



**Oldham**  
Council

# **Children's Services Multi- Agency Safeguarding Hub**

Operating Procedures

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## Introduction

1.1 Oldham's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) performs the following key functions:

- Processes all Child Safeguarding Contacts.
- Processes all Child Contacts for Early Help Advice, Guidance and Support.
- The children's duty and advice team also offer support to professionals to enable early identification of earliest possible support to children and families.
- Daily risk management meetings in relation to high-risk domestic abuse incidents.
- Process notification or request for information from another Local Authority or agency (CAFCASS, Probation, Police or Education etc.) on behalf of CSC.

1.2 Oldham's Duty and Advice service within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) aims to ensure:

- Professionals and families do not experience barriers or delay in accessing services.
- Children have easier access to the most appropriate service to meet their presenting needs. Children's needs are identified efficiently, and decisions are not delayed because of bureaucracy and/or differences in service thresholds.
- Information sharing between agencies and early identification of risk and harm is improved, to safeguard vulnerable children.
- Services are targeted at the most vulnerable children.
- Professionals work together creatively, share knowledge and expertise, and discuss and reflect together whilst applying professional judgement.
- The MASH accepts there is no single response for all families and is premised on making the right decisions, at the right time for the right and proportionate reasons.

1.3 The overall aim of Duty and Advice is to ensure that the right children and families receive the right support and at the right time. This is actioned through providing:

- A more accurate assessment of risk and need by building a timely and complete picture of an individual/family.
- More thorough and information driven management of cases.

- Better understanding between professionals from all agencies of working practices and Information Management culture.
- Underlying expectation of early identification of support and action by partner agencies where the family are involved, and evidence can be provided where outcomes have not been progressed or achieved.
- To provide greater efficiencies, streamlined service and value for money.

1.4 MASH has partnership presence from the below:

1.5

Local Authority	Children's Social Care
	Early Help
	Domestic Abuse Team
	Community Safety
	Adult Social Care
Greater Manchester Police	Public Protection Team
NHS	Health
Other partners include:	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) Probation Education Housing Youth Justice

## 2 Making Contact with the Duty and Advice team within the MASH

2.1 Duty and advice operates Monday to Friday 08:40am – 5:00pm (accepting calls until 5.00pm). The team can be contacted on 0161 770 7777. Outside of these hours the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) acts as the first point of contact on 0161 770 6936.

2.2 This guidance is for anyone who has concerns about a child, it is designed to be used as a foundation to enable the correct level of support to be provided.

## 3 Our Approach

3.1 In Oldham we have high ambitions for our children, young people and their families to thrive. We want them to feel safe and to care about their health, education, and employment. We want them to be confident and resilient individuals who are connected to their community; providing support so they are able to make an

effective contribution as responsible citizens, enjoying a life where they can meet their full potential. We believe that through promoting earliest possible support and intervention, ensuring that state intervention is a response only where proportionate, that we can support families to achieve change where needed.

- 3.2 Our vision in Oldham as a partnership is that we seek to recognise where children and families are experiencing difficulty and work together with them at the earliest possible opportunity to support them to achieve positive change. We recognise that the earliest possible help is likely to engage families to enable change. However, we are clear regarding our collaborative responsibility to highlight increasing risk or significant unmet need for targeted support or intervention where earliest possible help has not achieved change. Our key partnership responsibility is to keep children safe and support families to achieve change together where necessary.
- 3.3 Within the Duty and Advice service we strive to utilise the conversational model of social work. This model promotes professionals seeking advice directly via telephone rather than completing a multi-agency referral form.
- 3.4 This enables professionals to have a conversation with an experienced social worker, who will ask key questions about the strengths and risks within families, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the child/ren's circumstances to be obtained. The social worker and referrer will then work together to agree who is best placed to meet the needs of the child/ren and an agreed plan will then be shared by the duty and advice social worker to the referrer by email.
- 3.5 This guidance identifies four areas of support, in line with the continuum of need, and demonstrates how they can be met through:
- Universal
  - Universal Plus "Earliest Possible Help"
  - Targeted Early Help
  - Children's Social Care

### **3.6 Universal**

All children and young people have access to universal services such as schools, healthcare, leisure, and community services which are readily accessible to all. There are a wide range of universal services available to children, young people, and their families within the borough.

A range of resources to support families can be accessed on our [We Can Help Families](#) webpage

You can find information about social groups, practical support or leisure activities on the [Action Together](#) website.

Families who have children with disabilities can find out about help available to them on our [Local Offer](#) page

### **3.7 Universal Plus “Earliest Possible Help”**

Children who may have unmet or complex needs may require multi-agency support through an early help response involving two or more agencies. This is led by one agency and the aim is to build a plan of support around the child and family to work together to respond to needs.

Some children and their families need help to be healthy, safe and achieve their full potential. Research indicates that the sooner a family receives support, the sooner they can improve their situation and prevent the need for longer term support or specialist intervention.

Early help is everyone’s business, and it is expected that any worker from an agency or service can identify and respond to meet those needs, by working with others to do so. Where families need support, effective early help relies on local agencies to work together in partnership with families to identify needs, build on strengths, develop a plan to empower families and enable them to thrive.

Where early help is offered it is important that this is underpinned by a [Family Help Tool](#) and coordinated through Team Around the Family arrangements with an identified Lead Professional.

### **3.8 Targeted Early Help**

Children who have multiple and complex unmet needs may require a targeted Early Help response with targeted intervention from Early Help services led by the local authority or Positive Steps (commissioned targeted early provider), where Universal Plus “Earliest Possible Help” has not enabled change to be made. These unmet needs may be complex and could be impacting on the child and family daily life.

Family Workers in the Targeted Early Help team provide help to families on a range of issues. They help families to identify their own strengths and to achieve positive outcomes for themselves. Targeted support is typically for 3-6 months but is not limited to this.

This Targeted Early Help approach will retain the multi-agency working arrangements around the family but will be led by the local authority Targeted Early Help Service or Positive Steps, in ensuring a robust plan and any relevant access to specialist services connected with the assessed need for Early Help support, is in place. Where support and progress is sustained, return to partner led Universal Plus is encouraged to take place through a planned approach.

### **3.9 Children’s Social Care**

In more complex situations where children, young people and families need help to reduce risk of harm, it is important this level of support is provided as quickly as

possible. If a child, young person, or family needs more help, a referral to Duty and Advice, within MASH, should be made.

**If you have concerns about a child who may need immediate protection, please contact Duty and Advice on 0161 770 7777 and the Police on 999.**

It is important to ensure the family are aware you are making a referral. In very few cases a referral will be necessary without informing the family first, the Duty and Advice Service can support you with this. Following referral, the service will review the information and assess the support needs of the family, this may lead to one of the following outcomes:

- 1) The identified needs can continue to be met via Early Help Services
- 2) Support is required as a Child in Need under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989
- 3) An assessment under Section 47 of the Children Act is needed due to a child suffering or likely to suffer significant harm as defined in Children Act 1989.

## **4 Consent**

- 4.1 Gaining consent to refer through to the duty and advice service will always be considered best practice and the responsibility for communicating intention to proceed with contacting the MASH to families relies upon the referring agency. There may be times when obtaining consent is unsafe or inappropriate due to the risks posed in the case, the following legal gateways can be applied in these cases:

*'Where the professional making the referral deems the level of risk (or need) to be high enough, a legal gateway may be used. In particular Section 17 and Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 would facilitate this sharing. When using these legal gateways, we will be processing and sharing the data as part of a "public task" and "provision of social care support" under Article 6 and 9 of the GDPR.'*

- 4.2 Consent will be obtained verbally by the professional making the contact from the individual/family they wish to refer. It is vital to the process that the professional involved explains in a clear and concise manner, what the duty and advice service is and the help that the family can expect to receive.
- 4.3 When the professional makes contact into the MASH, they will be asked to confirm whether they have obtained consent. If the professional has not obtained consent, where appropriate, they will be asked to gain this by the Duty and Advice Social Workers.
- 4.4 In some instances, consent will be overridden where risks are identified and indicate the child/ren are at risk of significant harm. Where there is an immediate safeguarding risk identified to a child, the duty and advice service will rely on the legal gateway within the Children's Act 1989 (section 47) to ensure swift and



appropriate information sharing. Section 47 of the Children's Act is the Local Authority's duty to investigate, where a local authority:

- (a) Are informed that a child who lives, or is found, in their area:
  - i. Is the subject of an emergency protection order: or
  - ii. Is in police protection
- (b) Have reasonable cause to suspect that a child who lives, or is found, in their area is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.

The Local Authority shall make, or cause to be made, such enquiries as they consider necessary to enable them to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard or promote the child's welfare.

## **5 Contacts**

5.1 Contacts can be made to the MASH in 3 distinct ways. This can be:

- By telephone – this is the recommended option for all professionals.
- By secure email – this is an agreed arrangement between children services duty and advice and Police.
- By the online referral form – for out of hours acute health services only.

5.2 All submissions from MASH Police are submitted to the duty and advice secure mailbox. The Police are solely responsible for submitting contact information and adhering to the associated data protection mechanisms around this. There are clear legal frameworks around Police referrals and in these cases, consent is not always necessary but is deemed best practice where this can be obtained.

5.3 Any contacts in the child mash mailbox [child.mash@oldham.gov.uk](mailto:child.mash@oldham.gov.uk) are assessed to establish the threshold of need in accordance with Oldham's Continuum of Need and processed accordingly. Where they relate to an already open case the information is shared with the allocated social worker. Where the case is initially triaged to be either Early Help or statutory social work level, screening is undertaken. Any information relating to a child/ren and families will be recorded on Children's Social Care Systems.

5.4 All contacts to the duty and advice service should be made in line with the application of threshold as set out within the continuum of need as detailed below.

- Request for Early Help support for children and their families

To request this service a telephone call should be made to the duty and advice service. The information shared must make clear that this is a request for Early Help and a Family Help Tool should be provided, together with information about what support has already been provided to the child/ren

and family. Referrals to Early Help will not be accepted without a Family Help Tool.

- Request for social work assessment and intervention

All contacts into the duty and advice service requesting a social work assessment should be made via the telephone (unless out of hours acute services or the Police). The contact into the service should detail what team around the family support / intervention has been provided unless the concerns warrant a Safeguarding matter where the referrer deems the child to be at risk of significant harm. All professionals will be asked to provide a chronology / minutes of what support has been provided to support the child/ren and family.

All referrals into the Duty and Advice service require consent from a parent with parental responsibility, unless to do so would place the child at risk of significant harm.

5.5 Contacts are allocated to a Duty and Advice Social Worker or Early Help Officer dependent upon the initial identification of risk/threshold as identified by the Social Care team manager. Each contact will have initial management oversight recorded, which will include clear management direction to the social worker and identify whether a strategy meeting is required.

5.6 The screening process should establish:

- The nature of the concern.
- How and why, it has arisen.
- What the child's needs appear to be.
- Whether the concern indicates Significant Harm;
- Whether there is any need for urgent action to protect the child or any children in the household.

This process will involve:

- Discussion with the referrer.
- Consideration of any existing records (family history).
- The parent or carer should normally be informed that a Referral is being made unless to do so would place a child or vulnerable adult at increased risk of harm.
- The Information shared should always be necessary, proportionate, relevant, accurate, timely and secure.
- Involving other agencies as appropriate and in accordance with [Information Sharing Advice for Safeguarding Practitioners](#), and [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#).

- 5.7 As part of the screening process, duty and advice officers will consider any areas of need in respect of Complex Safeguarding (risk of exploitation for children and young people). If any concerns are noted, then the duty and advice officer will seek a discussion with the duty worker from the Complex Safeguarding Hub for further consideration.
- 5.8 If there are indications that a child may be at risk of Significant Harm, the manager may authorise whatever actions are necessary to protect the child or others in the household from Significant Harm, which may result in the immediate provision of services. There should be consideration of a Strategy Discussion and of a multi-agency response.
- 5.9 If there is suspicion that a crime may have been committed including sexual or physical assault or neglect of the child, the Police must be notified immediately.
- 5.10 After the triage process has taken place for those contacts received via email or via the contact form, or where a phone call from a professional has been received raising concerns, (within 24 hours of initial creation of a contact record), a management decision is made and recorded within the contact form as to how the case will be progressed. The case can then be progressed as: -
- That the child does not appear to be a Child in Need, which will result in one of the following: the provision of information, advice, signposting to another agency and/or no further action;
  - Identification of Early Help Support, in accordance with the Continuum of Need;
  - A social work referral, progressing to an assessment of need, under Section 17 of The Children's Act;
  - A social work referral, progressing to an assessment of need and a strategy meeting under section 47 of The Children Act;

## **6 Strategy Meetings**

- 6.1 Strategy meetings are held when it is suspected a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.
- 6.2 The purpose of this meeting is to decide whether a Section 47 enquiry under the Children Act 1989 (CA 1989) is required and if so, to develop a plan of action for the Section 47 Enquiry.
- 6.3 A strategy meeting / discussion should be used to:
- Share available information.
  - Agree the conduct and timing of any criminal investigation.

- Decide whether an assessment under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 (section 47 enquiries) should be initiated or continued if it has already begun.
- Consider the assessment and the action points, if already in place.
- Plan how the section 47 enquiry should be undertaken (if one is to be initiated), including the need for medical treatment or assessment, who will carry out what actions, by when and for what purpose and whether a social media search should be conducted.
- Agree what action is required immediately to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child, and / or provide interim services and support. If the child is in hospital, decisions should also be made about how to secure the safe discharge of the child.
- Determine what information from the strategy meeting / discussion will be shared with the family, unless such information sharing may place a child at increased risk of significant harm or jeopardise police investigations into any alleged offence/s;
- Determine if legal action or other urgent safety planning is required.

#### 6.4 Strategy Meetings should always be held when:

- There is concern that the child is suffering complex types of neglect or maltreatment (e.g. Fabricated or Induced Illness, Organised and Complex Abuse), sexually harmful behaviour;
- There is an allegation that a child has abused another child – there should be separate strategy meetings held for both children;
- There are ongoing, cumulative concerns about the child's welfare and a need to share concerns and agree a course of action;
- There are concerns about the future risk of harm to an unborn child.
- There are concerns regarding intrafamilial sexual abuse

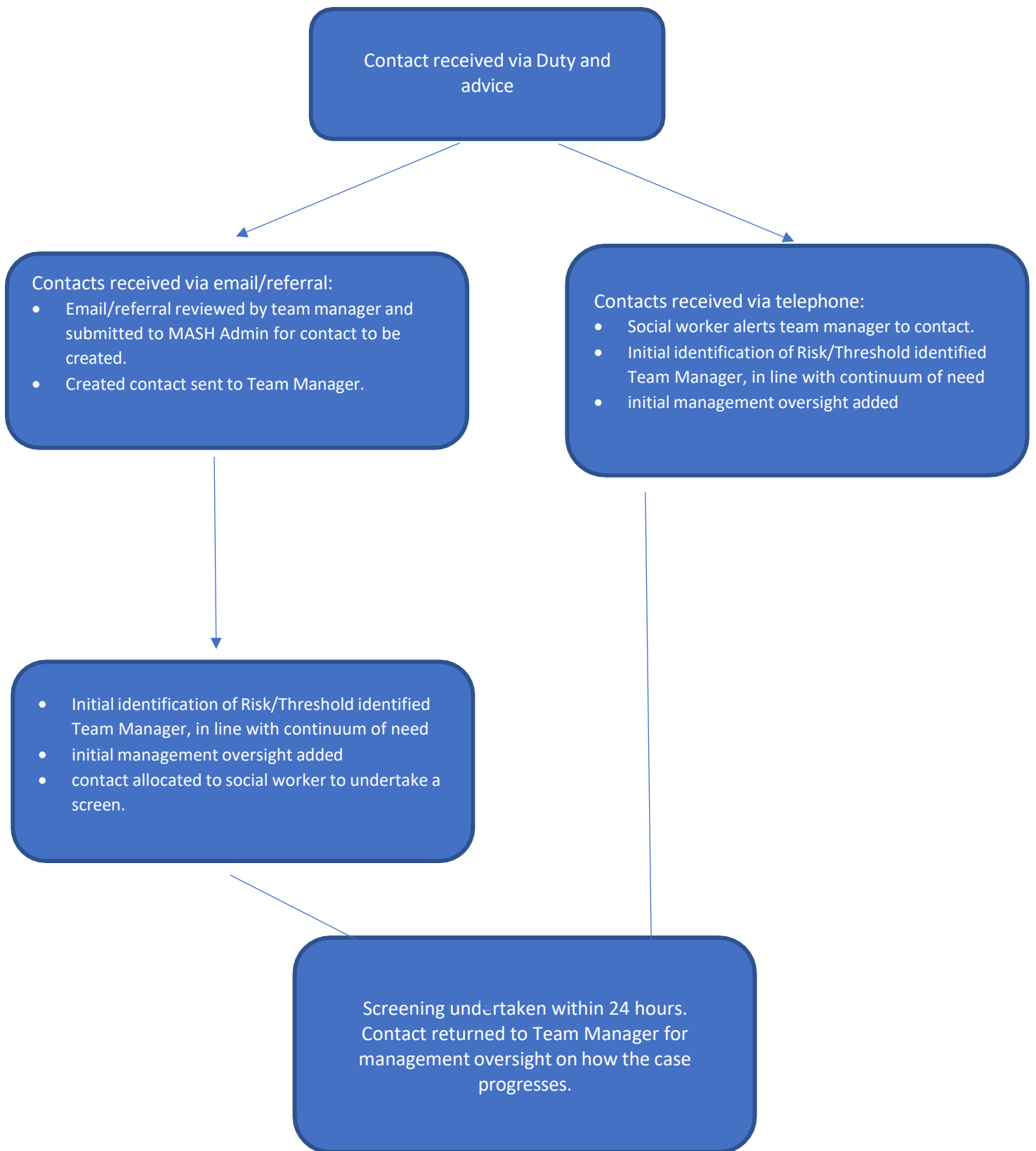
## **Appendix A – Privacy Notice Children’s Services**

The privacy notice for [Children’s Services](#) is at:

Privacy notice for MASH can be found at:

[Privacy Notice Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub](#)

## Appendix B



## MASH Structure Chart

