



# Walsall Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

## Operating Principles Document

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## **Contents**

- 1.0 Context**
- 2.0 MASH Membership**
- 3.0 Threshold Criteria**
- 4.0 MASH Contact Process**
  - 4.1 Overview
  - 4.2 Anonymous contact with Walsall MASH
  - 4.3 Consent
  - 4.4 Multi-Agency Referral Form
  - 4.5 Early Help Partnership Tool
- 5.0 Open Children/Cases**
- 6.0 Grading, Assessment, Response - RAG Rating**
  - 6.1 Decision and Analysis
  - 6.2 Outcomes
- 7.0 Responding to Domestic Abuse**
  - 7.1 Definition
  - 7.2 Legal Requirements
  - 7.3 Domestic Abuse Triage
  - 7.4 Domestic Abuse Triage Outcomes
  - 7.5 Operation Encompass
- 8.0 Missing and Exploitation**
- 9.0 Persons in a Position of Trust**
- 10.0 Governance Structures**
- 11.0 Information Sharing**
- 12.0 Review of Operating Principles**

# Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub Operating Principles Document

## 1.0 Context

Walsall Safeguarding Partnership introduced the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) in October 2015. The aim of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is to bring together key professionals from across the partnership to ensure timely and high quality information sharing, analysis and decision making to deliver appropriate and proportionate intervention and quality outcomes for children, young people and families in Walsall.

The MASH comprises of a co-located team including Walsall Children's Social Care, Early Help Team, Police, Walsall Healthcare Trust, Education Welfare, National Probation Service, Black Country Women's Aid and the Missing and Exploitation Team.

The key objectives of the MASH are:

- To ensure that children, young people and their families receive the right help, at the right time in accordance with Walsall Safeguarding Partnership threshold guidance.
- To ensure professionals utilise the Early Help pathway when there is an identified need for Level 3 multi-agency Early Help intervention where children and young people have multiple and complex needs, and ensure children and their families are not subject to statutory interventions unnecessarily.
- To improve the 'journey' for the child, young person and their families by having one central 'front door' to access appropriate and proportionate intervention through multi-agency Early Help, specialist intervention for disabled children and statutory intervention through Children's Social Care.
- 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 Walsall.
- To ensure safeguarding concerns for vulnerable children are responded to promptly, in a co-ordinated way by the multi-agency team of practitioners from across the partnership.

- To work in an open and transparent way with families, gaining their consent and participation to enable thorough multi-agency screening and decision making within MASH to ensure best outcomes for children and young people in Walsall.

## **2.0 MASH Membership**

The following agencies are physically located within the MASH:

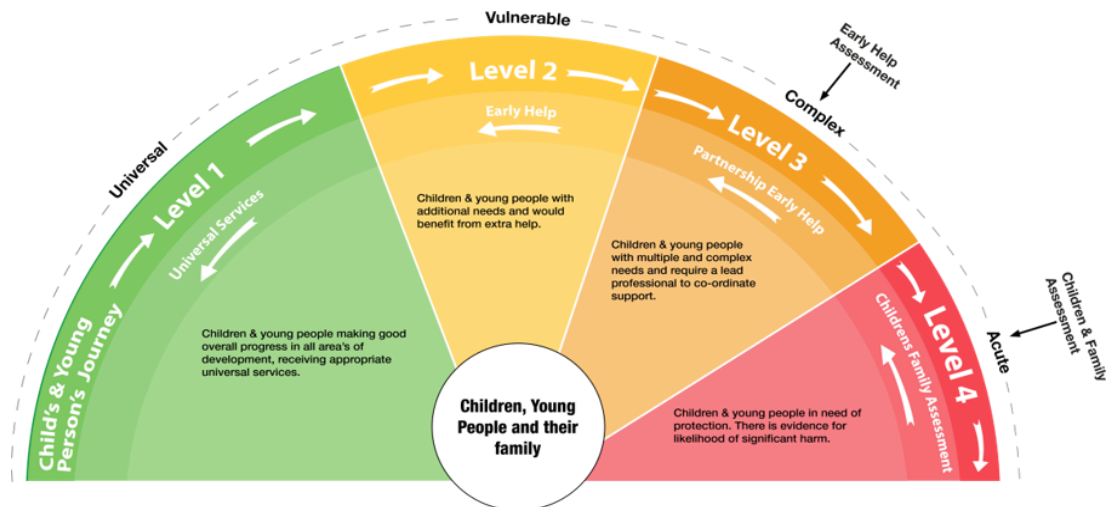
- Walsall Children's Social Care
- Police
- Walsall Early Help
- Education Welfare
- Probation Service/Youth Justice Service
- Black Country Women's Aid
- Walsall Healthcare Trust
- Missing and Exploitation Team
- Local Authority Designated Officer

Other partners are actively supporting the MASH and will act as virtual members albeit not co-located within the MASH. These include:

- General Practitioners - CCG
- Black Country Partnership Foundation Trust (BCPFT)
- Beacon Recovery Service

## **3.0 Threshold Criteria**

The Safeguarding Partnership 'Right Help, Right Time: Continuum of Need' threshold guidance launched in October 2019. Our shared ambition is to provide the right level of help at the right time so children and families can have their needs met outside of statutory safeguarding processes, where appropriate. The document provides the framework for those who work with children, families and adults who are parents/carers to identify and respond to the needs of children. The guidance describes potential indicators of concern for children and their families and can be used to enhance and support collective understanding of risk. This will help inform professional conversations between services and practitioners, improving the quality and consistency of assessments. Helping us to have a good understanding of the lived experience of the child.



Contact with MASH must meet level 3 or 4 threshold criteria, as outlined below.

### 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 are experiencing very serious or complex needs that are having a major impact on their expected outcomes or there is serious concern for their safety. These acute needs may require statutory intensive support for children and young people for protection. This may be as children in need - CIN (Section 17 of the Children Act 1989) or as children in need of protection- CP (under section 47 of the Children Act 1989). 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.

## 4.0 MASH Contact Process

### 4.1 Overview

Where a professional or member of the public has concerns regarding the welfare of a child, they should contact the MASH via one of the following channels:

**Telephone:** 0300 555 2866

**Email:** MASH@walsall.gov.uk

**Post:** Walsall MASH, Civic Centre, Darwall Street, WS1 1XU

When contacting MASH, the caller will be required to self-select from

Option 1 - Early Help Query

Option 2 - Safeguarding Concern

The Early Help Advisors provide a dedicated Advice & Guidance Helpline Monday to Friday between 2pm and 4pm or you could email them on

[EHpathway@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:EHpathway@walsall.gov.uk)

Walsall MASH operates between 8:45am and 5:15 pm Monday - Thursday and 8:45am - 4:45pm on a Friday.

Outside of these hours, a recorded message advises the caller of the opening hours and asks them to call back accordingly if they are seeking advice or guidance. Alternatively, if the caller is reporting a safeguarding concern for a child or young person, they are asked to re-dial 0300 555 2922 to speak to the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) where they will be able to share their concern with an emergency duty social worker who will respond accordingly. EDT operate during evenings, weekends and bank holidays.

#### **4.2 Anonymous contact with Walsall MASH**

Members of the Public have the option of remaining anonymous when making contact with the MASH. 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.

If the caller requests general information or advice concerning childcare matters, the call will be passed to an Early Help Advisor.

### 4.3 Consent

Professionals making contact with MASH must obtain parental consent when submitting either an Early Help Partnership Tool or Multi-Agency Referral Form (MARF). Professionals remain responsible for informing the parent/main caregiver of their intention to contact the MASH. In gaining consent for the submission of a MARF, it will be explained to the parent/main caregiver that they are also consenting to the sharing of information between agencies.

Consent does not need to be obtained in the following circumstances:

- 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

Although in circumstances where a child is deemed to be at risk of significant harm and parental consent to share information is not required, 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. It is recognised that parents' consent for statutory intervention and Early Help Support will inevitably impact upon their engagement with Children's Services and 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. In the absence of parental consent, a contact will not be progressed by MASH and the referrer will be informed. A letter will also be sent to the parents to advise of a contact received however in the absence of their consent, no action has been taken by MASH.

If it is felt that a child or young person's needs are so significant that they need immediate statutory intervention or highly specialist intervention to prevent significant harm or serious risk to their health or welfare, the MASH manager will request full screening with partners to take place to inform a decision regarding appropriate course of action. The decision to progress in the absence of parental consent is reflected in the manager's direction.

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) highlights "Effective sharing of information between practitioners and local organisations and agencies is essential for early identification of need, assessment and service provision to keep children safe. Practice reviews have highlighted that missed opportunities to record,

understand the significance of and share information in a timely manner can have severe consequences for the safety and welfare of children". It is therefore important that the referrer is open and transparent with the parents or carers in discussing their worries/concerns, and seeks consent at the earliest opportunity to allow for timely multi-agency screening and decision making to take place.

#### **4.4 Multi-Agency Referral Form**

The Multi-Agency Referral Form (MARF) is a pathway into the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) for professionals when there has been an identified need for Level 4 Statutory support and intervention for a child or young person where there is evidence of serious, prolonged or complex needs that are having a major impact on their expected outcomes or there is serious concern for their safety. In line with the 'Right Help, Right Time: Continuum of Need' (2019), these acute needs identified under level 4, may require statutory intensive support for children and young people to be protected and in such circumstances, professionals would complete a MARF and send this to MASH to screen.

The MARF can be located at [West Midlands Regional Procedures](#)

In the event that a MARF is submitted without parental consent, and it is not immediate child protection, it will not be accepted by the team. The MARF will be uploaded onto the database but screening will not take place in the absence of parental consent. The MASH partner/member that represents the referring agency will make contact with the referrer and ask that they seek consent at the earliest opportunity. A letter will be sent directly to the parent/main caregiver notifying them that contact has been made with MASH by the referrer and advising them to speak to the referrer directly. The outcome of any attempted contact with the MASH will be sent in writing to the referrer.

#### **4.5 Early Help Partnership Tool**

This is where a child, young person or their family has multiple and complex needs that have been identified through the completion of an Early Help Partnership tool. The tool evidences the complex needs and additional support required via Multi-agency Early Help. Needs will generally be identified by nursery, school, health, police etc, who feel that together extra help and support is required. A planned package of multi-agency support may be required and a 'lead professional' will coordinate this. Most children and young people will only need to be supported for a short period of time, if there is a robust multi-agency plan of



support and intervention in place to reduce the level of need, until only minimal support is required through single agency intervention or universal services.

The Early Help Partnership Tool can be located at <https://go.walsall.gov.uk/forms/On-line-tool>

Referral outcome letters will be sent to referrers.

#### **4.6 Disabled Children and Young Persons Team (DCYPT)**

Walsall Disabled Children and Young People's Team is a specialist Social Work Team which works with children and young people aged 0-18 who have a complex disability and are permanent residents in Walsall. The team provides a service to children and young people requiring additional resources in respect of their disability, where the disability is permanent and substantial (Equality Act 2010) and has a profound impact on the child or young person's life. The child may have been born with a disability or become disabled as a result of an illness, accident or injury.

In order to meet the criteria for a service from the DCYPT for children and young people under the age of 18, the child must firstly meet the requirements of section 17(11) of the Children Act 1989 which defines disability as follows:

*"A child is disabled if he is blind, deaf or dumb or suffers from mental disorder of any kind or is substantially and permanently handicapped by illness, injury or congenital deformity or such other disability as may be prescribed".*

Not all children who are defined as having a disability under Section 17 will meet threshold for a service from the DCYPT. The majority of children and young people in Walsall, including those who are disabled, will receive services through health, education and universal/targeted provision within their local community. It is recognised that in order to access community resources, families of disabled children and young people may require access to information and advice which can be obtained from SENDIASS – Special Educational Needs Information, Advice and Support Service and SEND Local Offer which can be accessed on Walsall Council website.

Where services are required that cannot be met through universal services and early intervention/targeted services, where there is a safeguarding concern regarding a disabled child or young person or they need specialist support, the

MASH will consider whether children and their families meet the threshold criteria for a service from the Disabled Children and Young Persons Team (DCYPT) at level 4 threshold of the RHRT continuum of need. Any child or young person requiring statutory intervention at level 4 that does not meet the criteria for assessment by the Disabled children and Young People’s Team, could have their needs assessed by a social worker within the Locality Duty and Assessment Team or at level 3 threshold of the RHRT continuum of need via an Early Help assessment.

**5.0 Open Children/Cases**

The MASH will only review and jointly assess new safeguarding concerns for children who aren’t already open to a social worker. All open or ongoing matters that require further information sharing, strategy meetings or conferences will be directed to the allocated social worker and Team Manager for them to review and make an appropriate decision regarding next action, based on their knowledge of the family situation and new information shared. 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.

Any contact made with the MASH via the Early Help Pathway will be considered by the Family Support Advisors to ensure that the application of threshold is appropriate.

**6.0 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. In order to meet our objectives of improving both the quality and timeliness of our response to concerns and support needs of children and young people in Walsall, the manager will review the contact record, add direction and apply a RAG, as below:

<b>RAG</b>	<b>RESPONSE</b>	<b>TIMEFRAME</b>
<b>GREEN</b>	Early Help Response.	5 working days
<b>AMBER</b>	Requires a Social Care Response in line with Right Help Right Time Threshold Guidance.	24 hours

<b>RED</b>	Child Protection. Requires an immediate response from agencies. A formal 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.	4 hours
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There will be oversight from the Senior Family Support Advisor of all contact records where a **green** RAG has been applied. Early Help Partnership Tools received will be assigned to a Family Support Advisor in order to identify and broker a Lead Professional either within the wider partnership or forward to the relevant locality for Early Help Assessment or Early Help Service. Any contact records that are deemed level 2 Single Agency Early Help Support, the referrer will be signposted to appropriate service provision within the community.

For contact records where a **red** or **amber** RAG has been applied, there will be oversight from a MASH Manager who will apply the initial RAG rating and provide management direction. The contact record will be assigned to a Social Worker and the screening process will commence. MASH screening will consider the presenting information; information held by respective agencies and involve professional discussion and multi-disciplinary analysis and decision-making. Where a **red** RAG rating has been applied, the screening social worker will make MASH partners aware and screening will take place within 4 hours, and a strategy meeting will be convened in that time frame if required.

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 the MASH manager who will also ensure any discussions that are held at the 'Daily Meeting' are clearly documented.

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.

MASH offer a consultation service to professionals whereby information and advice is provided.

## **6.1 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.

All staff located within the MASH will have access to Walsall Children's Services database, Mosaic. This will enable them to input their information, including historical information as relevant in relation to apparent patterns of behaviour, and provide an analysis of the importance of this information in relation to the referral.

Safeguarding Named Nurses within MASH collate health information proportionate to the concerns from a range of NHS providers locally including the GP if appropriate, and Black Country Partnership Foundation Trust.

In line with Walsall's Restorative Practice Approach, the MASH will use solution circles to aid decision making. Solution circles are a four-stage process for the focused discussion of problems and the formulation of ways in which to deal with them. Any member of the MASH can initiate a solution circle and they will sit with the support of the team to be heard and assisted in a non-judgemental way to find ways to progress the issue or concern. It is important for someone to facilitate the process to enable the clear demarcation of the separate steps and to stop any blurring from one into the other. This allows the team to come together, draw upon the strengths of a family, and concentrate on solution-focused outcomes.

The 'Daily Meeting' is held between Early Help and Social Care colleagues at 2pm. At these meetings, contact records that border between level 3 and level 4 threshold will be discussed. The Senior Family Support Advisor and a MASH Manager will be in attendance at these meetings and the discussion will centre

around threshold application, and what intervention will best meet the identified needs of the child, young person and family. This is considered the most appropriate arena to discuss all contact records where there may be a need to review the RAG, as further information is gathered during screening. The locality duty manager and specific MASH partners can also attend these daily meetings where required.

## **6.2 Outcomes**

The Early Help/MASH Process Map located in *Appendix A* outlines the outcomes in MASH.

## **7.0 Responding to Domestic Abuse**

### **7.1 Definition**

The Government have provided the following definition of domestic abuse as 'any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- Psychological
- Physical
- Sexual
- Financial
- Emotional'

### **7.2 Legal Requirements**

Section 11(2) of the Children's Act, 2004 requires Local Authorities and the Police to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children. This enactment provides the conditions required under schedule 2 (5b) and schedule 3 (7(1b/c)) of the Data Protection Act 1998 by which personal and sensitive personal data may be lawfully shared.

The Management of Police Information (MOPI) Code of Practice requires the police to obtain specific information when attending at domestic incidents. Personal data shared must be proportionate, necessary but not excessive, and must be balanced with the consideration of privacy rights under the Human Rights Act.

It must take into account any duty of confidentiality owed. A public interest in disclosure must outweigh an individual's right to privacy.

### **7.3 Domestic Abuse Triage**

The purpose of Domestic Abuse Triage (DA Triage) is to ensure that the right help/intervention at the right time is promoted to ensure all vulnerable children and young people, where domestic abuse is a feature, will have their needs appropriately responded to and that decision making around the threshold is a joint responsibility. The key objectives of the domestic abuse triage are outlined in the terms of reference in appendix B.

There is representation from across the partnership at DA Triage, as below:

- West Midlands Police – Police Constable
- Black Country Women's Aid – Independent Domestic Violence Advisor
- Education Welfare Officer
- Probation Service (PS)/Youth Justice Service (YJS) Representative
- Walsall Healthcare Trust - Named Nurse for Safeguarding Children
- Early Help – Senior Family Support Advisor
- Children's Social Care - MASH Social Worker

West Midlands Police send a daily list (Public Protection Unit Agenda) of crime reports for domestic abuse from the last 24-hour period via a secure email account by 6.30am each morning. Incidents that occur over a weekend or bank holiday will be received on a Monday morning. The list will only feature incidents where children reside in the household. Each member of the Domestic Abuse Triage will receive the daily list.

Business Support check all children on the list against the social care Mosaic system to identify if they are currently open and have an allocated Social Worker. If a child is open, a notification (via email and on Children's Services database) will be sent directly to the Social Worker and their Line Manager to alert them that there has been a domestic abuse incident. Information will be reviewed by the social worker and team manager and any required action taken. These children will not be discussed at Triage.

The Probation Service (PS) representative will conduct checks on all of the named victims and suspects prior to Triage, and alert the Offender Manager (PS or YJS) if they are active to their service.

DA Triage commences every morning at 9.30am and each crime report will be heard. The Police Constable will share the full circumstances of each incident with the group. The MASH Social Worker will have sight of Social Care database and share only relevant history pertaining to domestic abuse in order to aid decision-making. Collectively, the Triage members will apply threshold and contribute to the RAG decision. If any agency has information recorded on their respective database that may be a cause for concern, they highlight this and recommend a RAG according to risk. Full information will only be disclosed when the MASH contact has been created and consent is obtained for screening.

The Domestic Abuse Triage Flowchart can be found at *Appendix B*.

#### 7.4 Domestic Abuse Triage Outcomes

Police logs that are deemed very low level, where a child has not been on the premises or witness to the domestic abuse incident and there is no history, will not be progressed by MASH, and no action will be taken.

**Green RAG** - Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) support (level 2) - a MASH contact will be created following DA Triage and will be assigned to the IDVA. These contacts are deemed low level, where it is agreed that the named victim may benefit from Black Country Women's Aid support. The IDVA will make contact with the victim and offer appropriate support, advice and guidance. If a referral to Black Country Women's Aid is accepted, the IDVA will progress this accordingly. If there are any concerns that arise during screening, the IDVA will alert MASH managers so the RAG decision can be reviewed.

**Green RAG** - Early Help Partnership Support (Level 3) - if it is identified by DA Triage members that there are a multitude of complex needs for the family and threshold is applied at level 3, a contact record will be progressed by a Family Support Advisor.

**Amber RAG** - Social Care Response (Level 4) - any incidents that indicate a statutory response is required will be sent to the MASH and assigned to a Social Worker. Screening will commence when parental consent has been obtained by the screening social worker.

**Red RAG** - Social Care Response (Level 4) - Any incidents where there is a safeguarding concern for the child, such as if the child has intervened in the incident, been used as a shield or been injured during an incident, would be progressed as a child protection concern and received a **Red RAG** for full MASH

screening and preparation for strategy meeting. If this information is clear at point of police notification being received that there is a safeguarding concern for the child or young person, the MASH contact would be created immediately and would not await discussion at DA triage, to ensure that timely information sharing and decisions can be made in MASH to ensure the child's safety.

## **7.5 Operation Encompass**

Operation Encompass is a police and education early information sharing partnership, enabling schools to offer immediate support to children and young people experiencing domestic abuse.

The school will receive a confidential communication from the Operation Encompass Administrator before 10am on the morning after any domestic incident where a child at their school has been involved in, present or witness to domestic abuse. This will allow the school to provide appropriate early intervention and support in a timely manner. There will be designated Key Adults within the school whom have received training on what action should be taken following a notification. They can offer the child support silently or overtly and the Key Adult can use the information received to reach out to the parent about what support they feel they may need, which applies to all levels of harm relating to domestic abuse.

## **8.0 Missing and Exploitation**

The Missing and Exploitation Daily Triage is a process that runs parallel to MASH activity and brings together a range of practitioners who work in partnership to provide a clear, consistent and coordinated response to preventing, identifying and responding to children, young people and adults at risk of exploitation, trafficking and missing in Walsall. See *Appendix C* for the Exploitation Pathway.

## **9.0 Persons in a Position of Trust (POT)**

A contact record will be created in MASH where there has been an allegation of harm raised against a Person in a Position of Trust (POT). The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) will be alerted to the concern via their own referral process and communicate with the MASH Screening Social Worker. The LADO will be invited to attend all Strategy Meetings when the threshold for 'significant



harm' has been established and this will inform decision making within any subsequent POT meetings.

The LADO will provide information, advice and guidance on safeguarding matters relating to a child or children, which may result in a POT meeting if the LADO threshold is met or signpost settings to their own policy and procedures. The referral process for LADO can be located on [Walsall Safeguarding Partnership](#) website.

## **10.0 Governance Structures**

The MASH is a multi - agency team working together to safeguard children and young people in Walsall. Whilst there will be a strong culture of one team working together and individual agencies supporting each other when demand for managing calls / undertaking initial screening and assessments requires, it is important that team members continue to professionally challenge where appropriate perceived risk and response to referrals are based on healthy debate.

On those occasions when an assessment perceived risk does not receive unanimous agreement following MASH discussion or daily meeting, the final decision maker will be the Children's Social Care Team Manager located within the MASH.

Should any partner or team member feel that the assessment as determined by the team manager is an unsafe assessment the escalation process will be to the Walsall Children's Social Care Group Manager who will make the final determination. Respective agencies retain responsibility for ensuring their staff receive supervision, training and appraisal in accordance with the policies and procedures of their organisation.

To support the operational effectiveness of the MASH, there is a standing MASH Management Group. This group reports directly to the Walsall Children and Young People's Partnership Board and to other Boards as requested.

The MASH Management Group will meet bi-monthly and report to Walsall Safeguarding Partnership on a regular basis via the Safeguarding Partnership Operational Group and as requested to full Board. Membership of the MASH Management Group will comprise of Walsall Safeguarding Partnership members

and senior managers from all agencies either represented in or virtually connected to the MASH.

The MASH Management Group 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 Management Group 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 multi-agency qualitative work to support effective working of the team.

This group will be chaired by the Walsall Children Services Head of Help and Protection.

A MASH working Group is held monthly and attended by the line managers of the MASH partners. The working group gives opportunity to complete multi-agency audits and operational tasks set from the MASH Management Group.

MASH Team Members attend a monthly Unit Meeting. This meeting will include Social Care and MASH partner agencies. The Unit Meeting is chaired by the MASH Team Manager, or in their absence, the MASH Assistant Team Manager.

### **11.0 Information Sharing**

Information is shared amongst key partners within the MASH in line with the Safeguarding Partnership [Information Sharing Agreement](#) (ISA).

### **12.0 Review of Operating Principals**

These operating principles will be reviewed each time the core agencies located within the MASH change and on an annual basis.