**Missing People**

A consultation on working together for people who go missing in Scotland

**Evaluation of Responses**

January 2016



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# **Introduction**

In 2015, the Scottish Government ran a [consultation](https://consult.scotland.gov.uk/police-division/working-together) on its national strategy on people who go missing in Scotland. Each year over 30,000 incidents of missing people are reported to Police Scotland, many of them involving vulnerable children and adults, who are at a crisis point. The causes of missing incidents are numerous and so this is a complex issue which involves a wide range of agencies.

In collaboration with partners including Police Scotland, academics, third sector organisations and local authorities, the Scottish Government has therefore developed proposals for partnership working across Scotland within a national Strategy.

The overarching aim of the Strategy is to reduce the harm related to people going missing. It provides a framework for how organisations can reduce that harm by working together, and it also seeks to raise the profile of the issues connected with people going missing. It doesn’t propose to create new systems alongside those that already exist, but to ensure that the prevention, handling of incidents, and the provision of support, is incorporated within these existing systems such as child and adult protection.

In delivering this aim, the Strategy is focussed on four main objectives:

* Preventative measures reduce the number of missing persons incidents.
* Responding appropriately to incidents.
* Supporting missing people and their families.
* Protecting vulnerable people to reduce the risk of harm.

This report will provide a summary of the responses to the consultation.

# **Methodological Approach**

The formal consultation period ran from the 27th August to the 7th December 2015. A variety of methods were used to capture the views of users in the consultation, including:

* An online written [consultation](https://consult.scotland.gov.uk/police-division/working-together), which was available on the Scottish Government website and Consultation Hub.
* A series of local workshops with key stakeholders.
* Social media via the [@MissingPersonsS](https://twitter.com/MissingPersonsS) twitter feed and Facebook.
* Some feedback on the strategy was received by email, out-with the formal online consultation.

The local workshops were led by partner organisations, and held in Stirling, Dundee, Renfrew, Inverness, Irvine, Perth, and Dalkeith, and included a consultation launch event in Edinburgh involving 80 participants. In total, around 250 professionals from local authorities, police, NHS, third sector organisations, Health and Social Care Partnerships and academics contributed to discussions at the workshops.

To complement this open approach, social reporting captured people’s views through small interviews posted on Facebook, and through tweeting discussions at workshops. A summary of the consultation events and social media activity will be available shortly.

This mixed-methods approach ensured our consultation was fully inclusive and gave both expert and non-expert users the opportunity to participate in a way that suited them.

The written Consultation was based on a series of open-ended questions about the Strategy. [Annex A](#_Annex_A_–) highlights the questions that were asked as part of the consultation.

The online consultation received a total of 50 responses from individuals and organisations. The majority of the responses (45 responses) were from groups or organisations, and five responses were received from individuals. The groups and organisations include local authority committees and lead departments, child and adult protection committees, Health and Social Care Partnerships, third sector bodies, Police Scotland, and academics. A table showing the groups or organisations who submitted a response is shown in [Annex B](#_Annex_B_–).

This report will provide an overview of the responses to the consultation, and will also draw upon the responses and feedback to the Strategy received via workshops, email and social media.

The open-ended nature of the consultation questions meant that respondents had flexibility in responding to all or part of the consultation, and the level of detail received in responses varied between responses.

# **Overview of Responses to the Online Consultation**



## **Views on the Purpose of the Strategy**

The Consultation document set out the following statement on the purpose of the Strategy. Respondents were asked to give their views on this purpose statement.

**Purpose**

Our aim is to reduce the harm related to people going missing. This Strategy provides a framework for how organisations can together improve outcomes, and seeks to raise the profile of the issues connected with going missing.

A total of 39 respondents provided feedback on the purpose. The vast majority of responses were positive. In general, respondents welcomed the development of the strategy and the establishment of a clear and concise overarching framework on missing people. Several respondents noted the ability of the Strategy to raise the profile of the issue of missing people. Several respondents also welcomed the focus on ‘working together’ across the key service providers.

In particular, the general aim of the strategy on ‘reducing harm’ was considered to be a particularly important aspect of the purpose statement. It was noted that the term ‘harm’ could be extended beyond missing people themselves and to those close or who care for them.

Despite a general approval of the purpose set out in the consultation document, several respondents raised points for consideration, specifically:

* The ability of organisations to meet the objective of the strategy in the context of constrained resources.
* Noting the complexity of missing people as a group, and the challenges in proposing a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach.
* The importance of a strong Preventative approach.

## **Views on the Definition of Missing set out in the Strategy**

Respondents were asked for their views on having a definition of ‘missing’. Most respondents were in agreement with the recommendation that there should be nationally agreed definition on ‘missing’.

**Definition of Missing**

It is recommended that there is a nationally agreed definition of “missing”:

‘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’

The consultation document contained the above definition of missing, and asked users to provide comments on this. Of those who responded to the online consultation, 38 provided comments on the definition given.

There was general positivity about the definition. It was noted by several users that the definition was sufficiently broad to cover most missing scenarios and achieve consensus amongst agencies working in this area. However, several respondents noted the complexity of ‘missing’ scenarios, and acknowledged that no definition could cover all such instances.

Some common issues were raised about the proposed definition by respondents. These are discussed below.

Several respondents noted issues with the use of the term ‘out of character’ in the definition, noting that knowledge of an individual’s character is subjective, or may not be known, and could result in vulnerable people not being regarded as ‘missing’. In support of this, the example of young people who habitually go missing was drawn upon by several respondents to highlight that the event may not be ‘out of character’ but would still be concerning.

Furthermore, several respondents suggested including an additional category in the definition, that ‘the person is at risk of exploitation’ or that the individual is at risk *from* another.

It was noted that the definition could benefit from an age limit or category (e.g. any child under 12) automatically considered to be missing because of their vulnerability.

Several respondents also commented on the need to explicitly differentiate between ‘missing’ and ‘absent’, whereby individuals are missing voluntarily as they have chosen to leave or run away. In the present definition, it was suggested that the definition does not take into account of the rights of individuals to leave.

## **What Works Well in the Strategy?**

Respondents were asked what they thought works well in the Strategy, with 39 respondents providing feedback on this question.

Respondents made some broad statements about the clarity of the Strategy, particularly with regard to the objectives, commitments and responsibilities set-out in the Strategy. It was suggested that these elements provide a useful framework for organisations to work under.

Furthermore, several respondents commended the development of an overarching strategy in principle, suggesting that it has the potential to raise awareness of missing people and the underlying factors that contribute to people ‘going missing’.

In particular, the focus of the Strategy on multiple agencies working together was applauded by multiple respondents, specifically the involvement of third sector organisations. Mentioned in this context was the Strategy’s recognition of the complexity of the issues and the need for multiple agencies to work together. Some users referred to the Strategy supporting this by establishing a consistent language and framework for working between agencies that has the opportunity to enhance co-operation.

Several respondents were positive about the Strategy’s person-centred approach, in particular the focus on individual missing ‘journeys’.

Moreover, several respondents were positive about the strong focus on ‘prevention’ in the strategy. It was suggested that intervention and planning at an early stage could result in fewer people going missing repeatedly.

## **What could be Improved in the Strategy?**

Respondents were asked what could be done better, or differently, in the Strategy. Thirty-eight respondents provided comments on improvements that could be made in the strategy. Some themes emerged through the responses, and there were some areas that were mentioned by several respondents. This section will summarise the key themes that emerged.

It was suggested that, at present, the Strategy is overly focused on young people, particularly through the examples and case studies given. The Strategy could be more balanced and broadened out to reflect the diverse situations in which individuals go missing, and the different risks faced by particular categories of individuals.

Furthermore, a number of respondents suggested that the Strategy could provide more information on how delivery will be achieved and performance will be monitored. It was also noted that more information would be helpful on the guidance and training that will be given to organisations implementing the Strategy.

Several respondents noted that the Strategy could do more to highlight the importance of the role of the ‘named person’. It was suggested that this role is vital in the implementation and success of the strategy and consequently requires clearer guidance. Several comments were also made about the need to more explicitly reference the ‘Corporate parenting role’.

Multiple respondents suggested that the Strategy could make greater mention of a range of existing procedures, legislation and frameworks already in place locally, nationally and internationally, and how the strategy will ‘add value’ to these including:

* Those in place for children missing from education;
* Current human rights legislation;
* Other legislation and policy areas tackling forced marriage, femal genital mutilation, suicide prevention, domestic abuse, and child sexual exploitation;
* International enquiries and cross-border investigations.

## **What is Vital to the Success of the Strategy?**

Respondents were asked what they thought will be vital to the implementation and success of the Strategy. Thirty-eight respondents provided comments to this question. Some key themes emerged among responses; this section will provide a summary of these.

The majority of respondents made reference to agencies’ commitment or ‘buy-in’ to the Strategy as being key to its success, in particular the need for a sense of ownership of the Strategy among agencies.

It was also noted that the success of the Strategy is dependent on a recognition of the complexity of missing people as a group.

Several respondents also suggested that success will depend on effective multi-agency working. Specifically mentioned in this context was:

* the importance of a good working relationship between agencies;
* effective governance of the Strategy;
* clear communication between multiple partners;
* working on a shared understanding;
* a consistent, joint approach;
* a clear understanding of information sharing responsibilities; and
* clarity on the roles and responsibilities of other agencies.

Several respondents also noted the importance of local delivery plans for the implementation of the Strategy to ensure its success.

A key theme around resourcing the Strategy also emerged. It was considered vital that the implementation of the Strategy was adequately resourced within organisations, and that staff members tasked with operating the strategy had access to effective training.

It was also noted that it is essential that clear and focused implementation plans with measurable outcomes are developed, and effective performance management is established to ensure that partners are accountable for the delivery of the Strategy.

## **What are the Perceived Challenges to the Strategy?**

Respondents were asked to comment on any perceived challenges to the implementation of the Strategy. Thirty-seven respondents provided comments on this. The responses given reflected the factors that were discussed as being necessary for the success of the strategy in the previous [section](#_What_is_Vital). Several themes emerged among the responses to this question.

Many of the respondents raised issues with the intention to deliver Strategy with existing resources. It was noted that organisations are operating in an already challenging economic climate that could affect their ability to implement the strategy. In particular, reference was made to the level of resource required to successfully address the scale and complexity of ‘missing people’. The renewed focus on prevention was noted as a particular challenge. In practical terms, for example, it was noted that providing return interviews for missing people is a resource intensive activity.

In broad terms, several respondents suggested that a lack of buy-in or commitment to the Strategy from partners would pose a challenge to its implementation. It was suggested that there is a need to ensure that all partners are fully signed up to its implementation.

Respondents also noted some practical challenges associated with multiple agencies working together. Several respondents noted that a key challenge will be in establishing a joined-up way of working between organisations, for example, in relation to processes and sharing information. It was noted that the absence of a clear and consistent evaluation process with consistent baseline data against which the effectiveness of the Strategy can be assessed would present a challenge to implementing the Strategy.

Furthermore, several respondents suggested that a lack of awareness of the Strategy would pose a challenge to its implementation. Awareness was discussed broadly, as well as in relation to staff awareness, in different partner organisations, of what implementation means for their role. Related to this was the challenge of maintaining the momentum on the missing agenda.

## **Equality Considerations**

The Scottish Government wants to ensure that all members of society are treated equally. As part of this, we need to understand how different people and groups are affected by our policies and consider this when developing our strategies.

The consultation also presented the above equality statement, and asked respondents whether they considered there to be any issues raised by the Strategy for people with protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation). Thirty-one respondents provided feedback on this.

It was noted that the person-centred focus of the Strategy embeds an equality of approach across all social groups, and that the implementation of the Strategy would have positive outcomes for several protected groups.

Several respondents raised some more specific equality considerations, reflecting the complexity of missing people as a group, and the varying needs within this group. It was noted that the Strategy could better reflect:

* Consideration of the rights of individuals to decide to ‘go missing’ and do not want to be ‘found’. It was noted that response and support agencies share information about individual cases in a way that does not compromise the safety of those who have intentionally gone missing for reasons of personal safety (for example women fleeing domestic abuse).
* That people who have protected characteristics may experience harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, child sexual exploitation, or forced marriage, which could be reasons for someone going missing.
* Individuals with learning disabilities may experience communication challenges and struggle to explain their vulnerability or understand their support options.
* The needs of young people in the 16–18 years age group, who neither fit in children’s nor adult services (including looked-after children). It was suggested that responses can change significantly when there has been no significant change in their circumstances other than from a legal perspective they are now considered and adult. Furthermore, it was suggested that unaccompanied asylum seeking young people would have specific needs.
* The needs of non-English speakers as language and the use of terms may be misunderstood by different social groups.
* Health needs for those with chronic disease may impact on the vulnerability, risks and intervention strategies that are appropriate.
* The specific rights of traveller families, and to fully understand the differences in immigrant culture.

Respondents noted that further consultation with key representative groups (such as family and carers) would help ensure that accessible and appropriate systems and processes are developed when implementing the Strategy.

## **Feedback on the proposed Objectives and Commitments**

The Strategy proposes eight commitments which are structured around four Objectives: Prevent, Respond, Support and Protect. Each Objective has two Commitments and a number of Supporting Actions. This section collates the feedback provided by respondents on the Objectives, Commitments and Supporting Actions. (See [Annex A](#_Annex_A_–) for an overview of the Objectives and Commitments.)

Respondents were asked to provide feedback on the Objectives and Commitments proposed in the Strategy. Thirty-five respondents provided feedback, however, it is important to note that several respondents stated that they had no further comments to give and that their views had already been captured in previous sections. This section will provide a summary of the key themes that emerged on the Objectives and Commitments. It is important to note that this section does not cover all of the specific comments made in response to this question.

In general, there was positivity about the Objectives and Commitments, with several respondents noting that they provide a clear and concise structure around a complex issue, and can be used to guide the activities of multiple agencies and organisations.

In particular, the inclusion of commitments beneath each objective was a welcome inclusion in the Strategy as it was felt that they provide a framework within which partners can collectively agree to delivering changes relevant to their own organisation or agency.

As discussed in response to previous elements of the consultation, a requirement for a clear plan for implementation, piloting and performance management was highlighted. It was also noted that setting minimum expectations could help ensure that the objectives and commitments are achieved.

* Several respondents noted issues with how ‘return interviews’ are held. It was highlighted that return interviews need to be handled sensitively and draw on recognised evidence on best practice, particularly in relation to the use of the third sector or non-uniformed officers. It was suggested in one group discussion that return interviews could be replaced by a review of the situation involving the adult, carers and necessary staff.

Some respondents noted other specific areas where the Objectives and Commitments can be developed:

* More clarity on information sharing between agencies.
* More recognition of the role of the third sector.
* Ensuring that the strategy refers to all relevant policies – for example the Unseen Child Policy.
* More information on the role that Health Service professionals including GPs and Health Visitors could play in identifying and supporting vulnerable groups.
* More information on the role of local authority staff in responding to incidents of young people going missing from care.
* More consideration of the immediate support options offered to those who are returned from being missing.
* More detail on the range of support needed and what is available around the commitment that people are signposted to the appropriate support available.

## **Perceived Challenges to Delivering the Objectives and Commitments**

Respondents were given the opportunity to identify any challenges that they perceive to the delivery of the Objectives and Commitments outlined in the Strategy. Thirty-four respondents offered feedback to this question. However, it was noted by several that they had no further comments to give and that their views were adequately captured in [Section 3.4](#_What_could_be). Indeed, there was a strong overlap between the responses captured by this question and those covered in Section 3.4. Responses can be grouped into the following broad categories:

* A need to ensure that the Strategy is **adequately resourced**.
* A need for **consistency and understanding** in processes. The example of data sharing was flagged repeatedly as a possible area of difficulty.
* A sense of **ownership of the Strategy** among agencies involved, ensuring that organisations are fully included in key decision making at the outset.
* A need for **effective joint working** between multiple agencies.
* Ensuring that the Strategy is given the appropriate level of importance and **awareness** in the context of **competing priorities**.

## **Views on Supporting Actions**

Respondents were asked to provide views on the Supporting Actions set out in the Strategy and to comment on any additional actions that would support the delivery of the Strategy. Again, several respondents pointed to their responses to other aspects of the consultation, which they felt adequately captured their views. Feedback on the Supporting Actions were broadly positive, however, it was noted that the supporting actions could be broken down into targeted actions by sector, as well more detail being provided on how responsibilities came to be allocated to certain agencies. Furthermore, it was noted that the interdependencies between the supporting actions could be discussed more fully.

Several respondents made reference to the use of social media in relation to finding missing people, and the need for further debate about the privacy rights of individuals, and more broadly explore the role that technology (e.g. GPS) can play in helping to keep people at risk of going missing safe. Related to this it was suggested that further information could be provided around public messaging on missing people, and the opportunity for coordinated communication.

Respondents noted several more specific areas that could be included or developed in the Supporting Actions:

* Actions to ensure that the Strategy is adequately resourced both in terms of appropriate and available services in local areas to sign-post people towards, and also that staff are fully trained and supported to carry out the tasks identified.
* Actions around piloting the strategy and more reference to the mechanisms required to monitor the Strategy at a national level to ensure accountability.
* An action around the development of awareness-raising campaigns alongside the launch of the strategy.
* Actions on the development of local strategies should aim to ensure that these are outcome-focused, accessible, meaningful and support good practice.
* The development and use of a common missing person risk assessment tool.
* The development of a pathway approach to missing people would promote partnership working and ensure clarity of responsibility and actions across agencies.
* The development of an additional supporting action relating to domestic violence and Police liaison with Women's Aid.
* The inclusion of parent awareness and how to prevent and support in current parenting programme.

# **Conclusion**

Responses to the formal consultation together with feedback from workshops and through social media will now inform the further refinement of the Strategy, to be published in summer 2016. Whilst respondents’ views are broadly supportive of the overarching purpose, objectives and commitments, the responses highlight the importance of further developing an action plan which provides clarity about roles, and which balances those against local variations in circumstances.

The Scottish Government is therefore working with local areas to become early adopters of the Strategy’s proposals, so that their experience and learning can inform development of a full action and implementation plan during the course of this year. Opportunities will be explored to bring early adopters together to share the learning and impact of adopting the Strategy across partner organisations.

A Steering Group is also in place, with membership drawn from a cross-section of agencies, to provide advice and expert knowledge to the Scottish Government in developing the national Strategy. The Group is supporting the delivery of key proposals to agree a national definition of ‘missing’, to develop guidance about the provision of return interviews, and to build a communications and engagement plan which will help raise awareness, and encourage early adoption and testing of proposals.

An evaluation of respondents’ views on Police Scotland’s definition of ‘missing’ will be provided to the Steering Group to inform their work, together with analysis of comments made about return interviews.

Analysis of the consultation responses will also inform the development of a full Equalities Impact Assessment, and a Child’s Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment. Further engagement with key stakeholders will explore the issues raised by respondents.

**For more information please contact: Katherine Byrne, Policy, Directorate for Safer Communities - Tel: 0131 244 3485 Email:** **katherine.byrne@gov.scot**

# **Annex A – Consultation Questions**

Comments on all sections of the draft Strategy are welcome. In particular we are

grateful for your response to any or all of the following questions.

**Purpose**

Our aim is to reduce the harm related to people going missing. This Strategy provides a framework for how organisations can together improve outcomes, and seeks to raise the profile of the issues connected with going missing.

Q1. What are your views on the proposed Purpose of the Strategy?

**Definition of Missing**

It is recommended that there is a nationally agreed definition of “missing”:

‘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’

Q2. Are we right to have a national definition?

Q3. What are your comments on the proposed definition above?

**General Questions:**

Q4. What **works well** in the Strategy?

Q5. What could we **do better or differently** in the Strategy?

Q6. What will be **vital to the implementation and success** of the Strategy?

Q7. Do you see any **challenges** to implementation of the Strategy?

**Equality considerations:**

The Scottish Government wants to ensure that all members of society are treated equally. As part of this, we need to understand how different people and groups are affected by our policies and consider this when developing our strategies.

Q8. What issues are raised by this strategy for people with protected characteristics

(age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, pregnancy and

maternity, sexual orientation)?

Q9. Are there likely to be any negative implications as a result of the strategy,

particularly regarding children‟s wellbeing?

Q10. Are there any other equality issues we should consider?

Commitments:

The Strategy proposes eight commitments structured around four Objectives:

Prevent, Respond, Support and Protect. Each Objective has two Commitments and

a number of Supporting Actions.

**Objective 1: Prevent**

* Commitment 1: Prevention planning takes place for vulnerable
* individuals and groups.
* Commitment 2: Local partnerships include „missing‟ within their
* Priorities

**Objective 2: Respond**

* Commitment 3: Information about missing people is exchanged
* between agencies
* Commitment 4: Risk assessments are used consistently by
* agencies responding when someone goes missing.

**Objective 3: Support**

* Commitment 5: Return interviews are provided to young people
* and adults after returning from being missing.
* Commitment 6: People are signposted to the appropriate support
* available.

**Objective 4: Protect**

* Commitment 7: Awareness is raised of the issue of going missing
* Commitment 8: Links to wider risks are highlighted in training and
* Guidance

Q11. What are your views on the proposed Objectives and Commitments?

Q12. What are the challenges to delivering these Objectives and Commitments?

Q13. What are your views on the Supporting Actions and are there any additional

actions that would support delivery of the Strategy?

# **Annex B – Overview of Consultation Respondents[[1]](#endnote-1)**

|  |
| --- |
| Consultation Respondents |
| Angus Public Protection Executive Committee |
| Care Inspectorate |
| Centre for Excellence for Looked after Children in Scotland (Celcis) |
| Children 1st |
| COSLA |
| Dumfries and Galloway Council |
| Dundee City Council |
| East Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership |
| East Lothian & Midlothian Public Protection Committee |
| East Renfrewshire HSCP |
| Edinburgh Cyrenian Trust |
| Fife Council |
| Forth Valley Partnerships |
| Glasgow Community Planning Partnership's Safe Group |
| Head of Civil Contingencies Unit, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (Individual?) |
| HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) |
| Homeless Action Scotland |
| Missing People |
| National Crime Agency (NCA) |
| National Missing Person Unit, Police Scotland |
| North Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership |
| North Lanarkshire Chief Officer Group Public Protection |
| Perth and Kinross Council |
| Police Scotland, Aberdeen City |
| Police Scotland, Tayside  |
| RCGP Scotland |
| Renfrewshire Adult Protection Committee |
| Renfrewshire Child Protection Committee (RCPC) |
| Renfrewshire Community Planning Partnership - Safer and Stronger Thematic Board |
| SACRO |
| Samaritans Scotland |
| Scottish Borders Adult Protection Service |
| Scottish Borders Council Child Protection Committee |
| Scottish Recovery Network |
| Scottish Women's Aid |
| Shelter Scotland |
| Social Work Scotland |
| South Ayrshire Child Protection Committee |
| South Lanarkshire Council |
| The Alliance |
| West Dunbartonshire Child Protection Committee & Health and Social Care Partnership |
| West Lothian Child and Adult Protection Committees |
| Who Cares? Scotland |
| With Scotland |
| Individual Respondents |

1. *Published consultation responses are available at https://consult.scotland.gov.uk/police-division/working-together/consultation/published\_select\_respondent*  [↑](#endnote-ref-1)