

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub Operating Procedures 2025

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) was developed to manage all safeguarding (contacts) about a child's safety or wellbeing. The Portsmouth MASH applies the locally agreed threshold 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
- 1.4. This document should be read alongside:
- The Portsmouth Safeguarding
 - Children Partnership (PSCP) Thresholds Document
 - The Safeguarding Strategy
 - HM Government Information Sharing Document 2018
 - The PSCP threshold of Children with complex needs - tiers of need and support
 - Working Together 2023
 - 4LSCB Policies and Procedures

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Information sharing at the point of contact with the MASH

- 2.1. Portsmouth City Council and partners have an established information sharing framework which outlines responsibilities associated with information gathering, recording and sharing.
- 2.2. Practitioners should be proactive in sharing information as early as possible to help identify, assess, and respond to risks or concerns about the safety and welfare of children. (Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2023)

Information sharing is also essential for the identification of patterns of behaviour when a child has gone missing, when multiple children appear associated to the same context or locations of risk, or in relation to children in the secure estate where there may be multiple local authorities involved in a child's care.
- 2.3 We should consider 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 under "public task" in your judgement, there is a lawful basis to do so, such as where safety may be at risk. When you are sharing or requesting personal information from someone, be clear of the basis upon which you are doing so and be mindful that an individual might not expect information to be shared.

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Information sharing at the point of contact with the MASH

- 2.4. Where evidence, or strong evidence, indicates a child may be at risk of 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 is critical that any contact to MASH names the harm and should not use FII as the reason for contact. In principle, professionals should inform parents/carers about any safeguarding concerns and/or referrals of their child to Children's Services unless, by doing so, this action might place the child at risk of further and/or increased harm.

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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 inform parents of the sharing of 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 (PSCP) 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 consists of the following members of staff, children's social care staff including a service leader, team leaders, social workers and specialised support workers in education, Tier 2 and early help support., YOT, Business Support Team Leader and supporting staff. Police Inspectors, Sergeant's and staff co-ordinators including MARAC workers. Health colleagues are represented by the Solent NHS Safeguarding Team plus a Health Visitor,, Currently MASH are developing a working agreement with probation and work with PCC housing is fully embedded in the MASH.
- 4.3 The MASH provides the first contact point for any enquiries about a child's wellbeing. The information provided is initially reviewed by a Team Leader.

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The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

4.4. The Team Leader determines the appropriate response to the contact:

- Universal services are appropriate to meet the needs of child.
- The child needs a specific or single agency early help service - via tier 2 coordinators
- Early Help Tier 3
- 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.

4.5. Where the information provided meets PSCP 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.

4.6 The pathway for those children with disabilities will require the professional who makes the contact to refer to the threshold document, which now incorporates threshold for children with complex needs. The professional making the contact will be expected to complete an Inter-Agency Contact Form (IACF), and a Recommended Support Tool (RST) or Early Help Assessment (EHA). Children with disabilities will follow the same pathway as any other child.

4.7 Young people who are reported as missing receive a return home interview to understand the events which influenced the episode, their carers views and plan any necessary support. This information may be shared with the Missing, Exploitation and Trafficked (MET) team to help understand possible influences, hot spots and grow interventions to address these.

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The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

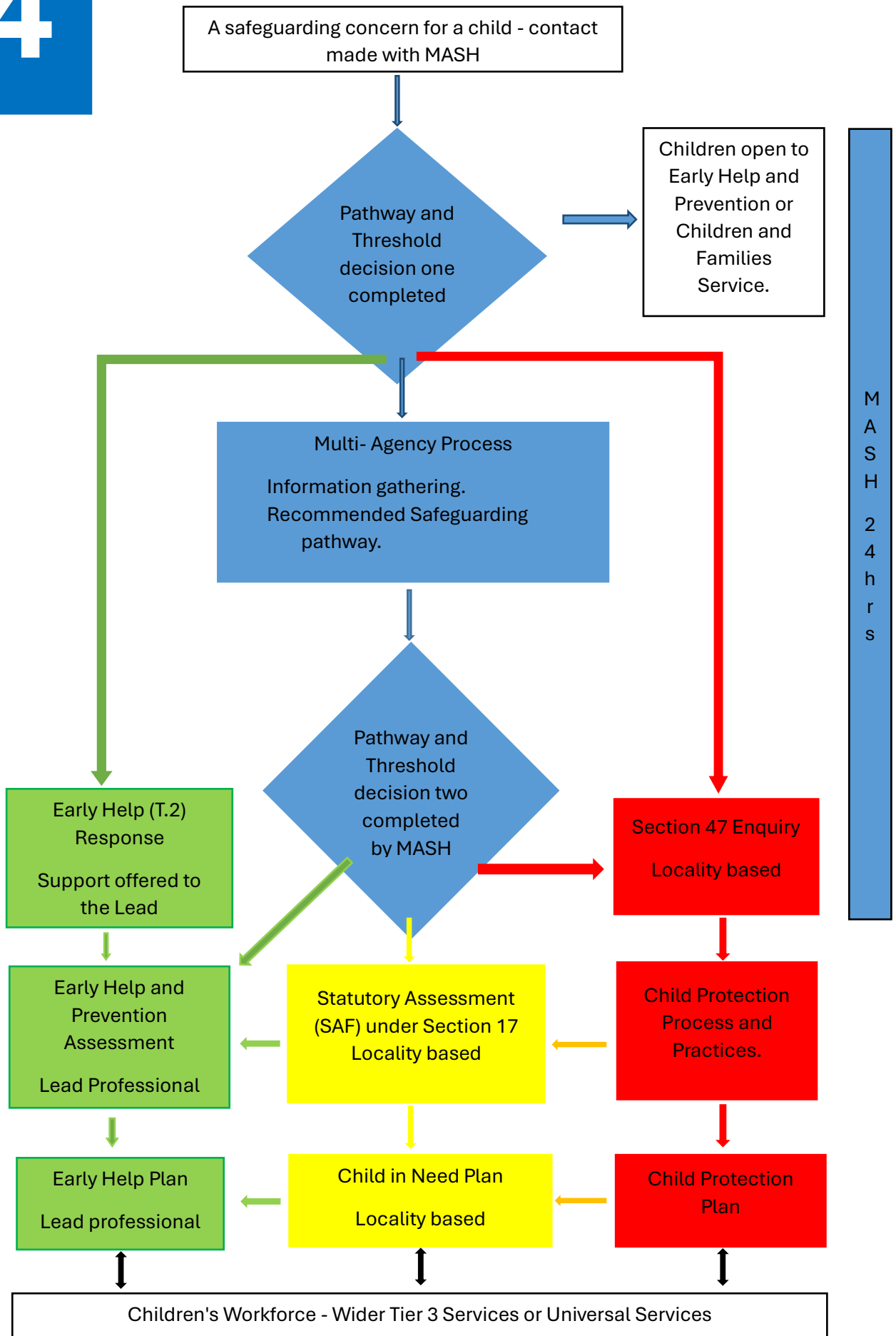
- 4.8 For those young people who are considered vulnerable to potential radicalisation and/or terrorism the pathway for support is via the CTP gateway national referral, the gateway would simultaneously share the detail of the contact with the MASH. This ensures there is context and safeguarding consideration/ownership from the key partner agencies at the point of contact whilst the CTP carry out deconfliction and/or any necessary pursuit considerations.

The MASH Service Leader is also the Deputy Channel Chair . Channel is the formal national mechanism which offers targeted support for those people who may be at risk of radicalisation or terrorism.

- 4.9 To aid real time support for those young people exposed to domestic harm the Portsmouth MASH aids and facilitates the sharing of Police PPN's with the schools involved. This is part of the national initiative—Operation Encompass. However, the Portsmouth offer means all relevant PPN's are shared with schools and not just those where the theme was domestic harm. This supports schools understanding of harm or trauma suffered by pupils attending their school, which required a police intervention.
- 4.10 The MASH is also a partner on the daily Hampshire Constabulary (Portsmouth Area) Management call—this enables any vulnerability to be identified early so the correct level of intervention can be initiated.
- 4.11 The MASH and LADO have a clear pathway which exist to ensure the necessary information sharing occurs around professional allegations so any safeguarding considerations are addressed.
- 4.12 For children who are homeless or at risk of homeless will be immediately referred to the Family Support and Safeguarding Team. They will then follow the *Joint Working protocol for 16/17 year olds who are homeless or threatened with homelessness*. This is a joint working protocol between Children & Families Services (CFS) Housing Needs Advice & Support (HNAS) regarding Portsmouth City Council's (PCC's) response to 16/17 year olds who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. This is to ensure that:
- i. PCC meets its statutory obligations towards 16/17 year olds who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.
 - ii. To help us prevent as many cases of homelessness as possible.
 - iii. To help respond to homeless approaches from 16/17 year olds in a joined up and consistent way.

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



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The potential outcomes from the MASH are:

- Signposting and advice to universal services
- 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 have had an **initial conversation** with the family to obtain 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 are two pathways according to the threshold of need. This is either the 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 Pathway reviews the information provided and consider whether the family meets the criteria to be attached to the Supporting Families Agenda. Eligibility for the programme is based 3 of the 10 outcomes:

- Getting a good education
- Good early years development
- Improved mental and physical health
- Promoting recovery and reducing harm from substance use
- Improved family relationships
- Children safe from abuse and exploitation
- Crime prevention and tackling crime
- Safe from domestic abuse
- Secure housing
- Financial stability.

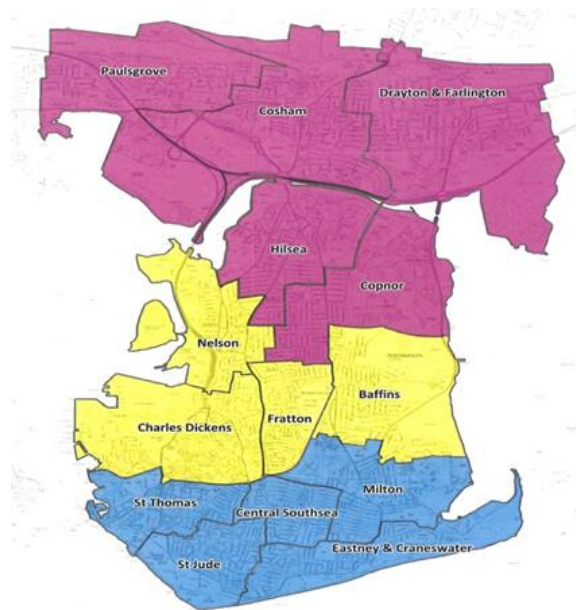
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- 5.4 Tier 2 coordinators work within the MASH Early Help Team to assist when cases are assessed as meeting a tier 2 threshold. The coordinators will assist in identifying support needs with the family they will discuss the level of support the family 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 Family Support Plan, meetings and effective family plans. They now conduct Return Home Interviews for missing children not open at Tier 3 or 4.
- 5.6 The purpose of the Early Help and Prevention Service is to:
- Where there is consent, the Early Help & Prevention service is able to work with the family to complete an Early Help Assessment and produce a plan with actions with the aim of improving the outcomes for the family. This plan will be reviewed with the family and relevant professionals. This could be stepped across to wider partners for the support to continue once the targeted aspect of the plan has been completed.
- 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 link co-ordinators are linked with a locality to work alongside Early Help and Prevention Service to ensure smooth

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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 IDVA project (PIP)
- Up2U
- Youth Services
- Housing

6.5. The Early help and Prevention Allocation meetings are attended by Early Help and Health management from the appropriate locality who identify the most appropriate lead professional within the integrated service .

6.6 MAT Locality Network Groups are run monthly within the localities that contain updates from Health, Early Help, Social Care, Police and Education along with guest speakers sharing information about their services.

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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 Service Leader.

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.



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

The MASH can be contacted on **02392 688793**. All referrals are to be made via email on **mash@portsmouthcc.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 Team Leaders.

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