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**Blackburn with Darwen**

**Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)**

**Multi – Agency Approach**

**and Practice Guidance**

February 2025

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**Introduction**

This guidance is for all partner agencies, professionals and members of the public that contribute to the work of the Blackburn with Darwen (BwD) Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). It is intended to:

* Enable professionals, partner agencies and the public to understand what is expected from MASH
* Describe the roles and responsibilities which will support the working of MASH
* Facilitate an effective and efficient sharing of information
* Promote co-operation between MASH partner agencies at an operational level.

MASH involves collaboration between various agencies to ensure families in Blackburn with Darwen receive the advice and support required. Predominantly MASH is a place to report safeguarding concerns.

Safeguarding is everyone’s business and statutory partners share that responsibility.

This guidance on how MASH works is not a stand-alone document and must be understood with their own agency’s safeguarding procedures and the multi-agency policies agreed by all partners of the Children’s Safeguarding Partnership (CSP).

**Blackburn with Darwen Safeguarding Partnership Arrangements**

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Throughout this guidance the relevant policies and procedures will be referenced, however there are three key documents that ***all*** practitioners should read to understand the team’s responsibilities, competencies, and statutory expectations before working in the MASH:

* Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023: Statutory Guidance (publishing.service.gov.uk)

* Working Well with Children and Families in Lancashire

Working Well with Children and Families in Lancashire (proceduresonline.com)

* BwD CSP Information Sharing Protocol.

1.6 Information Sharing and Confidentiality (proceduresonline.com)

**Vision**

The overall vision of MASH is to ensure children and young people in Blackburn with Darwen are safeguarded from harm and receive the support and services they need at the right time in the right place.

**The MASH Multi Agency Team:**

MASH Core Multi Agency involves an integrated team comprising:

**MASH Approach**

Our work at MASH is underpinned by the following values and principles:

* Children, young people, and their families are at the heart of what we do
* The focus is always on impact and outcomes for the child or young person
* Our approach is Systemic which means we seek to understand the relationships with families and their networks to understand why the family works in the way it does and to understand how interactions can both foster and solve problems.
* We focus on the strengths of families and understand the best way to intervene to generate lasting change in the life of families and children.
* We work alongside children, families, and practitioners, listening to perspectives to co-create positive change.

Please also reference: 1.3 Working Well with Children and Families in Lancashire (proceduresonline.com)

**Our Objectives in MASH**

MASH is a BwD service delivered by a multi-agency group of professionals who work together as a single team whilst remaining employed by their own organisation.

The purpose of MASH is to build a full picture of a child’s life based on sharing information known to agencies to inform better decision making, identify and manage uncertainty for families and make appropriate responses to managing risk for children and young people.

MASH also fulfils the duty of The Children and Families Act 2014 and the Care Act 2015 to provide children and young people with information, advice and support relating to their SEN or disability, and transition, including matters relating to health and social care.

MASH serves two main audiences:

The specific objectives of MASH are:

**Inclusive**

* Ensure the voice and the experience of the child/parent and family is known and understood as much as it practicably possible at point of decision-making regarding threshold.
* Ensure all decisions are child centred, timely and focus on the desired impact for the child.

**Timeliness**

* Speeding up safeguarding decision making
* Ensuring users of safeguarding services are quickly directed to the appropriate level of service
* Ensure that, at the end of the working day, there are no children who require decisions that have not yet been made.

**Effectiveness**

* Reducing the number of repeat and inappropriate referrals into MASH and ensuring appropriate onward referral decisions
* Reducing and managing demand by utilising the offer within Family Hubs, wider early help services and Transforming Lives Panel that meets weekly
* Ensuring a coordinated partnership approach which allows early identification of need and a focus on early intervention by the right person at the right time in the right place.
* Ensuring our systemic approach is embedded across the partnership to improve the experience for children, young people and families.
* Review the impact of MASH through:
* Monthly multi-agency QA
* Monthly multi-agency team meetings
* Monthly operational meetings
* Quarterly multi-agency Strategic Oversight Group that reports to the Safeguarding Effectiveness Group.

**Responsive**

* Ensure mechanisms are in place to enable effective information sharing and intelligence to improve consistency and outcomes.
* Create an environment which encourages feedback and shared learning on an informal and formal basis.
* Provide a consultation offer for partners seeking safeguarding advice, which cannot be addressed by their own safeguarding manuals and officers.

**Information sharing within MASH**

Information sharing is central to an effective MASH. There are various pieces of legislation which enable the sharing of information in MASH, and these are set out in the BwD Information Sharing Agreement.



Partners are encouraged to take a positive approach to information sharing to prevent children and young people across BwD suffering harm.

Partners within MASH need to be confident they understand how information is shared without creating bureaucracy which can become a barrier to information sharing.

Information sharing in MASH is proportionate and responsive to the level of harm.

**Support provided by MASH**

**Safeguarding consultation service**

MASH provides an offer for anyone who is worried about a child or unsure on what next steps to take. Any practitioner can contact the MASH advice line for guidance and discussion following consultation with their own safeguarding procedures.

The MASH advice line aims to:

* Offer quick access to children’s safeguarding advice and provide guidance on social care thresholds.
* Prevent delay in ensure safeguarding concerns are reported through to MASH.
* Allow professionals the opportunity to talk through situations they are concerned about to help determine what an appropriate response might be without the need for a formal referral.

**Gaining consent**

**We will gain consent to:**

* Make a referral into MASH.
* Consult with other agencies about a family to help determine what support they might need where personal details are being shared (in reference to MASH this would be to undertake a multi-agency MASH assessment).

**We do not need consent to:**

* Contact MASH for a consultation or for advice, although consent would be recommended as good practice in working with children and families.
* Share information for the purpose of MASH screening where to do so is proportionate and justified to ensure a child’s safety.

**We do not need consent, nor should you delay, but should, wherever possible, inform the family when:**

* You are concerned that a child/young person, family member or other person has come to, or is likely to come to significant harm and you need to share this with other agencies so that they can take steps to ensure their safety. If a family or individual refuses to give consent but you are sufficiently concerned about a child/young person or vulnerable person and feel you need to share information anyway, you should explain this to the family unless you are concerned that in doing so, you are placing the child/young person, yourself, or anyone else at immediate risk.
* MASH will seek the appropriate consent where a referral is received through members of the public or by an anonymous source.

Further advice and guidance for partners regarding consent has been published in the updated Working Together to Safeguard Children (see link in introduction)

**Child Safeguarding referrals**

A **contact** is made with MASH when anyone is worried about a child or wants to consider any support a child or family may need. Experienced Family Support Workers and Social Workers are sat in MASH to review contacts, alongside our partners – police, health, housing, probation, education, and our domestic abuse advisor.

Pathways into MASH are detailed on the following pages:

* Request for support form  MASH RFS (itouchvision.com)
* Telephone call into MASH for safeguarding referrals only
* Email referrals **only** by **emergency services** and **NSPCC**.
* Police Referrals are via Lancashire Constabulary MASH Police Safeguarding Report (PSR)

Following a contact into MASH there are 2 pathways:

**Pathway 1: Request for Support form and referrals from emergency services & NSPCC:**

**Pathway 2: Telephone call into MASH**

**Initial screening**

MASH will:

* ensure all practitioners have discussed their concerns with their safeguarding lead, in line with single agency procedures.
* **respond within a maximum of 4 hours if following the referral details being shared it is agreed an immediate response is required.** Further information in respect of timescales is available on page 15.
* always ask if the **consent** of the parent/s and child (where age appropriate) has been obtained before the sharing of information. Where consent cannot or has not been obtained and the need to share information is required for the safety of the child, consent will be overridden, and this will be clearly recorded in the MASH management oversight.
* all **previous involvement** of social care and other services is considered to fully inform the decision making.
* for those **children ages 16 and 17**, unless not in their best interests to do so, their views will be ascertained directly to inform MASH decision making.
* MASH oversight will proportionately consider the multi-agency information and views to inform decision making.

**How referrals are processed:**

MASH decision making will be clear regarding **threshold application**, as well as informing purposeful actions to be completed. If it is decided that a **social worker** is required, we will clearly record in our decision making the reason why.

Potential outcomes of referrals into MASH are:

* Appropriate advice and guidance provided to referrer, no further action to MASH;
* Referral to early help for support;
* Referral to social work team.

**MASH Timescales**

**Within 4 hours:**

* If there is an immediate safeguarding concern, MASH will agree on appropriate action

**Within 24 hours:**

* If the child/children are likely to required support as a Child in Need, MASH will agree on appropriate action within 24 hours, this may require the collation of further information to inform decision making. Where further information is required to inform a decision, management oversight will be recorded within 24 hours.
* For children requiring a Social Worker, transfer will take place to the most appropriate social work team and be allocated within one working day.

**Within 72 hours:**

* Decisions within MASH will always take place within 72 hours.

**Within 5 days:**

* Should a Family Support Worker be required, allocation will take place within 5 days from the point of decision making.
* The Family support worker will contact the family within 2 days and visit within 5 working days.

Children with a Family Support Worker are seen weekly, and direct work undertaken on a regular basis and evidenced within the child’s record, including tools used.

**Parent Carer Assessment**

Parent / carers (defined as the person providing a substantial amount of care on a regular basis) are entitled to have an assessment in their own right of their ability to provide and continue to provide care for their child, followed by the provision of any services and support for which they are eligible. This assessment will be under The Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995 and the Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2005. In Blackburn with Darwen this is not a standalone assessment, rather this is incorporated within the Child and Family Assessment.

**MASH record keeping process**

**Evidence of multi-agency information sharing and decision making**

MASH data is stored on Liquid Logic which all MASH partners have access to. This system is used to track the progress of referrals through MASH and to provide a secure and collaborative space for partners to share information in order to safeguard children.

Information shared within MASH will be available to partners in line with the information sharing agreements to allow each agency to fulfil its statutory duties, unless the providing agency specifically prohibits the wider sharing of information.

All recording of information in MASH adheres to the following principles:

* No jargon
* Child friendly language
* Accurate
* Contemporaneous
* Evidences multiagency involvement with clear analysis
* Include the voice of the child
* Consistent
* Is stored electronically for agencies (and acknowledge separate systems of partners)

The CSC practice handbook can also be accessed by multi agency partners:

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**MASH dispute resolution**

* Partners will make clear if they are not in agreement with the MASH outcome, and the **escalation policy** will be followed to ensure swift resolution.

**Utilisation of the Resolution of Disagreements in MASH**

8.1 Resolving Professional Disagreements (Escalation and Conflict Resolution) (proceduresonline.com)

In undertaking MASH tasks there will from time to time be disagreements with referrers and with partners in MASH. If partners are unable to resolve any disagreements, then the Resolving Professionals Disagreements policy should be followed.

**Quality assurance within MASH**

In order to review MASH practice we will do the following:

* Ensure multi agency information is proportionate, relevant, and appropriately analysed to inform effective decision making
* Ensure decision making is effective and involves multiple agencies where required
* Evidence the impact made by MASH through regular reporting and the MASH dashboard
* Ensure consideration is given to how to influence practice improvement and how to facilitate multi agency reflective sessions for re-referrals
* On a multi-agency basis, undertake quality assurance by way of auditing on a weekly basis.
* Review referrals to Children’s Social Care where they have closed in the preceding 6 months and determine whether a referral should be made for a multi-agency evaluation of practice.
* Review and consider the impact on the partnership of the outcome and learning of any escalations with regard to disagreements in decision making.
* Offer reflective discussion and challenge, utilising the CSC Practice Handbook to support this. It will aim to build on good practice and improve practice where needed- identifying any immediate remedial action.

**Appendix: Specific Single Agency Roles and Responsibilities**

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| **CSC Team Manager** |
| The responsibilities include:  |
| * The management and / or support of Children’s Social Care staff within the team (Practice Manager, Social Worker, Domestic Abuse Advisor, Referral Support Officer, Early Help Family Support Worker, Early Help Team Leader) and operational running of the MASH;
* Lead on decision making in response to referrals into MASH including authorising all referrals that require assessment by a social worker;
* Lead on decision making in response to referrals into MASH about children with disabilities or complex needs;
* Initial co-ordination and decision making on responses to MAPPA level cases referred to Children’s Services – where the child of/associated with the offender is open to Children’s Services, the allocated social worker will be MAPPA’s key contact point; where a child of/associated with the offender is not currently open to Children’s Services, the manager will determine next steps in terms of information sharing with MAPPA, attending MAPPA meetings[[1]](#footnote-1) about the offender, and assessment of the child’s needs/risks.
 |
| **CSC Practice Manager** |
| The responsibilities include: |
| * To determine initial RAG rating for referrals into MASH and to provide initial management oversight to staff within MASH .
* Responding to queries from practitioners and members of the public about child safeguarding concerns and determining whether the concerns require referral for multi-agency support or immediate child protection (CP concerns require immediate sharing with the Team Manager);
* Provide support to referrers about their concerns and advise whether a referral needs to be made to MASH .
 |
| **Social Worker**  |
| The responsibilities include:* Responding to queries from practitioners and members of the public about child safeguarding concerns and determining whether the concerns require referral for multi-agency support or immediate child protection (CP concerns require immediate sharing with the Team Manager);
* Provide support to referrers about their concerns and advise whether a referral needs to be made to MASH ;
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| **Early Help** |
| The responsibilities include:  |
| * Where a CAF, Early Help or Targeted service response is decided, liaise with the referrer to decide on how the support will be coordinated and how the referral will be made;
* Access Early Help/CAF information and providing advice/support to referrers.
* Undertake checks for information as required and directed by social worker or manager using available local authority (housing, transforming lives, community safety, education, early help, revenue & benefits) and partner databases.
* Response to the Early Help Level 2 PSRs received from Lancashire Constabulary following triage.
 |
| **Referral Support Officer** |
| The responsibilities include: |
| * Record all electronic referrals received via a Request for Support form or email from emergency services and NSPCC.
* Record all Missing from Home (MFH) notifications from the police ensuring all information from police safe and well checks is recorded (where relevant liaising with the Police MFH Co-ordinator to obtain additional information or clarify information);
* Respond to information requested by CAFCASS about any Children’s Services involvement with a child for Public and Private Law proceedings within five working days of the email;
* Respond to information requested by Probation about any children living in households connected with offenders they are managing.
 |
| **Domestic Abuse Advisor** |
| The responsibilities include:* Initial consideration of domestic abuse incident in the context of previous notifications and/or CSC involvement;
* Contact with the victim or relevant party and/or perpetrator (where appropriate), taking into consideration the relationship to involved children. When contacting the victim, revisit the risk assessment/gather an update on police involvement, consider the victim and children's immediate safety, consider any additional support required and to enable consideration of the impact of domestic abuse on the children.  When contacting the perpetrator the aim to provide information and advice with regard to the impact of domestic abuse on children and to signpost to appropriate services;
* Represent CSC at MARRAC meetings, co-ordination of CSC’s response to requests for information made by the chair of the conference, recording of all identified actions, and liaising with Social Workers as appropriate to ensure they are aware of allocated actions and these actions have been carried out.
* Provide advice and guidance to CSC practitioners and where relevant to partners in MASH in relation to issues of domestic abuse, including the provision of training
 |
| **Police** |
| The overall responsibilities include:  |
| * Quality assuring PSRs (Police Safeguarding Referral) raised by frontline police officers through checking information with the police officer attending incidents/investigating officer, checking other police team databases including PNC checks for incidents and intelligence, and liaison with safeguarding officers;
* Ensuring PSR’s are shared with appropriate agencies;
* Providing police information/intelligence for MASH referrals that have not been received through the police PSR pathway where it is deemed appropriate by SW / PM / TM to determine appropriate level of intervention.
 |
| **Detective Sergeant** |
| The responsibilities include: |
| * The Police MASH team complete secondary risk assessments on investigations registered to them following a police attended incident. Where necessary they complete various police system checks to collate relevant information to support the creation of the police safeguarding referral (PSR);
* Provide their oversight when considering thresholds to determine whether to refer to CSC or Early Help. Lancashire Constabulary will share Police Safeguarding Referrals (PSR), when they deem it appropriate to do so, *to safeguard children as early as possible to help identify, assess and respond to risks or concerns about the safety and welfare of children, whether this is when problems are first emerging, or where a child is already known to local agencies;*
* Provide a link between Vulnerability Governance Unit/Divisional Safeguarding Teams and the MASH to ensure safeguarding and investigative tasks are completed expeditiously in accordance with policy and by appropriately skilled staff;
* Contribute to MARRAC Assessment Panel meeting alongside partners.
 |
| **Safeguarding Support Officer (SSO)** |
| The responsibilities include:* SSO share responsibility for ensuring that police information recorded on Domestic Abuse, Vulnerable Child and Vulnerable Adult referrals is correct and appropriately completed - they research Police systems, produce Police chronologies, quality assure all standard, medium and high-risk referrals and provide Lancashire Police & PNC information that is proportionate and necessary;
* Provide their oversight with regard to considering thresholds to determine whether to refer to CSC or Early Help;
* Will complete ‘immediate risk’ safeguarding checks from police databases for partner agencies.
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| **Health (Lancashire & South Cumbria Care Foundation Trust on behalf of the local health economy)** |
| The overall responsibilities for the Specialist Safeguarding Practitioner:  |
| * Provide specialist health input into MASH .
* Gather and share proportionate health information for children and adults where indicated, providing risk analysis to inform and influence decision making.
* Advocate for children and young people from a health perspective and act as point of contact for health partner agencies.
* Attend MASH multi-agency meetings and support service development
 |
| **The WISH Centre/ BDDWA (Domestic Abuse Service)** |
| The responsibilities include: |
| * All PSRs are screened by a Senior IDVA/Manager and allocated to appropriate worker within BDDWA;
* Contact is made with the victim by the appropriate worker so that early intervention assists with ensuring safety planning is completed and any immediate risk of harm to the victim (and child) is identified;
* Where PSRs received outside normal working days highlight any child safeguarding concerns, these concerns are to be shared with Blackburn with Darwen Emergency Duty Team (EDT). The allocated Wish worker that has picked up PSRs outside normal working days will check with MASH Police during the normal working week about any changes to risk assessment following their quality assurance process. The worker will ensure that service responses are adjusted where any risk assessment changes have taken place.
* Internal referrals will be made by the IDVA to victim programmes and children and YP programmes. The SW or parent will be advised to make a referral to the YP programmes, as they hold more information on the behaviours of the child/children. The SW will be advised to make a referral or to advise the person who harms to self-refer to the behaviour change programme.
* The IDVA team attend multi agency meetings, including MARRAC, MAPPA, MDTs, strategy meetings, child protection conferences, core groups meetings and child in need meetings to inform risk, advocating for victims and their families.
* Training is also provided on domestic abuse and risk assessments.
 |
| **Engage Team Worker** |
| The responsibilities include:* Provide advice, support and guidance as required to assist in the early identification, assessment and planning for children and young people vulnerable to, or at risk of sexual exploitation (CSE).
 |
| **Children with Disabilities Team Worker** |
| The responsibilities include:  |
| * Providing advice, support and guidance as required in relation to referrals received in relation to children with disabilities / complex needs;
* Where is it deemed appropriate the CwD Worker will make contact with parents / carers to further discuss the presenting information in order to enable recommendations with regard to appropriate level of support / intervention.
 |
| **Housing** |
| The responsibilities include: |
| * Provision of support, advice and assistance regarding housing issues as required, including homeless 16 and 17 year olds, contacts for safeguarding leads in housing associations/housing providers;
* Supporting joint assessments of homeless 16 and 17 year olds;
* Provision of information on any homeless presentations by parents and details of which housing provider they were referred to;
* Overall responsibility for Asylum and refugee schemes including Ukraine and Afghan’s;
* Administration of the Local Community Care Grant scheme and the provision of essential items of furniture, beds, cookers etc;
* Provide a weekly presence in MASH and a point of contact for emergency queries.
 |
| **Probation** |
| The responsibilities include:* Undertake safeguarding checks.
* Provide relevant offender management information (current and past) in respect of all PSR referrals;
* Share PSR information and outcome of MASH decisions with the Offender Manager if a person named on the PSR is currently open to Probation Services; and
* Provide relevant offender management information (current and past) in respect of all non-PSR referrals where they indicate an adult may be known to Probation Services.
 |
| **SPARK (Substance Misuse services)** |
| The responsibilities include:  |
| * Provides support, advice and assistance with regard to alcohol and substance use/misuse issues in order to support risk assessment of presenting circumstances;
* All PSR’s where alcohol or substance misuse has been identified within a PSR and where consent to share information has been obtained, are shared with CGL by the Police at point of finalisation; and
* PSR’s are screened by CGL and appropriate action taken to offer services
 |
| **Education Officer** |
| The responsibilities include: |
| * Liaises with schools/education providers within and out of Blackburn with Darwen in order to share information about MASH Referrals;
* Liaises with schools/education safeguarding and pastoral leads to ensure immediate services are provided to a child to promote their welfare;
* Liaises with schools/education safeguarding and pastoral leads to collate relevant education information (attendance, behaviour, attainment indicators) for the child and analyse the information;
* To support information sharing PSR (Police Safeguarding Reports) / Operation Encompass to school mailboxes;
* The Education Officer is based within MASH half day on a daily basis (with the exception of school holidays).
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1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)