



## CHILDREN AND FAMILIES FRONT DOOR SERVICE INC. GLOUCESTERSHIRE MASH - OPERATING PRINCIPLES DOCUMENT

The Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub in Gloucestershire consists of a team of professionals from several statutory and voluntary agencies who securely share information to ensure that appropriate and robust decisions are made in relation to all new safeguarding concerns about children.



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## Document Revision Table

Version	Date	Notes
V1.0	1 <sup>st</sup> June 2023	GSCP Approved – Uploaded to GSCP Website
V1.1	18 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2025	Font and text size updated in line with GSCP corporate policies. Updates to information governance aspects to capture supplement Data Sharing Agreement and lawful basis for sharing information. Added embedded documents as appendices. Updates to reflect current operational practice.
V1.2	16 <sup>th</sup> October 2025	Online MARF form has been updated to new page link on page 6 of this document.

## Context

Gloucestershire Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) sits within the Children and Families Front Door Service for Children's Services.

The Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub in Gloucestershire consists of a team of professionals from several statutory and voluntary agencies who securely share information to ensure that appropriate and robust decisions are made in relation to all new safeguarding concerns about children. These decisions then result in an appropriate and proportionate response by local services in the county to ensure safeguarding and early help needs are identified and supported.

## Our vision and obsessions for children and young people

We will work together to support families and schools to give every child the best possible chance of a remarkable life, especially those children who are disadvantaged and vulnerable.

“Right Child, right support, right time, every time”

Our 3 obsessions

- Timely and skilled interventions
- Eradicate drift and delay
- Build sustainable outcomes

Within the Front Door Service, we will do this through:

- Keeping children and their families at the heart of everything we do. We will do this by being curious, by speaking to carers and children (where appropriate) to help understand and inform decisions.
- To facilitate multi-agency discussions and screening of initial contacts received in MASH, to support a collaborative approach to understanding children's needs and possible risk of harm which allows for timely information sharing and robust multi-agency decision making to ensure the right intervention, at the right time for children and young people in Gloucestershire.
- Having a good understanding of the views and wishes of the child/family when making decisions and ensuring that parents, carers and children (where appropriate) are given the necessary information they need to make informed decisions.
- Ensure that decisions are documented with a clear explanation and rationale.
- Working with partners to promote good quality information sharing at the point of initial contact to support timely and proportionate decision making.
- Early conversation with referrers to understand requests and inform decision making.

- Where MASH enquiries are undertaken, information share will be timely, proportionate and in line with the Data Sharing Agreement.
- Using professional judgement, based on the presenting information.
- The Front Door Service / Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub has a culture which promotes curiosity, healthy challenge, and a learning culture to ensure that we develop our response to achieve the right support at the right time.
- As a MASH partnership, we will review the impact and effectiveness of our response through weekly partnership audit activity. The analysis of this work will be shared within each agency's respective performance surgeries and through the safeguarding partnership through the Front Door / MASH subgroup.

## MASH Membership

The following agencies are physically located within the MASH:

- Children's Social Care
- Police
- Early Help
- Education
- Commissioned Domestic Abuse Service (GDASS)
- Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust
- Commissioned Drug and Alcohol Service (VIA)

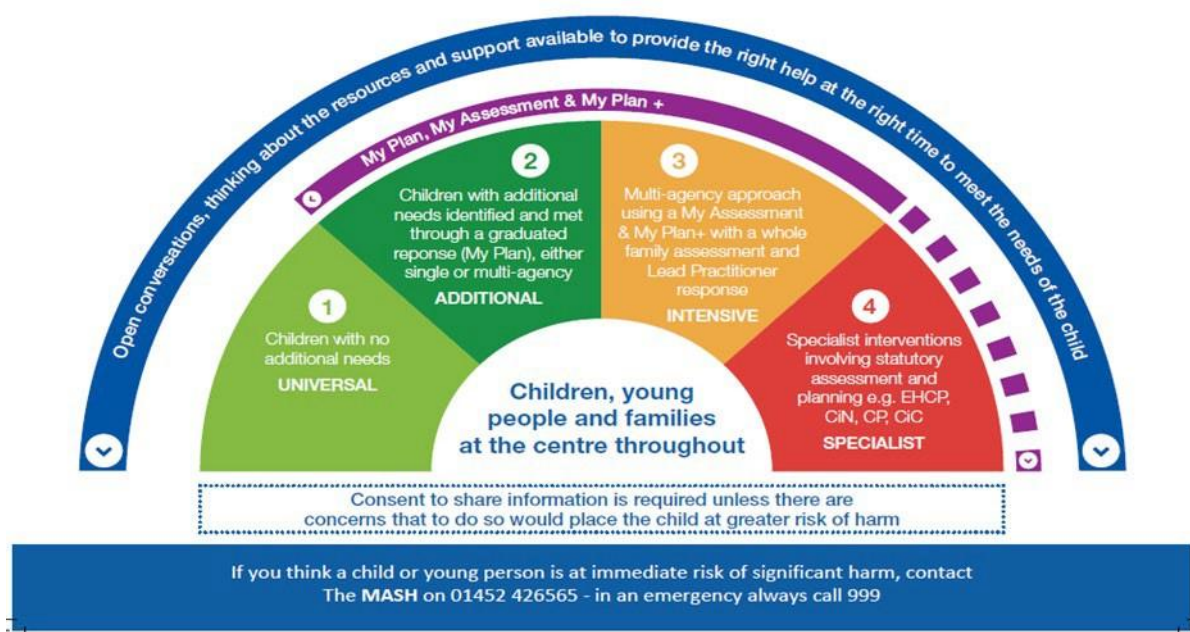
This list is not exhaustive and may be subject to change from time to time in line with contract reviews and legislative changes.

## Decision Making Process

Decision making is set against the Safeguarding Partnerships "Gloucestershire's Level of Intervention Guidance" which was revised in 2021. This sets out our shared commitment to Working Together to Provide Early Help, Targeted and Specialist Support for Children (including the unborn) and Families in Gloucestershire.

## The Windscreen

A diagram to demonstrate the Continuum of Need



Contact to the Children's Services Front Door should be made if:

- A child needs protection - if you feel that a child is suffering harm, neglect and/or abuse, we can investigate and act to protect the child.
- A family is under stress - we can offer support and advice and help families access support from other services.
- A child is seriously ill or disabled - we can arrange an assessment of the child's and family's needs and provide support.

Typically, the front door service and MASH will consider those situations which meet level 3 or 4 threshold criteria, as outlined within the guidance.

### Level 3 Partnership Early Help

Children, young people and families with identified vulnerabilities who are experiencing multiple and complex needs and are likely to need a more targeted, multi-agency coordinated approach. They are likely to require longer-term help.

### Level 4 Statutory Support

Children, young people and their families who have very serious or complex needs that will impact on their expected outcomes or there is serious concern for their safety. These acute needs may require statutory intervention or intensive support for children and young people.

Children, young people, and families receiving intervention for level 4 need are helped, where

possible, in reducing the seriousness and complexity of need and are then enabled to access Early Help or Universal services as appropriate. For information on where our statutory duty applies, you can review the legislative framework in our Data Sharing Agreement.

## Front Door Contact Process

The Front Door Service, including MASH, will only review and make decisions for children who are not already open to a social worker. This will also include representing social care at safeguarding meetings, such as MARAC, MAPPA, and AMM where there is no current social care involvement.

All open or ongoing matters will be directed to the allocated social worker and Team Manager for them to review and make an appropriate decision regarding next action. Professionals should direct any information in relation to open children directly to the allocated social worker and in their absence the Team Manager, to ensure timely information sharing.

Where a member of the public or a professional has concerns regarding the welfare of a child, they should contact the Children and Families Services Helpdesk via one of the following ways:

**Telephone:** 01452 426565 (during office hours) (option 3 for a safeguarding concern).

**Multi Agency Request Form (MARF):** The Multi-Agency Request Form is a pathway into the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) for professionals. This will be screened, in discussion with the referrer where possible, to determine whether a potential safeguarding or early help response is identified.

The Partnership Multi Agency Request Form should be completed, via the online Portal [https://forms.gloucestershire.gov.uk/RequestSupport\\_Childrens\\_EarlyHelp](https://forms.gloucestershire.gov.uk/RequestSupport_Childrens_EarlyHelp). If this is not accessible, the MARF can be sent via email to [childrenshelpdesk@gloucestershire.gov.uk](mailto:childrenshelpdesk@gloucestershire.gov.uk) The Children and Families Services helpdesk is open between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday.

To report a concern outside of these hours, please contact the Emergency Duty Team on 01452 614194. There is also an answering machine, and you will need to leave a message and your telephone number. Someone will then call you back.

Please remember that this number is only for situations that cannot wait until the next working day.

## Anonymous contact with Gloucestershire MASH

Members of the Public have the option of remaining anonymous when contacting the Front Door. If the caller wishes to remain anonymous, the Business Support Officer should encourage them to give their identity and contact details, explaining that their confidentiality will be respected in all instances. The Business Support Officer should obtain as much information as possible from the caller, to ensure that, even if the referrer terminates the call, gets cut off or chooses not to give a contact number, it should be possible to identify the child whom they are raising concerns about, and follow up accordingly. Where a caller wishes to remain anonymous, the call will be passed to a duty Social Worker.

It is expected that any contact from Professionals will not be made anonymously and that unless not safe to do so, the contact should be discussed with the parents, carers and children (where appropriate) unless to do so would place a child at risk of harm.

The flow of work and decision making within the Front Door Service is captured in Appendix A.

## Daily Harm outside of the Home meeting

To share and have multi agency oversight on a daily (Monday to Friday) basis of all children / young people who may be at risk of or experiencing exploitation:

- Are currently reported as missing or have been reported as missing in the past 24 hours / weekend.
- Are currently in the cells or have been in the cells during the past 24 hours / weekend.
- Completed child exploitation screening tools where the risk has been assessed as moderate and significant.
- Share key information with partners to provide a clear multi agency response.
- To identify the most appropriate response, by the right person at the earliest opportunity.

## Child Exploitation Screening Tools

### [Child Exploitation and Missing Children – Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership](#)

The child exploitation screening tool is not an alternative to a MARF, it is a tool to facilitate conversation and thinking around vulnerabilities, harm and the context in which harm may be or likely to be happening. It is to support decision making and child focused actions that are proportionate to the child's circumstances. All safeguarding concerns or requests for service will continue to follow the existing processes.

For children who are not currently open to children's social care, when a child exploitation screening tool is received by the Front door, and this is sent to the Child Exploitation Team where it is reviewed by Police and Children's Services within the team. The only difference for children who already have a social worker is that the tool is sent direct within the pathway on the child's records.

For **moderate/significant CE ST** - CE Coordinator/Senior Social Worker reviews ST, liaises with CSE/CEMM DS, looking at information on systems and a risk level is agreed.

For **mild risk CE ST only** - CE Coordinator/Senior Social Worker (SSW) and the MACE Co-coordinator jointly review the risk level and escalate it to moderate/significant if police information increases risk level. The screening tool will then be reviewed as per the **moderate/significant** above.

CE Coordinator/SSW speaks to the referrer and discusses the identified risk level and completes a CE consultation to identify what services are in place/signposts to appropriate services.

Should further support be required CE team are available in an advisory role. The processes for all children are in Appendix B and C.

## Police

The Police MASH Team assesses all Intelligence Reports, Domestic Abuse, Adult at Risk and Child Protection VISTs daily for the past 24 to 48 hours to identify any safeguarding concerns. This will be a timely efficient and effective review of relevant information and should not be a detailed review of each case.

Every piece of information is assessed to ascertain what the safeguarding concern is against the threshold of need windscreen as set out in our Levels of Intervention and Threshold Document.

Further Action will be taken, and the information will not be shared.

- If the individual being assessed is open to children social care or early help services, then this information will be shared directly to that agency working with that child, adult and/or family.
- If the information hits the high end of level 3 and into Level 4 of the threshold of need this will be shared with CSC
- The remaining information is taken to the police led daily vulnerability meeting (PDVM) – This will hit level 2/3 on the Threshold of Need Windscreen.

## Police Led Daily Vulnerability Meeting

**Strategic Intent:** To ensure that police incidents without a clear pathway are assessed within a multi-agency setting to ensure early intervention opportunities are maximised. The intention is that children and families will therefore receive the right response, at the right time at the earliest opportunity, with the aim of preventing an escalation of concerns.

Within this forum, relevant and proportionate will be shared as a multi-agency approach to obtain relevant information from partner agencies to obtain that holistic picture and then to reassess the threshold of need to identify the correct pathway.

If the holistic picture does not increase the threshold of need, then the relevant agency is identified as to who is best to work with the child, adult, or family to offer the correct level of intervention at the right time to reduce the escalation of need or risk. This will also include VISTs completed for a range of contacts, including domestic abuse.

## Children's Services

Upon receipt of a new contact, a children's services practitioner will screen the MARF / Service



Request to ensure the appropriateness and quality of the request to support safe and timely decision making.

Professionals contacting the Front Door Service / MASH are responsible for informing the parent / main care giver, or young person, where appropriate that they will be submitting either an Early Help Partnership Tool or Multi-Agency Request Form (MARF) and the reasons for this.

Professionals may want to take advice from their designated safeguarding lead if there are concerns about having this conversation:

- if by having a conversation with the parent or main caregiver you will be placing the child at increased risk of harm
- it will lead to a delay about allegations of significant harm

Our practice model takes a relationship-based approach, seeking change through a relational way and this should start before contact is made to Children's Services Front Door. Therefore, it is always good practice to attempt to engage the family at the earliest opportunity, unless doing so would place the child or young person at greater risk of harm.

Furthermore, it is acknowledged that parents' consent for statutory intervention and Early Help Support will inevitably impact upon their engagement with Children's Services and the desired outcomes for the child. Professionals should work positively to engage parents and obtain consent where possible and record their decision-making and rationale where consent is not sought or given.

Upon receipt of a new contact, a children's services practitioner will contact the referring agency to discuss the request, including what has been tried already to meet the need, to inform what needs to happen next. This recommendation is progressed for management oversight and initial direction, using the [Levels of Intervention and Threshold Document](#)

## Grading, Assessment, Response – RAG Rating

A MASH contact record will reflect the referrer's details, an overview of the concerns, whether the contact is a request for information, a request for Early Help input or Social Care intervention.

Upon receipt of a new contact, a children's services practitioner will attempt to speak with the referring agency to discuss the request, including what has been tried already, to inform what needs to happen next. This recommendation is progressed for management oversight and initial direction, using the [Levels of Intervention and Threshold document](#).

This initial screen will give a recommendation as to the direction of the response. A deputy team manager / team manager will review the contact record and add direction and apply a RAG, as below:

RAG	INDICATED RESPONSE	TIMEFRAME
GREEN	Early Help Response.	72 hours
AMBER	<p>Indicators that a safeguarding response may be required, a potential Level 4 response in line with the levels of intervention guidance.</p> <p>Where a social care response is identified, and consent to assess has been given, the contact will be accepted as a referral to children social care and progressed to the appropriate locality team. MASH enquiries may not always be required</p>	Up to 72 hours where MASH enquiries are required.
RED	<p>Child Protection. Requires an immediate response from agencies. A strategy discussion will be held between Children Social Care, Health, and Police as a minimum; however, other partner agencies will also be asked to attend and contribute to decision-making and the safety plan. The strategy discussion will take place within the MASH and the locality team will attend.</p>	4 Hours

- Where an early help response is indicated, the contact will be assigned to an early help practitioner who make further enquiries, including a conversation with family, carers and children (where appropriate) to identify and agree the appropriate response.
- Where potential safeguarding concerns are identified, the contact will be assigned to a social worker who will initiate MASH enquiries to inform decision

making regarding what action, if any, is required to promote the wellbeing and safeguard the child.

- Where it is identified that immediate action is required to safeguard a child, MASH will convene a strategy discussion which will include the appropriate MASH partners, referring agency where possible and the receiving social work team.

The timescales have been agreed to balance the need for allowing sufficient time at the beginning to gather the appropriate information and have meaningful conversations with parents / main care giver to make the right decision at the right time, reducing the risk of over intervention by accepted as a referral to children social care by progressing for assessment when this may not be needed or consented to.

A RAG decision can be reviewed at any point during the screening process, for example, there may be a need to escalate a **green** RAG to an **amber** RAG and vice versa. Any review of the RAG rating would be reflected on the contact record with rationale from a MASH manager or Deputy Team Manager.

## Decision and Analysis

All MASH members are responsible for providing a summary and explanation in respect of the information they provide.

Practitioners based in the MASH will provide an analysis and summary of the information their agency holds which considers the impact on and risk to the child or young person in relation to the presenting issue. Practitioners will consider cumulative harm drawing on their agency's historical information as well as the immediate presenting concern. It should be recognised that this information will form part of the decision-making process for children and their families and as such may be visible to staff sitting in other areas of Children's Services.

## Outcomes

A robust decision regarding the level of need, identification of risk and decision regarding follow on action will be undertaken based on the analysis of the information sharing that takes place within the MASH or by the Early Help Practitioners.

The Early Help/MASH Process Map located in Appendix A outlines the outcomes for contacts received.

All children and families that are assessed as not requiring any response from Children's Social Care and/or Early Help will be provided with advice and guidance, signposted to other services where appropriate and the contact closed.

## Operation Encompass – Police / Education

[Operation Encompass for Schools and Nurseries – Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership](#)

- Our ambition is to ensure that all incidents of domestic abuse are shared with Early years settings, not just those where an offence can be identified.
- Within every setting a trained Key Adult (DSL) is appointed – the Key Adult receives information about abusive incidents directly via their dedicated email address.
- Gloucestershire Encompass is an integral component in child safeguarding and protection policies and, as such, should be cited in the settings Safeguarding and Child Protection policies.

## Quality Assurance

Within the Front Door Subgroup, the need for regular dip sampling / audits is identified as a key activity for the MASH Operational Group.

After reviewing a range of models (audit days, individual dip samples, using the GCC children social care framework), it was agreed that of most benefit is to meet as a multi-agency group of MASH partners once a week for an hour. We have found that “short and often” allows for greater participation and partners are able to commit to the activity.

Within the audit, we are evaluating the appropriateness of contacts into children services, the quality of information shared and the impact upon timely decision making to support children and their families receiving the right support at the right time. Open and reflective conversations within a safe space allows an opportunity to identify areas for development, challenge, and celebration across the partnership.

The methodology for this is that we agree the focus of curiosity (for example, unborn babies, contacts by referrer source) from the previous months contact. We have a hybrid of quantitative and qualitative questions on an online engagement survey platform which allows us to run outcome reports.

The analysis reports will be provided bi-monthly, and it is agreed that this can be shared within partnership and individual agencies quality assurance forums.

## Governance Structures

The MASH is a multi – agency team working together to safeguard children and young people in Gloucestershire. Whilst there will be a strong culture of one service working together to achieve our ambition of “Right Child, right support, right time, every time”, it is important that MASH partners continue to be professionally curious and give healthy challenge when required.

Difference of opinion relating to levels of risk will exist and are an expected part of quality practice. Staff within the Hub will be expected to discuss these differences in a professional and productive manner. If differences are not able to be sorted at the practitioner level, then the issue will be raised with the Service Manager who will investigate the issue and where necessary liaise with the equivalent link managers to the MASH in partner agencies.

This escalation process runs in line with the [GSCP Escalation Policy](#).

To support the operational effectiveness of the MASH, there is a standing Front Door Service / MASH Subgroup. This group reports directly to the Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership (GSCP) Management Group and ultimately the GSCP Executive.

**Membership of the Subgroup** will comprise of Gloucestershire's Safeguarding Partnership members and senior managers from all agencies either represented in or virtually connected to the MASH.

The Front Door / MASH Subgroup will:

- Review and address any practice issues identified. As this Operating Principles document is a live document, which will evolve with identified good practice and emerging experience, the MASH Subgroup will maintain responsibility for any amendments to the agreed Operating Principles.
- Oversee the effectiveness of the MASH including reviewing performance information and have oversight of key performance data and coordinate multiagency qualitative work to support effective working of the team. This group will be chaired by the Head of Service for the Front Door, MASH, EDT, Missing and Exploitation. The Police MASH manager will take the role as Vice Chair and will deputise for the Chair when required.

**A MASH Operational Group** is held monthly and attended by the line managers of the MASH partners. The Operational Group will be responsible for analysing and compiling a regular report of the learning gleaned from the multi-agency audits which are undertaken weekly.

The group will also respond to tasks set from the MASH Subgroup. MASH Team Members attend this monthly Meeting. This meeting will include Social Care and MASH partner agencies. The Operational Meeting is chaired by the MASH Service Manager, or in their absence, MASH Health Manager will deputise.

## Confidentiality

A Data Sharing Agreement will be signed by all relevant agencies who work within the Hub and those actively working within the MASH Enquiry Process. All members of the Hub have been cleared through the Vetting and Barring Scheme and Police vetting process where required.

Information obtained through a MASH enquiry will be handled in line with data protection legislation and our Data Sharing Agreement.

## Information Governance Practice

Information sharing is a vital part of multi-agency working and enables the agencies within the MASH to make timely, efficient, and informed decisions based on accurate, updated and quality information.

All agencies within the MASH will sign our Data Sharing Agreement which outlines the practices and principles to underpin the data sharing including:

- The key aims of information sharing within MASH
- The specific purposes for sharing information
- The legislative framework to support information sharing
- The specific points of contact for each agency
- The data sharing principles to comply with data protection legislation

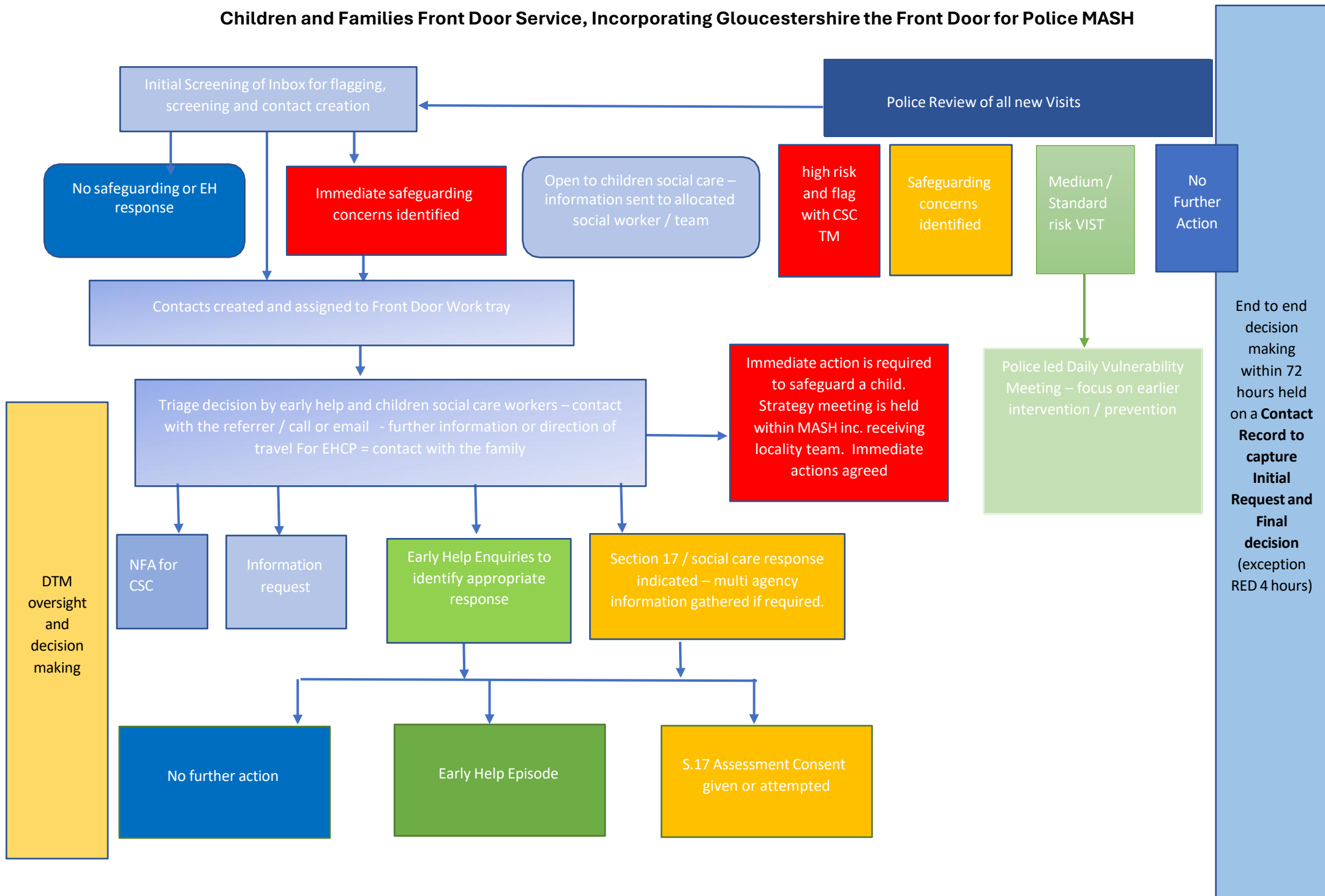
T. his policy is supported by a separate Information Sharing Agreement which governs the information sharing taking place across the agencies involved in the MASH. The Data Sharing Agreement will be kept under review by GSCP MASH subgroup in line with any operational or legislative changes but at least every 2 years.

Any concerns or queries relating to the information sharing practices taking place within MASH should be directed to the relevant specific point of contact for the agencies as displayed in the Data Sharing Agreement.

## Review of Operating Principles

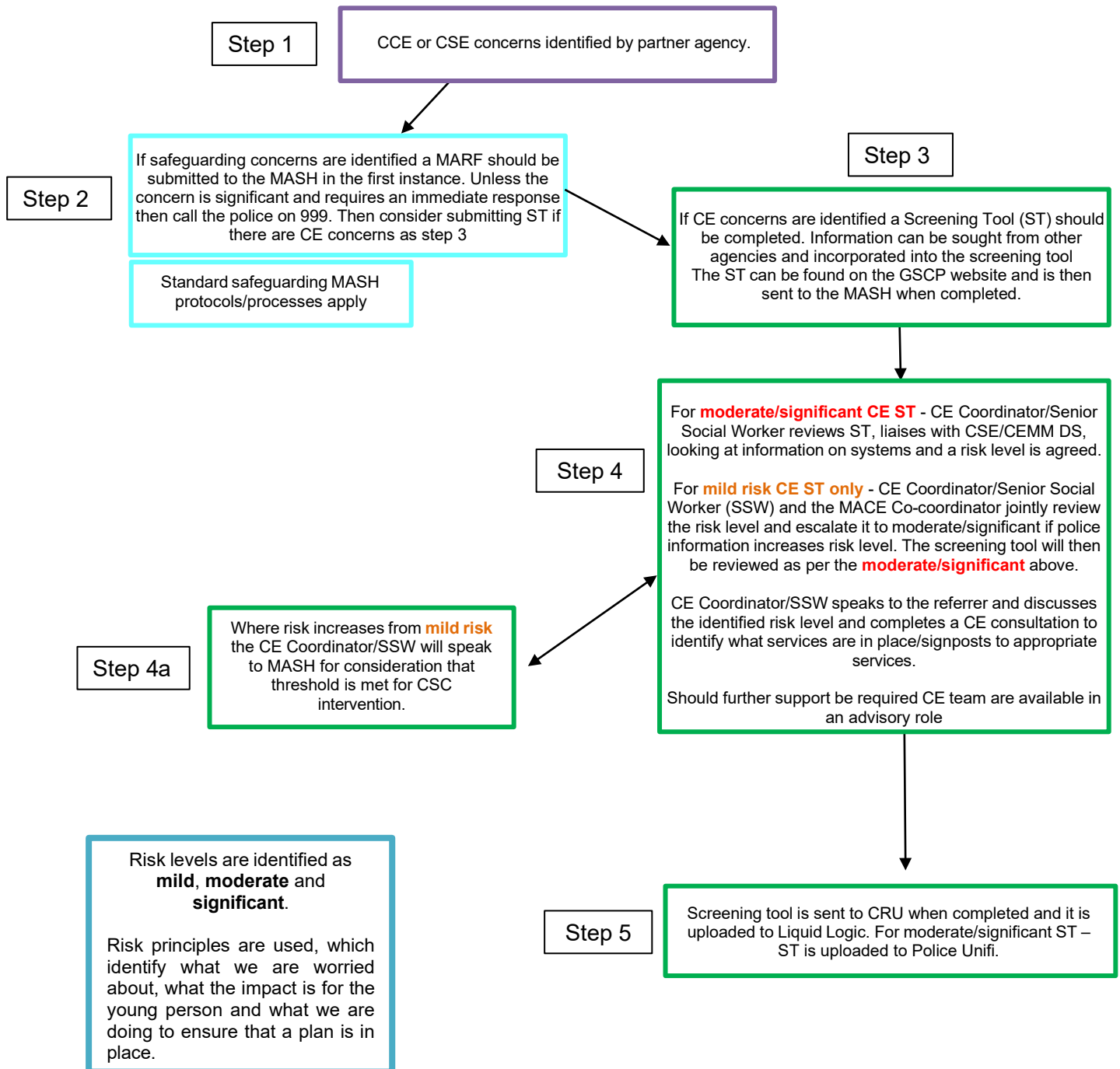
These operating principles will be reviewed each time the core agencies located within the MASH change and will be kept under review by GSCP MASH subgroup in line with any operational or legislative changes but at least every 2 years.

# Children and Families Front Door Service, Incorporating Gloucestershire the Front Door for Police MASH



## Appendix B –

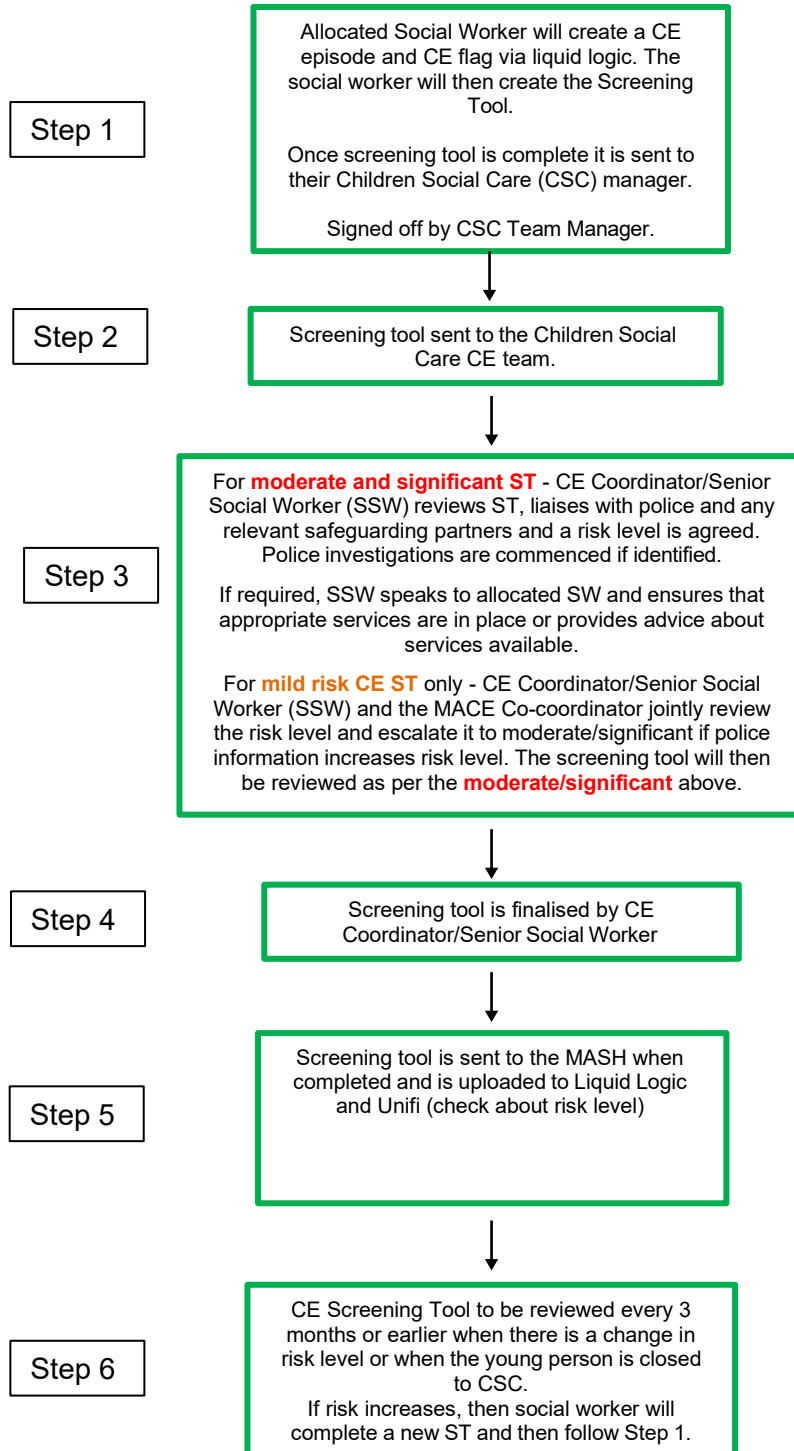
### Child does not open to Children's Social Care – CE Screening Tool process





## Appendix C –

### Child open to Children's Social Care – CE Screening Tool process



Risk levels are identified as **mild, moderate** and **significant**.

Risk principles are used, which identify what we are worried about, what the impact is for the young person and what we are doing to ensure that a plan is in place.