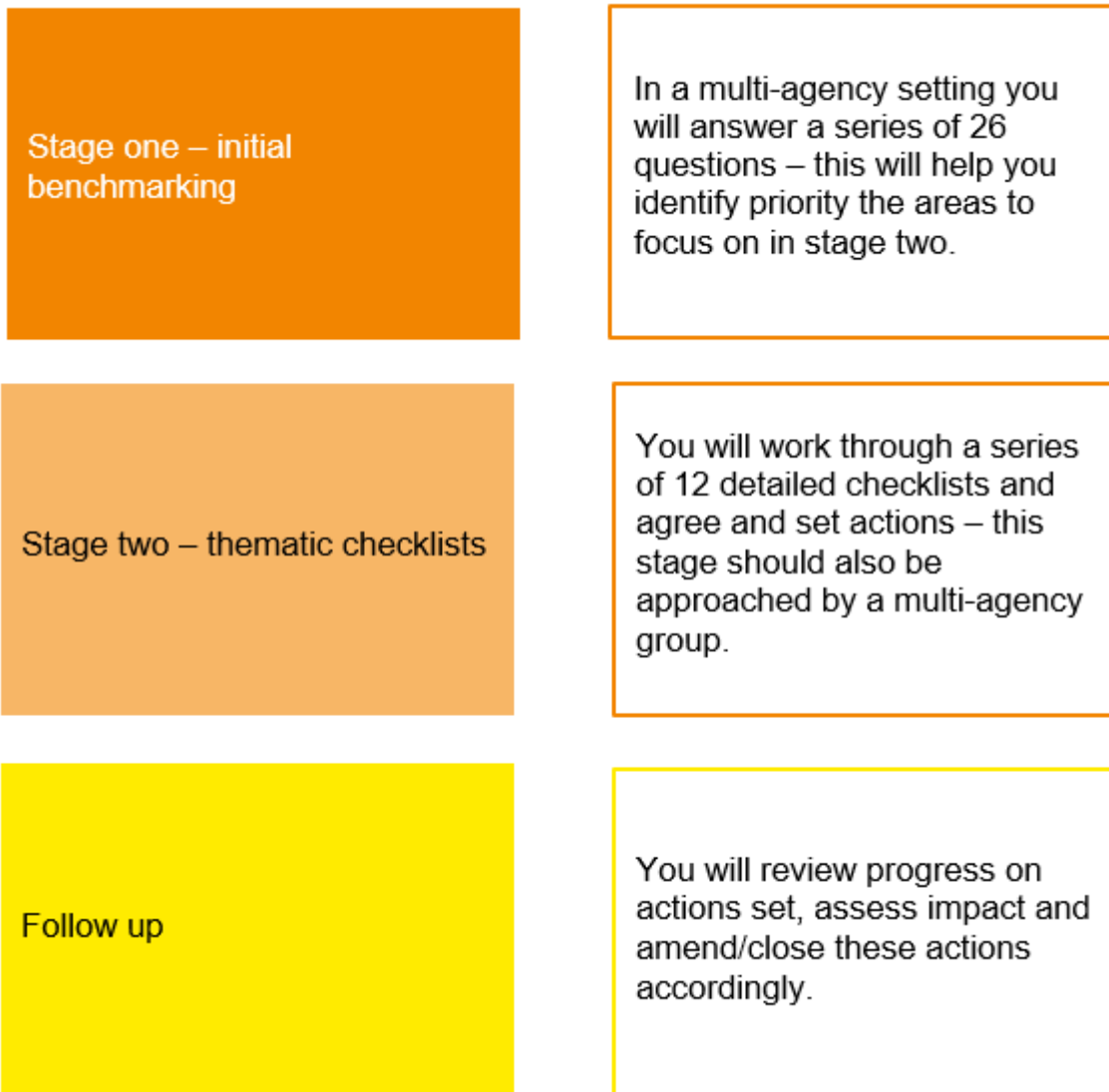
This benchmarking tool has been developed by the Children's Society in partnership with the NWG network. The tool predominantly draws on evidence gathered as part of the Children's Society's First Step report¹ and learning from our direct work in this area over many years as well as evidence from the NWG's extensive experience working on the issue of missing and child exploitation.

This benchmarking tool is a series of checklists, overarching and thematic, helping local safeguarding partnerships to assess their response to missing children. The tool aims to support local safeguarding partnerships, or relevant equivalent multi-agency groups, to think holistically about the responses that they provide to children and young people who go missing from home or care. It aims to ensure that no child falls through the gaps by encouraging different agencies to work together and communicate with each other about missing children and young people. Throughout this document when we refer to children and young people we are referring to those up to the age of 18.

The tool is divided into two stages, both stages require you to work in a multi-agency way. However, the representatives attending each stage may differ. We will discuss this in more detail below. The first stage will help you to identify the thematic checklist(s) that your area should focus on first. The second stage will involve working through a series of 12 detailed checklists and setting actions to be completed by a range of agencies to support practice improvement.

'I have found this tool as a really reflective experience and it has asked us questions that I have not previously considered and this will enable us to have a better insight and provide better services for missing children.' – Pilot site

¹ <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-10/the-first-step.pdf>



Stage one – initial benchmarking

Stage one of the tool asks you to coordinate, either face-to-face or virtually, a multi-agency meeting. This can either be embedded into an existing safeguarding partnership or equivalent meeting, or you can choose to call a separate meeting to complete this first stage. The first stage asks you to discuss and agree on the answers to 26 questions. These questions are designed to assess how well your area is prepared to respond if a child goes missing, how well the response to missing children works and how well agencies work

together to reduce the likelihood of a child going missing again. This stage will take between 1-2 hours to complete. Once you have completed the 26 questions a report will be generated based on your answers. This report will highlight which thematic checklist(s) you should prioritise working on.

If you would rather jump straight into stage two you will have the option to download all 12 thematic checklists before you start the process.

Who to invite

It is important to have representatives from a range of agencies with responsibility for missing children present. You may want to make use of an existing multi-agency group meeting such as a Local Safeguarding Partnership meeting and you will want to ensure representation from your local authority and police. Having education and health represented is also advised. We would also strongly encourage you to invite individuals from your Return Home Interview (RHI) service and any other relevant voluntary or community groups. It is up to you and you may decide on local structures and/or the size of your areas but we have found that groups of around six to eight work best as they enable everyone to participate in a detailed and dynamic conversation.

Example attendee list: Multi-agency group coordinator, Detective Inspector for Strategic Safeguarding, Missing From Home Coordinator, Strategic Service Manager, RHI Practitioner, Early Help, Educational Safeguarding lead and Senior Youth Offending worker.

How to facilitate

You should nominate someone to lead the session, who you choose is up to you, in pilot areas sessions were led by a range of professionals including: Local Safeguarding Partnership Managers, Heads of Service, Detective Inspectors and Missing From Home Coordinators.

The leader should read out each question to the group and ensure that all representatives have had a chance to input into the discussion. It will be important for the leaders to make

clear that this process only intends to help improve practice – it is not a test and those present should answer all questions as honestly and openly as they can. Once an answer has been agreed on by the group the leader should input the answer into the tool.

You should have someone taking notes at this stage as we have found that actions and solutions have been identified during this stage too.

Case study – police force wide application of the tool

One pilot site took a police force wide approach to using the benchmarking tool. The police force covered six local authorities, four out of the six local authorities took part. Engagement with the benchmarking tool was coordinated by the Detective Inspector (DI) leading on Safeguarding and Strategic Support.

Each individual local authority already had Strategic and Operational Missing, Slavery, Exploitation and Trafficking (MSET) meetings which sit as a sub group of the Local Safeguarding Partnership. The decision was made to use these pre-existing groups for the first stage of the tool. A range of professionals sit on MSET panels including representatives from: children's social care, police, health physical and mental, local care home managers, education, local charities, youth groups and youth justice. The DI attended each benchmarking tool meeting enabling oversight of concerns and practice across all the local areas in the police force area. Learning from the benchmarking tool was planned to feed into an upcoming review and update of the joint missing from home protocols as well as a review of the MSET process.

For the second stage of the tool, at the local level, task and finish groups were set up to work through the thematic checklists that were identified as being a local priority and each group developed and took away an action plan from the meetings.

The DI reported that the tool was a really useful way for the partnership to identify where it worked well together around missing children and where the partnership could be strengthened. It also helped identify single agency areas for improvement.

Stage two – thematic checklists

The second stage of the benchmarking tool involves working through a series of detailed checklists, considering the extent to which you believe your area meets a set of standards as well as assessing the impact that each of these standards has on your response to missing children and setting actions as a group, based on these answers.

Whilst stage one will support you to make a decision about which checklist to start with we strongly advise that you work through all 12 stages over time as there will be elements in all thematic areas that can be improved on.

Who to invite

As in stage one it is vital that these checklists are approached in a multi-agency forum. Using a preexisting meeting may be the most time efficient way of approaching the checklists. However, you may want to set up some separate working groups depending on what theme you are covering. During the pilots some areas reviewed each checklist they planned to work on at the Local Safeguarding Partnership level, making

decisions about who would be best suited to work on each theme before inviting them to form new task and finish groups. For example, you may want to ensure a representative from your RHI service is present when you are looking the RHI checklist but they may not be integral to the group that meets to discuss data.

The Checklists

Each checklist is divided into three sections:

- Required actions, actions required by guidance and national protocols.
- Good practice actions, evidenced based actions that have been shown to benefit a local areas response to missing children.
- Good practice actions that may require additional resources, similar to good practice actions but may require further staff time or financial investment.

Action setting and follow up

Each group will go through a similar process to stage one, working through each question and agreeing to what extent they think your area meets the criteria. This time however, there will be an added step that asks you to consider how much of an impact that action has. You will then take time to review all your answers and set actions together as a group – some of these actions will be for

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individual agencies and some will be for the partnership. These actions should be reviewed at future multi-agency meetings.

If you have any further questions please get in touch with policy@childsoc.org.uk or admin@nwgnetwork.org