

Stockport multi-agency step up/step down protocol

Policy Summary

This policy describes the multi-agency protocol for use in the application of 'step up' and 'step down' mechanisms across Stockport to ensure a seamless journey for the child through services.
It should be read in conjunction with Stockport levels of need document.

Introduction

The multi-agency step up and step-down protocol ensures that children and their families have their needs met seamlessly, without delay and are provided with a range of services. This protocol is relevant to children who have all levels of need and should be applied by all agencies who provide support to families whether universal, early help or social work interventions are required. Appendix 1 provides definitions of the terms used in this document.

The means by which an agency can identify the point at which the step up or step-down processes should be applied is by the application of the Stockport's level of needs. The level of needs document can be accessed via:

<http://www.safeguardingchildreninstockport.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Stockport-Multi-Agency-Guidance-on-Levels-of-Need.pdf>

There are 4 levels

Level 1 Universal Services

Level 2 Additional needs requiring multi agency early help

Level 3 Complex needs multi agency early help

Level 4 Acute/ specialist including safeguarding

How levels of need are met

Children who receive services at a **universal Level** are those children whose needs can be met by universal services, these services are available to all children and families such as a GP, School, or Health Visitors, etc. These interventions will not be included in the Local Authority's electronic computer system (Liquid Logic) unless they have been stepped down from services at Level 2, 3 or 4, in such circumstances these cases will be closed on the system.

Children who require **Early Help support** at either Level 2 or Level 3 will require an early help episode, which can be triggered by a lead professional who identifies the need for an Early Help assessment (EHA). No referral to the Multi Agency Safeguarding and Support Hub (MASSH) is required to enable an Early help episode or EHA to be completed. An EHA at this level will still require a plan to be agreed with the family to address identified need, however, may not always require a "team around" approach if only a single agency is working on the plan. Level 3 will include more complex cases where a multi-agency team around the family/ Child plan (TAF/ TAC) is required to deliver support. The lead professional should be agreed with family and the members of team around the family. To implement this plan a referral to the MASSH is not required

The Early Help Hub considers cases where it is identified that early help support is required, and it is unclear who is best placed to deliver this. The Early Help Hub meets weekly and is made up a group of multi-agency professionals who will recommend who can offer assessment and interventions the case being tasked to the identified service during the Hub. This ensures early help support is available to families in a timely manner. Business support will share the outcome of the Early Help Hub to ensure that professionals are aware a case has been allocated to them. Cases presented to the MASSH that do not require social work intervention may be discussed at the hub if first response team lead deems it appropriate.

In the event of **Acute/ Specialist including safeguarding concerns** (Level 4) these are circumstances where a child is at immediate risk of harm or there are child welfare concerns that cannot be met at an Early Help Level and require a Children and Family assessment (Level 4).

The MASSH referral would be completed as:

Level 3 in circumstances when there is not an immediate risk to the child, but concerns cannot be managed at early help level to the child

Level 4 Where there is a significant risk of harm to a child.

A **telephone referral** by a professional or member of the public should be made in circumstances where the **risk to the child requires an immediate response**

Definition of Step Up

Step Up describes the process of supporting families when additional support is required, and the levels of need escalate. This may be required at an Early Help or Social care level.

An example being when it is identified that a child in receipt of Universal Services (Level 1) is not having all their needs met and additional support is required. In such circumstances the professional identifying this need will consider the Levels of Need document, if the needs can be met by additional Early Help support they will use the step-up process and trigger an Early Help episode to complete an Early Help Assessment (EHA). In this situation the child's needs have stepped up from Level 1 to Level 2 on the continuum of need.

The pace at which or if a case steps up is determined by the child's needs and where these fall on the continuum of need. It is possible in circumstances where a safeguarding concern is identified that the child's level of need will step up directly from Level 1 to Level 4 of continuum of need as these can no longer be met by Early Help services and require Children and Family Assessment or the implementation of sec 47 Child Protection enquiries undertaken by a Social Worker.

Definition of Step Down

Step down is the process that occurs when the level of need has moved down the continuum of need as the child's identified needs have reduced or are being met by the support plan in place to meet these.

As with the step-up protocol that of step down is applicable to all levels of need whether these be at the level of Early Help or Social care. The assessment of level of need when a case is being considered for step down and the processes followed are essential to prevent the re escalation of need.

An example of step down from an Early Help episode may involve circumstances where a team around the family plan has been in place (TAF/TAC) and when all aspects of the plan has been achieved and the identified needs have been met by the TAF/TAC plan and no new concerns have arisen. In such circumstances it may be concluded that support can be offered by universal services at level 1 or by additional support from a single agency, but without the need for an Early Help episode.

Stepdown can also occur within statutory frameworks. An example of this is when a child and their family's needs have been met under sec 47 of the Children Act 1989 by a Child Protection Plan and risk has diminished as the child and family have made positive progress. In this situation the Child Protection Review would conclude that the case can Step Down as there are no safeguarding concerns. In such circumstances the Child Protection Plan will be discharged, and the support needs will be managed under sec 17 of the Children Act by a TAC/TAF plan (TAC). In such circumstances the case would continue be managed by a Social Worker and sit within a Statutory framework.

Process/Practice Step Up

Consent

- Consent from the parent/s is required prior to beginning of an Early Help Episode or Early Help Assessment
- Consent should be obtained both verbally and in writing from the parent, where possible both parents should be asked if they give consent (it is possible to complete an Early Help Episode with consent of one parent/ carer provided they have parental responsibility for the child).
- Consent is required before sharing information with other professionals other than if doing so would place a child at risk of harm (for guidance see data sharing guidance appendix 1 and [1.1.2 Confidentiality Policy](#) .
- A conversation is required prior to making a referral to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub, to discuss your concerns where appropriate.
- Professionals can ask for guidance in respect of EHA and making referrals on **0161 217 6160**. When an urgent response is required contact the MASSH on **0161 217 6028**.
- Schools can seek advice from the link Social Worker and cases where there is emerging need should be discussed at the team around the school, either in the formal TAS (Team Around the School) meeting or by contacting the school age plus worker to discuss if a meeting is not due to be held. All agencies will have a lead professional within their agency who can provide advice and guidance around safeguarding and consent.

Step up from universal to early help

- In the first instance if needs are unmet this should be discussed with parent/s/carer/s and if age appropriate, the child.
- Consent must be obtained from the parent/s when undertaking this conversation to discuss at TAS, to begin an Early Help Episode or make a referral to the MASSH or Early help Hub.
- Any referral to the MASSH or Early Help Assessment needs to include all the children in the family, as both an Early Help Assessment or a Children and Family Social Work Assessment are holistic family assessments.
- Details of both parents and carers for the child, whether they reside at the same address.
- A case can be stepped up to an Early Help Episode and Early Help Assessment can be started by any professional with the consent of the parent and this does not require a referral to the MASSH
- When a referral to the MASSH is made the triage by a first response Social Worker may assess the level of need as Levels 2 or 3. In such an event a lead professional will be identified and contacted about this recommendation.

- A recommendation of an EHA may be recommended by the Early Help Hub and if appropriate a lead professional and case allocated to them during the hub meeting. The professional will be informed about this recommendation by business support. They will take responsibility for contacting the parent and beginning the Early Help Episode.
- When discussions with parent are undertaken it needs to be clearly explained what an EHA is, what it will involve, and consent needs to be obtained
- Discussions, when possible, should be undertaken with both parents. Both should be asked if they consent to an EHA, and both should be involved in the EHA unless doing so poses a risk to the child or they decline to do so.
- Parent/s need to be aware that during the EHA a professional will need to speak to the child, other than in circumstances where this would not be age appropriate.
- Parents need to be informed about what they are consenting to, and they should be aware that an EHA will involve gathering information from other professionals
- Parent/s need to be aware that should safeguarding concerns arise during an EHA this information may need to be shared with social care
- Following these discussions, the lead professional will create an Early Help Episode and provided the consent is verbally obtained or obtained in writing an EHA will be completed
- Professionals from other agencies will be asked to contribute to the EHA and the lead professional may delegate information requests. It is expected that these will be completed in a timely fashion.
- It is necessary for the EHA to be completed in 30 working days

Step Up to Social care

There are 2 routes via which a case can be stepped up to social care

1. MASSH referral – this should be used by Schools, Housing, and services outside of the Local Authority
2. The second option available to Services within Stockport Family is via the step up to social care outcome of an EHA, which should be completed within the Liquid Logic Early Help Module (EHM) in consultation with the Lead practitioners Team Leader and Team Leader Locality Social care team.

Option 1

- Referrals can be made to the MASSH by parents, members of the public or professionals to request that a case be triaged and be stepped up for a Children and Family Assessment completed by a Social Worker, if appropriate to the Level of Need.
- Prior to making a referral to the MASSH best practice would be to complete an EHA and in the event of a case needing to be stepped up Option 2 would be applied.
- Concerns should be discussed with the parent and consent obtained prior to making a referral to social care. Only in cases where this poses a risk to the child should this not be the case (see sec on Consent and Appendix 2).
- Referrals to the MASSH can be made online by professionals and they should use this method of referral unless a safeguarding concern is requiring an urgent response.
- When completing an online referral, the professionals will be asked to select a level of need. This informs how this case will be prioritised. The levels of need document should be used to inform this decision.
- Following the receipt of the referral this will be triaged and a decision will be made by the First Response Team manager as to whether a Children and Family Assessment is the best means to meet a child's needs

Option 2

- This relates to cases where an EHA is being completed and the lead practitioner's professional opinion is that the case needs to step up and a Children and Family Assessment completed by a Social Worker is required.
- If a professional from **Stockport Family** is considering outcome of **Request step up to social care**. The lead professional should discuss this with the delegated person in the organisation and should they agree, this will be discussed with the Locality Social Work team manager following this discussion the outcome will be chosen and sent for authorisation to the Managers tray for the relevant Locality.
- In the event of a Lead professional from a **Partner Agency** is considering an outcome of **Request Step up to social care**. The Lead professional will complete a referral to the MASSH. If step up is agreed to be appropriate the outcome **Request Step up to social care** will be chosen and authorised by the First Response Team manager.
- Following the step up to statutory social care processes a child will be in receipt of "Child in Need" support delivered under sec 17 Children Act 1989 unless during the MASSH enquiries immediate Child Protection concerns have arisen which would warrant section 47 enquiries

- The first process in the delivery of sec 17 services is the undertaking of a Children and Family Assessment by a locality Social Worker which assesses the level of need and informs the support plan.
- If the level of need remains the same the Social Worker will recommend that services continue to be delivered under sec 17 and a TAC/TAF meeting and a plan will be put in place.

Step up from Sec 17 Child in Need (TAC) to Sec 47 Child Protection

- Step up to Child Protection Procedures Sec 47 of the Children Act 1989 can occur at any point if "There is reasonable cause to suspect that a child who lives in or is found in, a local authority area is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm in the form of physical, sexual, emotional abuse, or neglect".
- Any referral received by the MASSH which either immediately or during the process of triage a sec 47 concern this will be allocated to the locality social work team to undertake any sec 47 enquiries as directed by the Local Authority's Child Protection procedures, [1.3.5 Section 47 Enquires](#)
- A case allocated to a Social Worker, undertaking assessments, or managing TAC plans under section 17 can step up and need to be managed under sec 47 Child Protection procedures at any time that Child Protection concerns arise.
- Prior to an Initial Child Protection Conference being requested a Multi-Agency Strategy meeting will take place and should it be agreed that an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) this outcome will be chosen.
- The Initial Child Protection Conference will be convened and take place in 15 working days of the strategy discussion taking place
- The recommendation whether to step up to a Child Protection plan will be discussed at the Initial Child Protection Conference. The conference will be chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer and a multi-agency decision will be made, as to whether the child/ children should be made the subject of the Child Protection Plan.

Step up to a child being looked after

- The level of need for a child to be placed for a child being looked after and the Local Authority needing share parental responsibility for a child (sec 20 and sec 31 Children Act requires the Local Authority to meet threshold criteria that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer [Significant Harm](#) attributable to the care being given to the child, or likely to be given if an Order were not made.
- Any Order for a child to become looked after requires that the granting of an order by the court or for an interim period the agreement of the parent under Sec 20 of the Children Act 1989
- The policies and procedures for this process are included on <https://www.proceduresonline.com/toolkit/glossary/c/cs-care-proceedings/>

Process and Practice of Stepdown

When children and families have received a statutory intervention, and the family have progressed positively, it is important that the progress made is sustained and that children and families do not feel that they are being passed from 'service to service.' The Step-Down process enables relevant professionals from Children's Social care and a range of other services to support the intervention plan for a child appropriately whether the step down is within the arena of early help or social care. Ensuring that an appropriate support plan is in place following the de-escalation of need is essential to prevent the situation deteriorating following stepdown and a child's need ceasing to be met.

Step down from care order or interim care order

- Decisions to step down from an Interim Care order or Care Order granted by a court can only be discharged with the agreement of the court [5.1.1 Decision to Look After and Care Planning](#)
- A child looked after under Sec 20 of the Children Act 1989 is a voluntary arrangement between the parent/s or legal guardian for a child. [5.1.1 Decision to Look After and Care Planning](#)
- A parent can withdraw agreement for a child to be looked after at any time in which event the case will be stepped down their previous legal status or the Local Authority will need to make an application for a care order to the Court.
- The Local Authority can discharge Sec 20 and cease to look after a child at any point that it is not required, and the threshold is no longer met.
- The Local Authority's plan following the discharge of any order will be dependent on the level of need and could include the granting of a Supervision Order by the court, implementation of child protection procedures, the meeting of needs via a TAC plan, team around the family Plan or Universal Services
- The step-down plan following the discharge of care proceedings will be informed by the discharge plan directed by the Court and the relevant procedures will be followed to implement any of these processes

Step Down from a Child Protection Plan

- A Child Protection Plan is subject to ongoing review via Core Group Meeting and Child Protection Conference reviews.
- At each review, the conference members will assess the child/children's level of need and decide whether these continue to require a Child Protection Plan.
- If the level of need has reduced the Conference will recommend that the Child Protection Plan is discharged.
- The allocated social worker who will lead the TAC plan and a date for the next TAC meeting will be arranged during the Child Protection Review and will take place within 4 weeks of the Child Protection Plan being discharged
- The Conference Chair will ensure that minutes of the final Child Protection Conference are distributed to the parents and other professional

Step Down from Social care to Early Help support

- A decision that the level of need has reduced and no longer requires a TAC plan led by Social Worker will be made by the Social Worker in conjunction with other professionals and parents who are part of the Multi Agency TAC/TAF.
 - A case cannot be stepped down to a TAF/TAC plan led by Early Help / universal services without the consent of the parents being given.
 - Should the multi-agency TAC/TAF and the parents agree that the child's level of need based on the continuum need has reduced and these would be best met by a team around the family plan this would be agreed during the TAC meeting and a Stepdown TAC meeting would be convened.
 - During the step-down TAC meeting verbal and if possible written consent **must** be obtained from the parent/s or carer/s for the case to be stepped down to team around the family. Without the consent of the parent a TAF/TAC plan cannot be implemented
 - During this meeting, a lead professional will be identified who will be responsible for the future early help episode.
 - Following the step-down meeting if a TAC/TAF plan is agreed by all parties the Social Worker will complete the minutes of the step-down meeting and a step-down plan will be agreed. This plan should include what actions should take place should professionals or parent/s or carer/s should concerns appear to be re escalating.
 - The lead professional provides minutes of the meeting and a copy of the plan to the parents and all parties who attend the meeting, who do not have access to Liquid Logic

 - The Social Worker will complete a closure summary
 - If the designated Lead professional is a member of **Stockport Family** the transfer request will be sent directly to the manager of the lead professional who will manage the Early Help Episode
- Or
- If the case the designated Lead professional is from a **partner agency** the transfer request will be sent to the Operational Lead on the MASSH
 - The transfer request **must include consent** from the parent/s or carer/s of the children.
 - The transfer request must include the name of the lead professional and their agency to enable the transfer to be completed.
 - The stepdown plan and step-down meeting minutes should be attached to the transfer request along with any other documents required to enable the lead professional and TAF to effectively manage the plan.
 - The transfer document will be authorised by the Operational Lead or the team manager who will assign the Early Help Episode to person identified as the Lead professional to manage the TAF plan.
 - If **consent is not given** by the parent or the necessary information is not provided the transfer request will be **refused** and returned to the Social Worker with a request that this information is provided. This should be done in conversation with social care team leader.
 - If the parent/s or carer/s do not consent to a TAF plan and further Early Help episode the case will be closed, and the family's needs will be met by universal services
 - The lead professional should update the EHA with parent/carers and young person with current assessment of need.
 - Identified lead professionals are then responsible for the plan that has was agreed at step down.
 - The assessment should be completed within 30 working days of the step down and the TAC/TAF plan reviewed and recorded within the early help episode on Liquid Logic.

Step Down from Social care to Universal Services

- Any assessment that the level of need has reduced and no longer requires a TAC plan, and these can be met by Universal Services will be made by the Social Worker in conjunction with other professionals and parents who are part of the multi-agency TAC/TAF.
- Should the multi-agency TAC/TAF and the parents agree that the level of needs of the child would be best met by universal Services this decision will be made at a TAC Meeting.
- During the final TAC meeting it needs to be discussed whether the child/children would benefit from any additional single agency or whether the support already in place from individual services should continue following the closure of the case.
- A plan should be agreed of what will happen in the future if professional or the parent/s or carer/s believe that the Level of Need has increased so that supports can be put in place quickly to prevent the concerns escalating.
- The Lead professional provide minutes of the meeting to the parents and all parties

Step Down for Early Help Episode to Universal Services

- The assessment that the level of need has reduced and no longer requires a TAF plan will be made by the multi-agency Team Around the Family in conjunction with the parent/s of the child/children.
- If this plan is agreed a Stepdown TAF meeting will be convened
- The stepdown TAF meeting should consider the ongoing support needs of the child and whether additional single agency support or supports which form part of the TAF plan should continue to be offered to the child and their family after the Early help Episode is closed.
- The Lead professional provide minutes of the meeting to the parents and all parties, who do not have access to Liquid Logic

APPENDIX 1

Definition of Terms used in this Guidance:

Levels of need	This is how a child's needs and potential risk are categorised and provide guidance how a need could be met
Universal service	Public and community services available to all children and families, e.g., schools, GP, health visitors
Early Help	Support needs additional to that generic support provided by universal services
Early Help Episode	Framework in which an Early Help Assessment or Team around the Family plan will be completed
Early Help assessment (EHA)	Assessment (previously known as CAF) that can be completed by any professionals in universal services working with a family. Assessment of the children and families to identify additional support needs
Team around the Family/Child (TAF/TAC)	Multi agency plan of support for a child & family
Safeguarding concerns	Concerns that a child is experiencing or at risk of experiencing of physical or emotional abuse, maltreatment, neglect that would place them at risk of harm
Multi Agency Plan	Professionals from different services, such as health, education, etc, working as group to put in place services to meet a child and family's needs
Early Help Hub identified	Local Authority's process for identifying Early help Support services where a lead professional has not been identified
Lead professional	Individual responsible for completing an Early Help and Assessment and facilitating Team Around the family (TAF plan)
Children and Family Assessment	Assessment completed by a Social Work in circumstances where a child is at risk of harm or has complex needs beyond those that can be met an Early Help level
MASSH	Multi Agency Safeguarding and Support Hub. Service made up of different agencies. This receives and processes referrals to Children Social care services and Early help Hub. Manages Missing from Home and Missing from School episodes
Partner agency	A service which works with children and families who whose staff undertake the role of Lead professional in the completion of Early Help Assessments and managing Early Help Episodes
Stockport Family	Integrated service including Social Care, Health, and Early Help services

APPENDIX 2

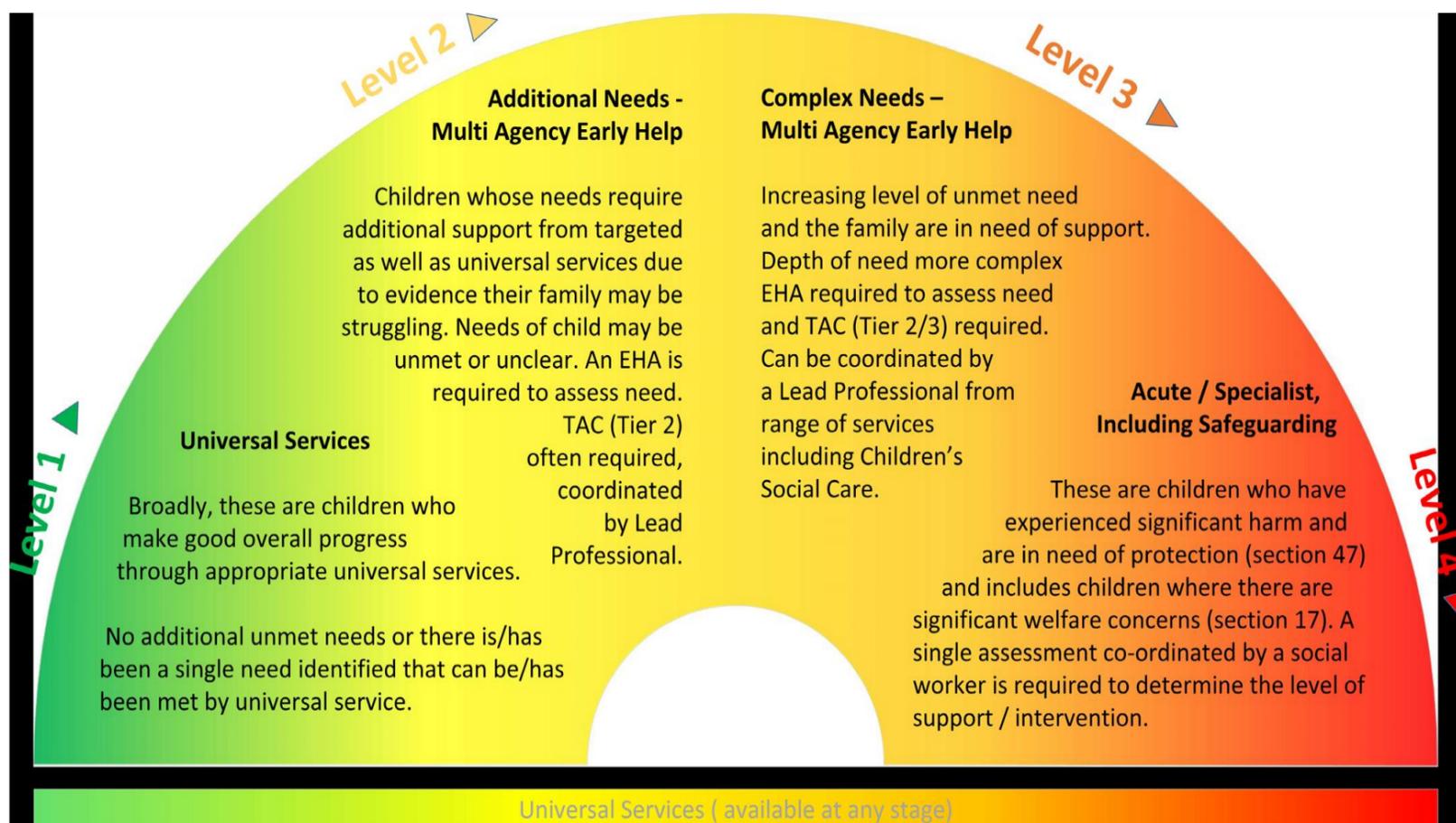
The seven golden rules to sharing information

1. Remember that the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Data Protection Act 2018 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, or your information governance lead, if you are in any doubt about sharing the information concerned, without disclosing the identity of the individual where possible.
4. 4. Where possible, share information with consent, and where possible, respect the wishes of those who do not consent to having their information shared. Under the GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018 you may share information without consent if, in your judgement, there is a lawful basis 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 clear of the basis upon which you are doing so. Where you do not 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.

Examples may include Fabricated Illness, Injuries, or abuse where the carers are the alleged perpetrators or may collude with the alleged perpetrator (this is not exhaustive, and advice can be sought on **0161 217 6160** in nonurgent situations or on occasions where an immediate action is required **0161 2176028**).

Appendix 3

Levels of Need



Effective Information Sharing

STOCKPORT MULTI AGENCY GUIDANCE ON LEVELS OF NEED

Refer Directly to the MASSH/ First Response Team immediately for concerns that the child is at risk of significant harm

Link to full Level of Need Document:

<http://www.safeguardingchildreninstockport.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Stockport-Multi-Agency-Guidance-on-Levels-of-Need.pdf>

