



PRESS RELEASE

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The Care Agency and the Royal Gibraltar Police Sign Memorandum of Understanding on Missing Vulnerable Children

The Gibraltar Care Agency and the Royal Gibraltar Police have signed a memorandum of understanding for the joint protection of children who go missing from residential and foster care. The aim of the initiative is to further strengthen the close working cooperation between the two entities and ensure there are direct and effective lines of communication whenever there is an episode of vulnerable children absconding from care.

It will also enshrine the supporting role of the RGP within a formal protocol.

The signing took place today, Wednesday 7th June 2017, at the Offices of the Minister for Health, Care and Justice, the Honourable Neil F. Costa, MP.

The Care Agency is the responsible authority for children in residential and foster care. Children and young persons under 18 who are looked after by the Care Agency are often extremely vulnerable when they have gone missing. Even short stays from their carers can lead to a child or young person being at risk of significant harm.

The RGP is the responsible authority for the welfare and safety of the community and have a primary role in searching for and returning to safety vulnerable children who have absconded or been reported missing. Both agencies have an ongoing commitment of collaborative work in order to safeguard children and young people in Gibraltar.

Care Agency CEO Natalie Tavares said: "The memorandum of understanding sets out very clear guidelines, including the role and responsibilities of each agency and also of carers and foster parents. The joint protocol will undoubtedly help the RGP and Care Agency respond to incidents of children missing from care in a consistent and professional manner. It includes the levels of risks which need to be assessed by the professionals and the required responses from each department. The public should note that these are not frequent occurrences but we must be well prepared to react to any contingencies."

Minister for Health, Care and Justice, the Hon Neil F Costa MP, said he was very pleased with the introduction of this joint protocol. Mr Costa said: "The Ministry is always looking at ways in which

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to enhance the protection mechanisms that the Care Agency affords to vulnerable children and young persons in the community. This memorandum will provide a consistent framework to ensure good practice and is in addition to the RGP's standard operating procedures as reflected in the Missing Person's Policy, which applies in all other cases.

"It is doubly satisfying that two key agencies within my ministerial responsibilities have teamed up to design, and now implement, this memorandum, which updates professional procedures. The agreement paves the way for closer working ties and collaboration that will ultimately serve to enhance the quality of a vital service for the benefit of the community."

For his part, Royal Gibraltar Police Commissioner Eddie Yome said: "It is right and proper that local institutions should seek to work together for the betterment of our community. More so when, as in this case, it applies to those young persons whose safety and wellbeing is entrusted to us."