

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub Operating Procedures 2019

**Portsmouth
MASH**

Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub





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Introduction

- 1.1. This document outlines the process by which safeguarding services are prioritised and allocated. The aim of this procedure is to ensure that all Portsmouth's children and families identified with additional needs, receive a timely response by appropriate services to achieve the best possible outcomes.
- 1.2. It is known that the best way to ensure that the needs of children and families are met by providing the right support at the earliest opportunity. This is best achieved through collective action by all agencies.
- 1.3. The Portsmouth Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) has been set up to manage all concerns (contacts) about a child's safety or wellbeing. The Portsmouth MASH will apply the locally agreed thresholds criteria to determine whether statutory services should be provided by Children's Social Care or whether Early Help support should be offered to meet the level of identified need.
- 1.4. This document should be read alongside:
 - The Portsmouth Safeguarding Children Board (PSCB) Thresholds Document
 - The Prevention and Early Help Strategy
 - HM Government Information Sharing Document 2018
 - The PSCB threshold of Children with complex needs - tiers of need and support
 - Working Together 2018
 - 4LSCB Policies and Procedures

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Consent at the point of contact with the MASH

- 2.1. Portsmouth City Council has an established information sharing framework which outlines responsibilities associated with information gathering, recording and sharing.
- 2.2. The data being shared within the MASH is likely to be sensitive and therefore underpinned by statutory principles. Good practice guidance highlights that informed consent should be obtained before sharing information. It will be expected that any professional making an enquiry to the Portsmouth MASH about a child will have the consent from the person/s with parental responsibility to share information. Obtaining explicit consent for information sharing is best practice and can be expressed either verbally or in writing. Where it is appropriate to obtain parental consent, written consent is always preferable, as it reduces the scope for dispute - except where to do so would place a child at risk of harm.
- 2.3. Where possible, share information with consent, and where possible, respect the wishes of those who do not consent to having their information shared. Under The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection 2018 you may share information without consent if, in your judgement, there is a lawful basis to do so, such as where safety may be at risk. You will need to base your judgement on the facts of the case. When you are sharing or requesting personal information from someone, be clear of the basis upon which you are doing so, where you do not have consent, be mindful that an individual might not expect information to be shared.

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Consent at the point of contact with the MASH

- 2.4. Where evidence, or strong evidence, indicates a child may be at risk of suffering, or is likely to suffer significant harm information can be shared without consent. However, it is still good practice for the practitioner to share with the parent the contact they have made to the MASH. Be mindful to not place the child at risk by sharing information. Practitioners are responsible for evidencing attempts they have made to contact parents without causing delay for the child.
- 2.5. All personal information recorded by Portsmouth MASH must be recorded accurately. The data will be stored in accordance with agencies' procedures for children in need. Access to the records will be limited to Portsmouth MASH professionals.
- 2.6. Where there are concerns that a child is at risk of harm due to Fabricated and Induced Illness (FII) it should not be mentioned to the carers if sharing this concern would jeopardise the child's safety or criminal proceedings. In these instances a multiagency decision is usually needed to collectively assess the risk, agree the appropriate course of action and consider what parents should be told and by whom.

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Principles Underpinning the Work

3.1. In Portsmouth we aim to create the best possible environment for families to care for themselves and their children, providing additional support where appropriate and to intervene where necessary to safeguard and protect children and young people. To do this we are committed to:

- Wherever possible all children's and families' needs will be met by universal services.
- As soon as any professional is aware that a family has additional needs that may impact adversely on a child, he/she will have a **starting conversation** with the child and their family and offer advice and support to meet that need.
- Professionals working with children and families will always seek to gain their consent to share information with others unless to do so would place the child at risk of harm.
- Families will be empowered to identify their own problems, needs and solutions. In most cases outcomes for children will only be improved by supporting and assisting parents/carers to make changes.
- Our aim is always to build resilience in children and families and their capacity to overcome their own difficulties for the remainder of their lives.
- We will offer support and services to help families find their own sustainable solutions. Once improvement is made services will reduce or end so as not to create dependence.

3.2. These principles support our restorative approach to practice in Portsmouth. Restorative practice is a way of behaving, which helps to build and maintain healthy relationships, resolve difficulties and repair harm where there has been conflict. We will support the development of family capacity, resilience and independence by building on strengths and enabling them to find their own solutions - and take responsibility for their **stronger future**.

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The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

- 4.1. The Portsmouth MASH is a multi-agency team set up to assist families and the workforce in deciding the right response for a child who may have additional needs or about whom there may be concerns. The Portsmouth MASH is the initial contact point for all enquiries about a child's safety or wellbeing and applies the Portsmouth Safeguarding Children Board (PSCB) threshold criteria to determine whether a response is required by Children's Social Care or the child's needs can be met by an Early Help response or Universal Services.
- 4.2. The MASH provides the first contact point for any enquiries about a child's wellbeing. The information provided is initially reviewed by a senior social-work practitioner. Consent will be checked at this point and if not acquired, the contact will be returned to the referrer with an action to seek consent, prior to referral being accepted. However, if the contact has an element of safeguarding and meets the safeguarding board tier 3 threshold, the case will be considered by the MASH with an attached justification as to why the case has been progressed at that point without consent. A plan of how to obtain consent will accompany this.
- 4.3. The senior social work practitioner will determine the appropriate response to the contact:
- Universal services are appropriate to meet the needs of the child.
 - The child needs a specific or single agency early help service - via tier 2 co-ordinators
 - The child is suffering significant harm, thus a child protection enquiry should be undertaken under S47 of the Children Act 1989.
 - The information provided requires more detailed analysis by key professionals in the MASH.

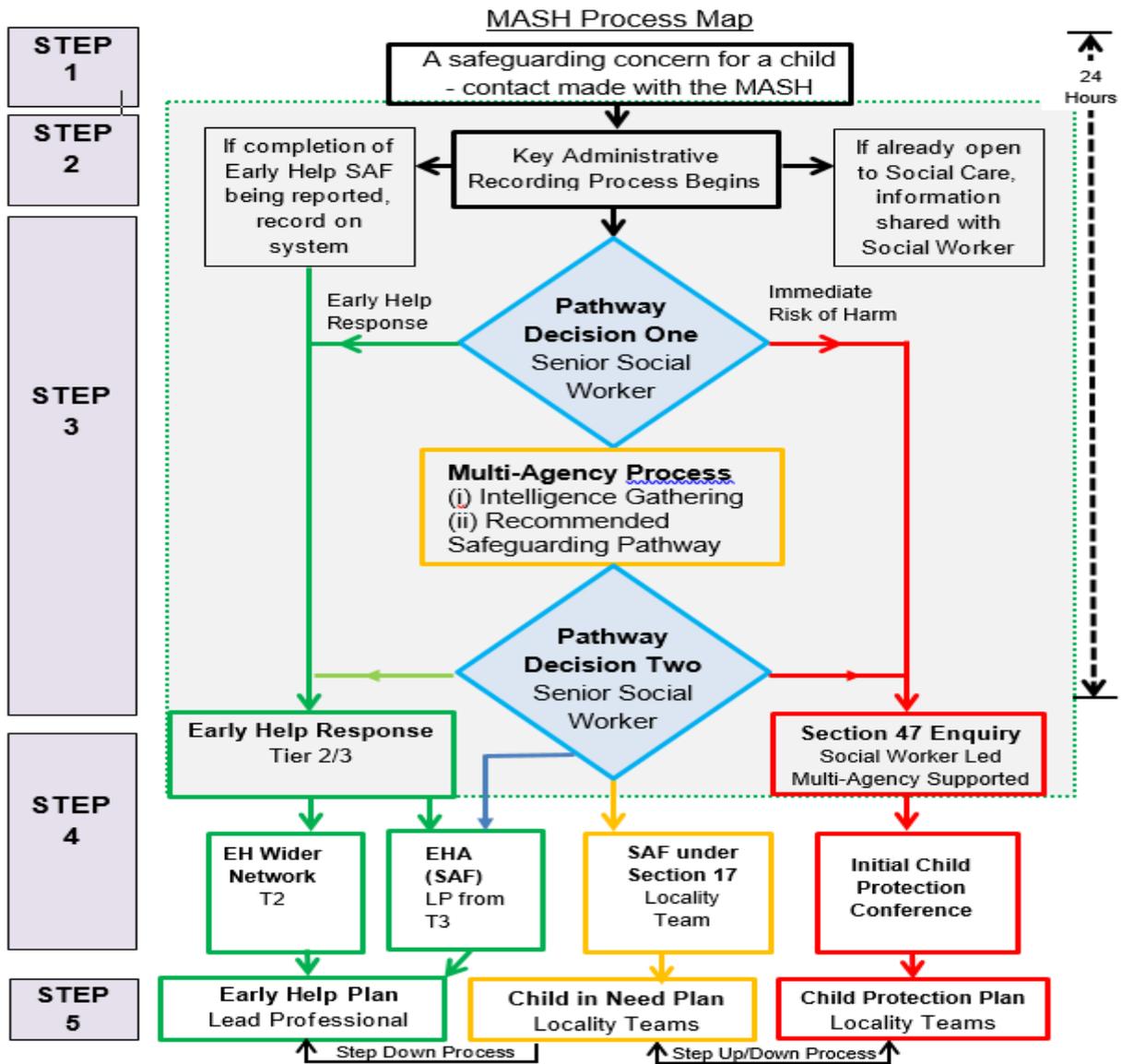
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The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

- 4.4. Where the information provided meets PSCB threshold document indicators tier 3 and above, the case will be considered within the formal MASH multi-agency process. These contacts will have a key professional who will ensure other MASH colleagues, along with themselves gain the necessary and relevant information about the child/family and then make an informed outcome recommendation from a multi-agency perspective. The expectation being the right children and families are able to access the right services at the right time.
- 4.5 The pathway for those children with disabilities will require the professional who makes the contact to refer to the threshold document for children with complex needs - pathways to support. The professional making the contact will be expected to complete an Inter-Agency Contact Form (IACF), Recommended Support Tool (RST) and Early Help Assessment (EHA). Children with disabilities will follow the same pathway as any other child. However, the children with disabilities threshold document will be used to provide additional support to aid practitioners in their decision making.

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The diagram below details the MASH, Tier 2, Early Help and Children's Social Care Process:



The potential outcomes from the MASH are:

- That multi-agency early help coordinated by a lead professional is required (green pathway) either Tier 2 or Tier 3.
- That a statutory assessment is required by children's social care to determine services under S17 of the Children Act 1989 (amber pathway).
- That the information indicates the child may be suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm and an enquiry under S47 needs to be initiated (red pathway).

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The Early Help Pathway

5.1. It is expected that all professionals contacting the MASH will have had a **starting conversation** with the family to ascertain their views about their needs and any support that may be helpful to them.

5.2 Where the MASH process indicates that a child needs an early help response, there will be two pathways according to the threshold of need. This will either be an Early Help tier 2 coordination within the MASH or the Early Help and Prevention service response located within the Locality at tier 3.

5.3 The Early Help and Pathway will review the information provided and consider whether the family meets the criteria to be attached to the Troubled Families Programme. Eligibility for the programme is based on the family having at least two of the six headline problems:

- Parents or young people involved in offending or anti-social behaviour
- Children or young people where attendance in an education setting needs to improve
- Children and families who need effective help and protection
- Adults out of work or at risk of financial exclusion, or young people at risk of worklessness or NEET
- Adults and children affected by domestic violence and abuse
- Parents or children with a range of health and wellbeing problems.

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5.4 Tier 2 coordinators work within the MASH Early Help Team to assist when cases are assessed as meeting a tier 2 threshold. The coordinators will assist in identifying support needs with the family they will discuss the level of support the family is requesting, who the family would identify/request as their lead professional. They act as a guide to the professional network in undertaking a plan of support including Early Help Assessment, meetings and effective family plans.

5.5. Tier 2 coordinators support Portsmouth Safeguarding Children Board training in Early Help Procedures and advise professionals in the city about procedures, local support services and facilities that may be available for a family. The tier 2 co-ordinators are linked with a locality to work alongside Early Help and Prevention Service to ensure smooth transitions for families as their support needs change.

5.6 The purpose of the Early Help and Prevention Service is to:

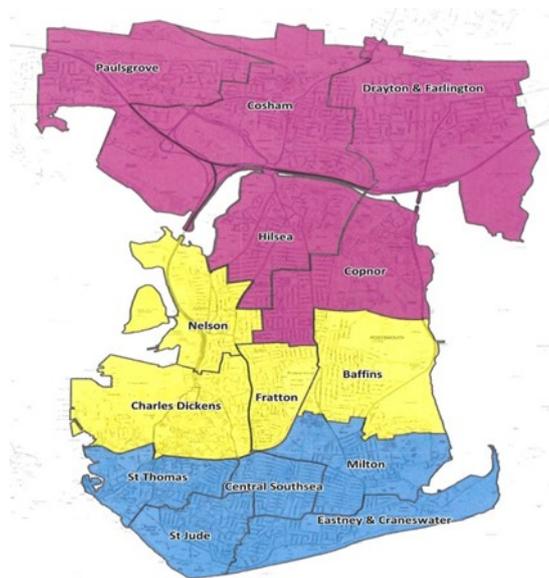
- a) Establish the level of priority for intensive family support.
- b) Identify families that meet the Troubled Families eligibility criteria and highlight that they can be attached to the programme.
- c) Agree who is best placed within the professional network to complete an Early Help Single Assessment Framework (SAF) and coordinate the early help offer (by the lead professional).

5.7 The Early Help Hub will maintain a record of all children and families receiving early help (including information on the service allocated to them, their lead professional and whether they can be attached to the Troubled Families programme).

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The Multi-Agency Teams (MATs)

Multi-Agency Teams (MATs) have been established in three localities across Portsmouth, in the North, Centre and South of the city, co-locating services for children and families (see the map below).



- 6.1. Locality Areas are coterminous with neighbourhood policing areas and that each MAT is developing strong links with education settings and GPs in their locality area.
- 6.2. The locality multi-agency teams have been established to promote integrated working practices across different agencies so that families receive seamless and timely support that is appropriate and proportionate to need.
- 6.3. Each multi-agency team is made up of a range of professionals including:
 - Specialist Family Support Workers
 - Health Visitors
 - School Nurses
 - Social Workers

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The Multi-Agency Teams (MATs)

6.4. Services within the locality, but outside the MATs include:

- Voluntary Services
- Nurseries
- Schools
- GP practices
- Neighbourhood policing teams
- Colleges and post-16 Education providers
- Portsmouth Intervention project (PIP)
- Up2U

6.5. At the allocation meeting held following the MASH decision the Service Lead for the Early Help and Prevention Service will identify which Early Help Prevention Worker is appropriate to take on the lead professional role. The Early Help and Prevention Service has two pathways:

- Under 5 years old will be signposted to health visiting for the ECHO programme to be undertaken.
- Families with children over five years of age will be allocated a Family Support Worker who will support the family for up to six months to complete identified work following completion of the Early Help Assessment.

6.6 Within the Multi Agency Teams (MATs) there will be a monthly network meeting with relevant professionals who work outside of the MATs to offer supervision, review processes and track progress. A relevant manager within the MATs will be identified to facilitate this meeting.

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The Pathway to Children's Social Care

Children in Need

- 7.1. Where a professional is concerned about the safety or wellbeing of a child they should complete the IACF to send to the MASH. The MASH will consider what is known about the family and apply the threshold criteria to determine the right level of response, alongside considering whether consent has been gained.
- 7.2. If the MASH process determines that a social work assessment should be completed to determine whether a child/family should be provided with services under S17 Children Act 1989, the MASH will allocate to the relevant locality social work manager.

Section 17 Children Act 1989 defines a child in need as:

- A child who is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or have the opportunity to achieve or maintain, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision of services by the local authority
- A child whose health or development is likely to be significantly impaired or further impaired without the provision of services
- A child who has a substantial and permanent disability

- 7.3. Children's Social Care will be the lead agency for all children identified as 'in need' under Section 17 Children Act 1989. Social work support will only be provided for as long as required by the family and the lead role may be 'stepped down' to Early Help Services as appropriate.

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The Pathway to Children's Social Care

Child Protection Pathway

7.4. Professionals in all agencies have a responsibility to contact the MASH when it is believed or suspected that a child:

- Has suffered significant harm, is suffering, or;
- Is at risk of suffering, significant harm

7.5. If professionals who are raising a child protection referral deem the child to be at risk of immediate harm, they are to phone through the concerns and follow up with an Inter-Agency Contact Form (IACF) within 24 hours of making the contact.

Section 47 Children Act 1989 states:

'Where a Local Authority... have reasonable cause to suspect that a child who lives , or is found, in the area and is suffering, or is likely to suffer, Significant Harm, the authority shall make, such enquires as they consider necessary to enable them to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard or promote the child's welfare... the enquires shall be commenced as soon as practicable and, in any event, within 48 hours of the authority receiving the information.'

7.6. A child protection enquiry will be initiated under S47 Children Act 1989. Children's Social Care will take the lead role in safeguarding the wellbeing of the child/ children and ensure that the 4LSCB Child Protection Procedures are followed.

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Out of Hours Concerns

The Portsmouth MASH is open at the following times:

Monday
08:30 - 17:00

Tuesday
08:30 - 17:00

Wednesday
08:30 - 17:00

Thursday
08:30 - 17:00

Friday
08:30 - 16:30

The MASH can be contacted on **02392 688793**. All referrals are to be made via email on **MASH@secure.portsmouth.gov.uk**

Should you have a **safeguarding concern** please contact the MASH via phone and follow up in writing.

To deal with concerns outside of these core hours, there is an out of hours' service that can be contacted on: **0300 555 1373**

Any contacts made out of hours will be reviewed the next working day by the Portsmouth MASH manager.

- Published: **November 2016**
- Updated: **April 2019**