



LONDON BOROUGH OF
BEXLEY

Children's Services Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub

Operational Practice Framework

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INTRODUCTION

The Bexley Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is the single point of contact for members of the public and professionals seeking advice and/or services, to support and protect vulnerable children, young people and their families who need ‘**intensive**’ or ‘**specialist**’ help, according to Bexley Safeguarding Partnership guidance; ‘Effective Support for Children, Young People and Families in Bexley’. It is the referral gateway for the Family Wellbeing Service or Children’s Social Care (including services for children with disabilities).

The MASH is a team of co-located professionals from a range of agencies who in certain circumstances, carry out enhanced information sharing¹ at the point of contact, to enable informed decisions to be made about presenting need and risk, to refer the child and family to the right service. The 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.

The MASH is managed by Bexley Children’s Services and includes a range of professionals from key agencies working with children and families; a multi-agency collaboration between:

Local Authority	Children’s Social Care - Social Work
	Education
	Family Wellbeing Service
	Targeted Youth Support & Youth Offending Team
	Housing & No Recourse to Public Funds Team
	Adult Social Services
Oxleas Health NHS Trust	Health worker
London Metropolitan Police	Public Protection Team
SOLACE	Domestic Violence Officer
London Probation Trust.	Probation Officer
Metropolitan police	Police officers

BEXLEY MASH OPERATIONAL PROCESS

1. Making contact with the MASH

- Family members can phone, correspond with and/or present themselves at the office.
- Police forward ‘Merlin’ reports and other notifications, via their Public Protection Team located in the MASH.
- Professionals requesting a **Family Wellbeing or Children’s Social Care service** will need to complete the **referral form**, which can be found on the Bexley Council Website at <https://www.bexley.gov.uk/sites/bexley-cms/files/Early-Help-Family-Wellbeing-and-Childrens-Social-Care-referral-form.pdf> and send to the MASH.

2. All contacts with MASH are initially recorded and screened by a **contact officer**. If the person making contact with MASH simply requires information e.g. how to access a service, the contact officer will signpost the person to the service and no further action will be taken.

¹ London Borough of Bexley, MASH Information Sharing Protocol

3. Screening

Upon receipt of a request for a Family Wellbeing or Social Care service, the contact officer will conduct **basic screening**, checking LCS (Children's Social Care system), EHM (Early Help system) and IAS (Adult Social Care system) to confirm if the child has received and/or is currently receiving either service. Screening checks are to confirm identifying details for the child and prevent duplication of services. If screening checks show the child is already receiving a service, the information will be immediately forwarded to the allocated social worker, or key worker. *Note: Screening checks are not the same as MASH checks for further information about MASH checks see section 11.*

4. If the child is not currently receiving a service, the contact information will be forwarded to a **qualified social worker in MASH to review the presenting level of need and risk, to make a threshold decision about which service can best help** the child and family. The MASH social worker will establish the following information as far as possible to make the initial decision:

- Full names, dates of birth and gender of children;
- Family address and, where relevant, school/nursery attended;
- Identity of those with Parental Responsibility;
- Names and dates of birth of all members of the household;
- Ethnicity, first language and religion of children and parents;
- Any special needs of the children including the means in which they communicate;
- Any significant recent or past events;
- Cause for concern including details of allegations, their sources, timing and location;
- The child's current location and emotional and physical condition;
- Whether the child needs immediate protection;
- Details of any alleged perpetrator;
- Referrer's relationship with and knowledge of the child and his or her family;
- Known involvement of other agencies;
- Information regarding parents' knowledge and agreement to referral.

5. Consultation & Advice

If the person making contact with the MASH is worried about the wellbeing and/or welfare of a child, they can call the MASH on 020 3045 5440 to discuss the situation with a MASH social worker, or another professional in the MASH, who can provide a consultation about whether or not the child should be referred for a service. If the person seeking the consultation shares the child's details, basic screening checks may be conducted as part of the consultation process and the consultation will be recorded on a contact record on the Children's Social Care LCS case recording system. A summary of the consultation will be recorded in the MASH and a copy sent to the person who sought the consultation, within 48 hours.

6. A consultation can be provided about a child without the child's details being shared. In these circumstances, no screening checks will be undertaken and the advice given will be based solely on the information provided by the person seeking the consultation. A summary of the discussion and advice given will be recorded in the MASH and sent to the person who sought the consultation, within 48 hours.

7. MASH daily meetings

This meeting happens between Tuesdays – Friday at 11am in the MASH room. This is where concerning referrals are discussed within a multi- agency framework and where we share information if need be to determine the level of right intervention. We use the traffic light or the BRAG rating system as first step to decide whether there is sufficient concern to share information. In addition, this enables early identification of Children and families to ensure they

receive the right support. The Police, education, health, probation, SOLACE and Children social care attend this meeting.

8. Additional level service - Signposting

Where families do not meet the threshold and eligibility criteria for either a Family Wellbeing or Children's Social Care service, the person making contact with MASH will be signposted to other 'Additional' services. E.g. Children's Centres, Voluntary Organisation Services and Targeted Youth Support.

9. Intensive level service – Family Wellbeing

If it is clear from the contact information (a) the child requires a preventative 'intensive' service, (b) consent is obtained and (c) the situation meets at least one of the following Family Wellbeing service criteria: Parental domestic violence, parental mental ill-health, parental substance misuse and/or a child at risk of exclusion or excluded from school. The MASH social worker will make a referral to the Family Wellbeing service (Within 24 hours).

10. Specialist level service – Children's Social Care

If it is clear from the contact, information the threshold is met for a 'specialist' service. The MASH social worker will make a referral to the Children's Social Care Assessment service, or if the child has a disability that meets the eligibility criteria, a referral will be made to the Children with Disability service. (Within 24 hours) The child and family will then be offered a Child in Need assessment (s17)² which should be completed no later than 45 days of the referral.

11. Significant harm - Children's Social Care

If it is, clear from the contact information that the child may be at risk of significant harm. The MASH will immediately make a referral to the Children's Social Care Assessment service for a Child Protection Strategy Meeting (s47)³ to consider the need for a child protection enquiry.

The "three month" rule – where a family is referred to MASH and has been open to a Social Worker in CSC within the last three months, the case will be allocated immediately to the previously involved Social Worker.

- 12.** The MASH social work decision and **outcome will be shared in writing**, with the person making contact with the MASH, within 48 hours. If there is disagreement regarding the decision and outcome in the MASH, the person making contact should contact the manager of the MASH in the first instance. If resolution cannot be found, the Bexley Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB) formal escalation policy should be followed.

MASH CHECKS

13. When a MASH check will be initiated

If the level of need and risk of harm is unclear, the MASH will need to gather more information before making a decision. In these circumstances, a manager will decide **enhanced MASH information checks** will be initiated, MASH checking is a process of enhanced information sharing between the agencies in the MASH. Not all contacts coming into the MASH will be subject to MASH checks, only those where there is insufficient information to make a clear decision at the point of contact. High-risk MASH checks will be completed within a maximum of 4 hours; other MASH checks must be completed within 1 working day. *NOTE: MASH checks are only intended to make the initial contact decision; they do not replace the need for agency checks to be undertaken as part of any child and family assessment or child protection enquiry.*

² Children Act 1989. Section 17. Children in Need

³ Children Act 1989. Section 47. Child at risk of significant harm.

14. Recording MASH checks

When MASH checks are initiated, a secure MASH record will be created on the Children's Social Care LCS case recording system by the social worker. This record existing in a secure workspace, which is only accessible to designated MASH professionals. Each designated professional has access to the workspace and can record their agency information directly onto the MASH record.

15. Co-ordination of MASH checks

A manager will assign MASH checks to a Social worker to conduct and co-ordinate the MASH checks with the relevant designated professionals. The assigned social worker responsible for co-ordinating the MASH checks will immediately request information from the other designated MASH professionals. MASH checks will always be conducted with Health, Education and Police, checks with other agencies will be proportionate to the presenting issues.

16. Each designated professional will conduct checks within their own agency and record the information on the MASH record. The information provided by the designated professional needs to be clear, relevant, proportionate and include some analysis to provide meaning to the information in the context of the enquiry. It is the responsibility of the agency providing the information to keep a record of the information they have shared.

17. The co-ordinating social worker will collate and lead the analysis of all the information from the incoming MASH checks to make a judgement on the level of presenting risk or need and make a decision on the next step. Where there remains uncertainty about the best course of action the MASH team will hold a Signs of Safety rapid case mapping discussion to come to a decision.

CONSENT AND INFORMATION SHARING

18. It is not an expectation that **members of the public** will have gained consent from the child/parent, or at least one person with parental responsibility, to make contact with the MASH. Best practice dictates that when **professionals** request a service, they will have gained the explicit consent of the child/parent, or at least one person with parental responsibility.

19. If a professional is requesting a Family Wellbeing service, there must always be **consent**. If a professional is requesting a Children's Social Care 'Child in Need' assessment and they do not have consent, the social worker may ask the professional to discuss the matter with the child/family, before they will take further action. However, if it has not been possible to get consent and/or there are potential safeguarding concerns, it is expected the professional will have at minimum **informed** the child/parent they are making contact with the MASH. *For further guidance on when these circumstances apply, refer to the London Child Protection Procedures & Information Sharing Advice for Safeguarding Practitioners. DfE 2015.*

¹https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/419628/Information_sharing_advice_safeguarding_practitioners.pdf

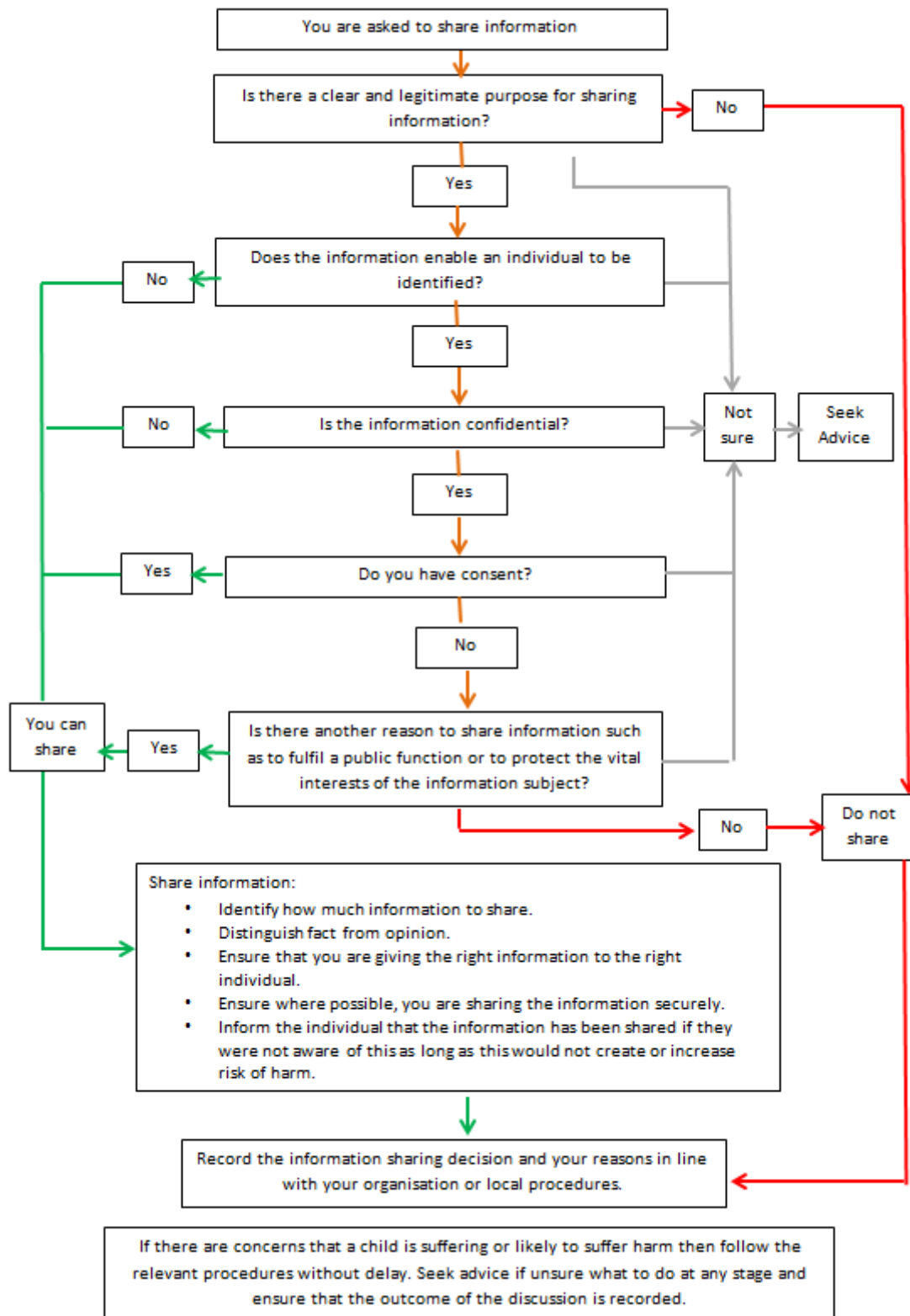
¹http://www.londoncp.co.uk/chapters/sharing_info.html?zoom_highlight=information+sharing

20. When considering what information to share and when the 'Seven Golden Rules' should be applied and the process in the flowchart on page 6 applied.

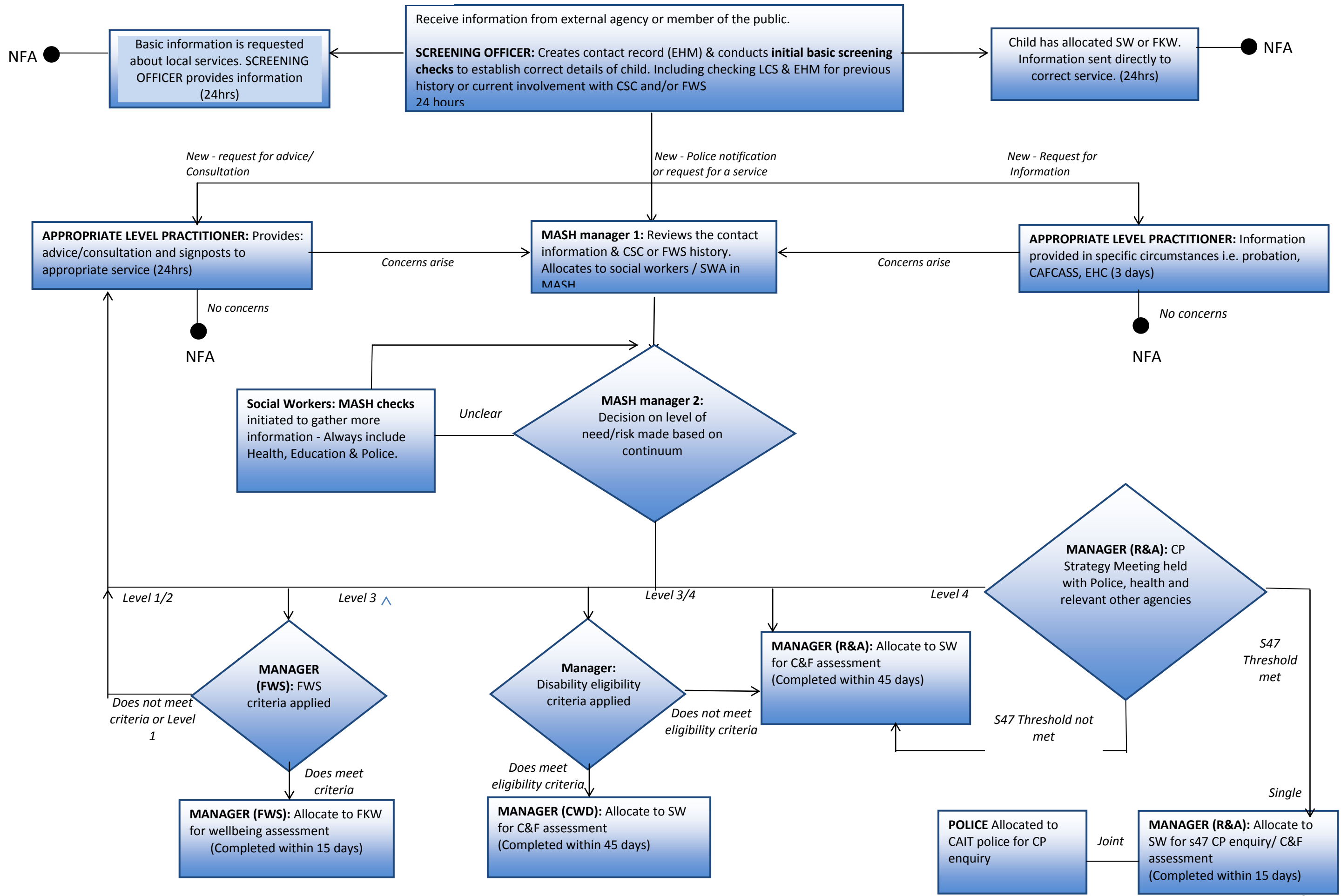
1. Remember that the Data Protection Act 1998 and human rights law are not barriers to justified information sharing, but provide a framework to ensure that personal information about living individuals is shared appropriately.
2. Be open and honest with the individual (and/or their family where appropriate) from the outset about why, what, how and with whom information will, or could be shared, and seek their agreement, unless it is unsafe or inappropriate to do so.
3. Seek advice from other practitioners if you are in any doubt about sharing the information concerned, without disclosing the identity of the individual where possible.
4. Share with informed consent where appropriate and, where possible, respect the wishes of those who do not consent to share confidential information. You may still share information without consent if, in your judgement, there is good reason 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 certain of the basis upon which you are doing so. Where you have consent, be mindful that an individual might not expect information to be shared.
5. Consider safety and well-being: Base your information sharing decisions on considerations of the safety and well-being of the individual and others who may be affected by their actions.
6. Necessary, proportionate, relevant, adequate, accurate, timely and secure: Ensure that the information you share is necessary for the purpose for which you are sharing it, is shared only with those individuals who need to have it, is accurate and up-to-date, is shared in a timely fashion, and is shared securely (see principles).
7. Keep a record of your decision and the reasons for it – whether it is to share information or not. If you decide to share, then record what you have shared, with whom and for what purpose.

21. There are some circumstances; when there is evidence or reasonable cause to believe that a child is suffering, or is at risk of suffering, significant harm; **where sharing information without consent will be justified in the public interest.** The circumstances under which information can be shared in the MASH is specified in the Bexley MASH Information Sharing Protocol. Which can be found in the appendices.
22. When there is justifiable public interest, there are some circumstances where consent can be overridden; furthermore, there may also be **times when it is also NOT appropriate to inform the child/parent** or person with parental responsibility that the information will be shared. If doing so would:
 - a) place a person at increased risk of significant harm; or
 - b) prejudice the prevention, detection or prosecution of a serious crime; or
 - c) lead to an unjustified delay in making enquiries about allegations of significant harm to a child.⁴
27. A decision to override consent in these circumstances will be need to be agreed between the MASH Manager/SSW and the agency who owns the information. The rationale and decision will be **clearly recorded on the contact record.**
28. The MASH is a secure information-sharing environment; the **information gathered during MASH checks should be released proportionate to the situation and presenting risk.**

When and how to share information:



REFERRAL & DECISION MAKING PROCESS BEXLEY MASH/MASH



APPENDICES

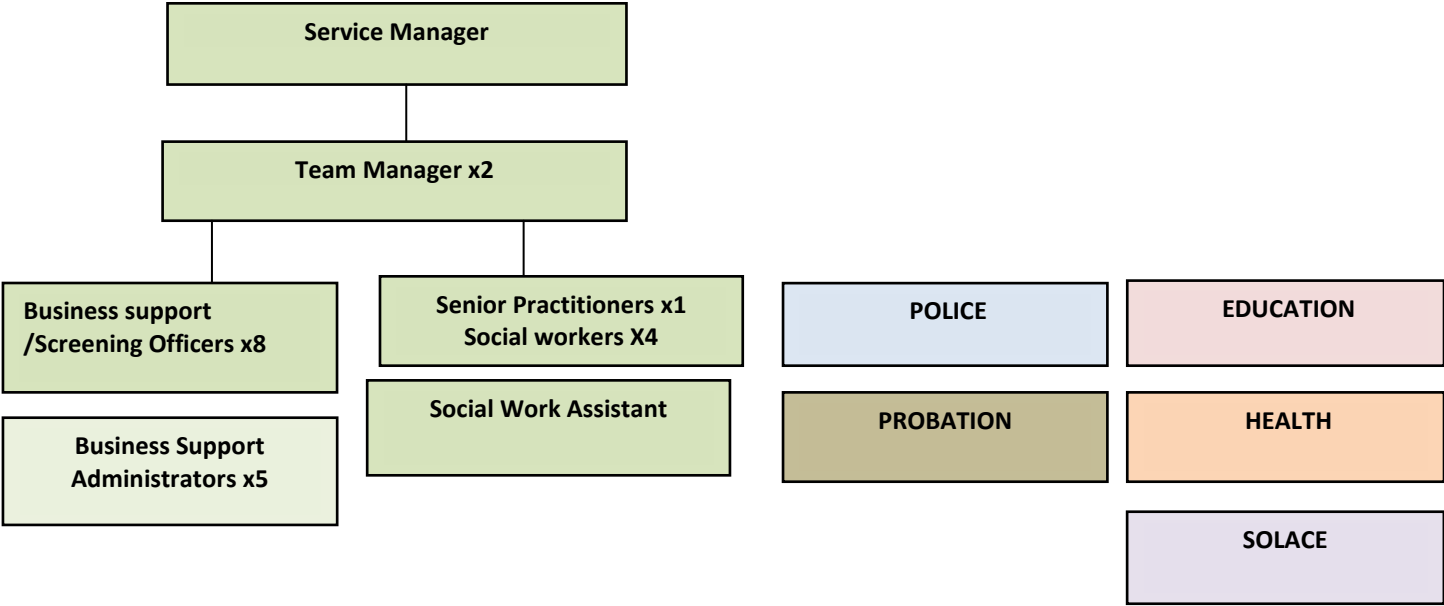
PROFESSIONALS IN MASH/ MASH. ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES & DELEGATED AUTHORITY.

Title	Agency	Virtual or Co-located	Access to system/name	Responsibilities & delegated authority in the MASH
MASH Team Manager (Social Work) No. x2 (f/t)	Children’s Social Care	Co-located f/t	LCS EHM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manages FD-MASH responsible for performance management and quality assurance of MASH practice. • Decision maker on contacts, screening, MASH checks and service provision for specialist services at levels 3 and 4. • Works with targeted service decision makers to agree risk and level of service for those cases at might be level 2 or 3. • Supervisory responsibility for SP
CSC Senior Practitioners No. x1	Children’s Social Care	Co-located f/t	LCS EHM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision maker on contacts, screening, MASH checks and service provision for specialist services at levels 3 and 4. • Works with targeted service decision makers to agree risk and level of service for those cases at might be level 2 or 3. • Provide advice and guidance/consultation to people with possible safeguarding concerns. • Conduct, co-ordinate and analyse screening & MASH checks to decide on further action. • Line management of SW’s and SWA’s
CSC social workers No.x4 (f/t)	Children’s Social Care	Co-located f/t	LCS EHM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet children and families making first contact at the office. • Provide advice and guidance/consultation to people with possible safeguarding concerns. • Conduct, co-ordinate and analyse screening & MASH checks to recommend further action. • Provide information reports to other agencies where families are known with complex histories <i>e.g. SEN, CAFCASS, Probation.</i>

CSC social work assistants No.2 (f/t)	Children's Social Care	Co-located f/t	LCS EHM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet children and families making first contact at the office. • Provide information reports to other agencies where families are known. <i>e.g. SEN, CAFCASS, Probation.</i> • Provide information and signpost people to other services available for children in Bexley
Front Door Screening/contact Officers No. x 8 (f/t)	Children's Social Care	Co-located f/t	LCS EHM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information and signpost people to other services available for children in Bexley • Record all contacts onto the LCS system • Conduct screening checks • Provide information reports to other agencies where families are briefly or NOT known <i>e.g. SEN, CAFCASS, Probation.</i>
Public Protection Desk (PPD)	Police	Co-located f/t	CRIS; CRIMINT; PNC; PND; MERLIN; IIP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research all Police Notifications via Merlin System • Research and Risk assess MASH contacts • Create Crime reports for new allegations as a result of MASH • Assist the MASH managers & SSWs with decision making and outcomes* • Contact other Police Units for deployments from MASH
Health	Health	Co-Located F/T	LCS RIO Other local health recording systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support timely information sharing and influence effective decision making by: • Search available database and collate health information from a range of NHS providers both locally and external to Bexley via telephone contact and secure email. • Interpret and share information proportionate to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child • Contribute to a multi-agency analysis of risk on a case by case basis • Undertake basic screening and enhanced MASH checks. • Liaise with health providers when MASH refers to other agencies (i.e. recommending TAF/sending missing alerts) • Provide data to health managers

Probation Officer	Probation	Not Co-located	LCS; probation database	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research probation databases. • Undertake basic and enhanced MASH checks. • Clarify probation referrals which contain limited information • Assist the MASH managers & SSWs with decision making and outcomes *
Education Officer	Education	3 days per week – Tues-Thurs Virtual	LCS EMS – TO CHECK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research education database. • Undertake basic and enhanced MASH checks. • Assist the MASH managers & SSWs with decision making and outcomes*
Domestic Abuse officer	SOLACE	Co-located 4 days ac week.	LCS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake basic and enhanced MASH checks. • Cases referred to SOLACE • Undertake DASH assessments

BEXLEY MASH / MASH STRUCTURE CHART



SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT WITH PARTNER AGENCIES WORKING WITHIN MASH

Introduction

The Bexley MASH is a multi-disciplinary service providing a single point of contact for all referrals into Children’s Services The MASH includes professionals from within CSC and the following partner agencies; Police, Health, Education, Housing & Probation. Partner professionals are either physically co-located in the MASH on a full or part time basis, or as a satellite/virtual service, based in their respective home agency offices.

All the agencies represented within the MASH have identified designated professionals who are responsible for conducting MASH checks. For all details about the MASH business process, information sharing agreements, structure, roles and responsibilities, see the main framework document.

Purpose of this agreement

The purpose of this agreement is to ensure day to day case working, management and supervisory arrangements between CSC and all partner agencies included in the MASH are clear, to safeguard children and process referrals effectively.

Glossary of terms for this agreement

- CSC Bexley Children’s Social Care (CSC) services.
- MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) refers to the designated professionals responsible for conducting MASH checks.
- ‘Partner Agency’ refers to all agencies that are part of the MASH but are external to CSC.
- ‘Host Agency’ refers to CSC staff and management.

Agreement between CSC and the following partner agency:

Presence of the partner professionals within MASH

The partner agency will agree to the following named professionals being co-located in the MASH, on the following dates and times:

Time	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
9am – 1pm					
1pm – 5pm					

During periods that partner agencies are not co-located in the MASH, the following professionals will be the virtual designated MASH professionals:

Role of partner agencies within MASH

Professionals from the partner agencies in the MASH will, when based in the MASH or available virtually, prioritise and undertake MASH checks to the expected standard and within the required timescales, according to the prescribed risk rating.

Professionals from partner agencies will be expected to attend periodic MASH meetings when co-located, to discuss the progress of the MASH and contribute to problem solving issues as they arise. The frequency of these meeting will vary according to the needs of the service.

Training and Development.

Training for partner agency professionals will remain the responsibility of their respective agency. Specific training in relation to their designated MASH role will be provided by CSC.

Management Monitoring of arrangements

In order to ensure a smooth working relationship a MASH manager, the partner agency manager will meet to review arrangements every 6 months. If any issues arise in the intervening period a meeting should be held as soon as possible.

Host Agency Manager (CSC)	Partner Agency Manager

Partner Agency Management Responsibilities

The partner agency manager retains overall line management and supervision for their professional/s based in MASH, maintaining responsibility for the quality and output of their work, their professional conduct, training, development, health and safety.

Host Agency Management Responsibilities

The CSC manager and the assistant manager of the MASH are responsible for day to day running and the quality of the overall output of the MASH, including decisions made following MASH checks. A will be available for direction on urgent issues and case related matters relevant to MASH work. The partner agency professional based in MASH may have on a day to day basis.

Attendance, absence and cover arrangements

The partner agency will make all reasonable attempts to provide cover for their respective professional/s based within MASH, during periods of leave and absence. In the event of an unexpected absence, the partner agency will inform the manager of MASH on that day and attempt to provide cover if possible.

Performance and Conduct

If there are issues about the attendance, performance or conduct of the partner agency professional, the MASH manager will report this to the partner agency line manager, immediately and meet to discuss and resolve as soon as possible.

If the professional from the Partner Agency based in MASH has any concerns they will need to raise this both with their line manager and the manager immediately. If they do not feel comfortable raise this with the MASH Manager they must raise the issue with their line manager who in turn must bring this to the attention of the MASH Manager and/or the Operational Manager of MASH.

Data protection and information sharing.

All partner agency professionals will be required to comply with their own agency requirements for data protection whilst working within MASH. In addition they will need to observe the procedures set out in the Information Sharing Agreement in the main framework document.

Facilities and ICT

CSC provide the venue and facilities for MASH at the Civic Centre, 2 Watling Street. Bexleyheath. SMART working arrangements exist therefore a specific number of desk spaces are allocated to MASH. All MASH professionals will be expected to be located in the MASH area when co-located. The council operates a desk policy based on a 7:10 ratio, therefore flexible working arrangements are required to manage this and MASH staff may periodically work from another location. This is in agreement with the operational manager.

Partner agencies will retain responsibility for supply, maintenance and security of all ICT equipment belonging to their respective agency.

Health and Safety

The health and safety needs of partner agencies professionals will remain the responsibility of their respective agencies. However CSC will provide an induction to the premises. Day to day, the manager of MASH will provide guidance and advice regarding urgent health and safety matters. (E.g. whether a service user should be seen alone in reception).

Review of this agreement

This Service Level Agreement will be reviewed annually. Should any issues arise in the interim, an immediate meeting should take place between the MASH manager and the respective partner agency manager.

Date initial SLA agreed	
Date SLA to be reviewed	
Date of start of co-location in MASH.	
Date of first 6 monthly management monitoring meeting.	

Name	Position & Agency	Signature