



Croydon Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) Operation Protocol

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Status of this document:

This protocol outlines the purpose and remit of Croydon’s Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

This protocol sits in line with the Croydon Safeguarding Children’s Partnership (CSCP) [Information Sharing Policy](#) which defines the purposes for which professional agencies have agreed to share information and the legal basis under which information sharing takes place.

This document, and any changes to it, is overseen and endorsed by Croydon’s MASH Operational Group, which reports to the CSCP Executive Group (the Strategic MASH)

This document should be read in conjunction with:

- MASH Operational Group Terms of Reference.
- The Pan-London Threshold Document.
- London Multi-Agency Safeguarding Data Sharing Agreement.
- London Child Protection Procedures.

1. Introduction:

Intelligence led safeguarding can only occur if multiple organisations and agencies who hold knowledge (information and intelligence) about individuals, children and families share this (within the law) and effectively communicate with each other at the earliest stage when harm or risk is identified, considered, or suspected.

Where organisations who hold the various pieces of information can work in close partnership to consider concerns about children and adults as soon as they are first raised, then need, harm and risk can be identified much earlier. This early identification can then inform intervention and preventative strategies.

Sharing information to support decision making is appropriate to all levels of need, harm, and risk, not just the highest. In fact, it is fair to say that it is the lower levels of need, harm, and risk, for instance where children may be suffering neglect, that are among the hardest to identify and understand. These lower-risk cases can benefit enormously from information sharing at an early stage to build a picture of the child's history, current circumstances, support systems, needs, and risks so that proportionate and timely decisions can be made about the type and level of services, ensuring that children receive the right help first time.

Working Together To Safeguard Children 2023 states that no single practitioner can have a full picture of a child's needs and circumstances so effective sharing of information between practitioners, local organisations and agencies is essential for early identification of need, assessment, and service provision to keep children safe. Rapid reviews and child safeguarding 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 children.

The Children Acts 1989 and 2004 (amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017) sets out specific duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area with specific duties to provide services to them if they are in need and to undertake enquiries if they believe a child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm. The Children Act placed a duty on the local authority to promote co-operation with partners and other agencies to improve the wellbeing of children in their area. It also placed duties on a range of organisations and individuals to ensure they too give sufficient regard to children in need of help and safeguarding.

As statutory safeguarding partners, the Police, Integrated Children's Boards (ICBs) and the Local Authority, are under a duty to make arrangements to work together and with other partners, including education providers and childcare settings, to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area.

Croydon MASH acts a single 'front door' for children in need of additional support and/or protection. Croydon's MASH is a partnership of professionals from a range of agencies including the police, health, education, children's social care, and other partners who work together to share and analyse information held on multiple client data systems.

This document is intended for use by all staff working in the MASH and those outside of MASH to understand it's remit. The protocol aims to ensure that managers and staff in the MASH have a clear understanding of the MASH workflow, information sharing and multi-agency working.

2. Aims and Objectives

Croydon MASH aims to ensure that:

- All safeguarding referrals are dealt with in a timely and effective manner to ensure the immediate protection of children.
- Decisions are timely, sound and based on high quality, multi-agency information sharing arrangements.
- All agencies have the ability and skill set to share information safely and securely.
- Risk is identified through robust analysis of a wide range of historical and current information and concerns.
- Children, young people, and their families are referred to the right services first time and as early in the life of the need as possible.
- Professional agencies working with children and their families have access to information that is proportionate and relevant to their involvement in a child's life.
- Allocation of resources for children and families is timely, coherent, and transparent.
- Professionals/Practitioners have rapid access to qualified and experienced social work professionals for safeguarding advice, information, and guidance on access to local resources.
- MASH is well understood and accessible to those that need it.
- Our partnership arrangements are continually reviewed and built upon to improve access and promote seamless delivery throughout the borough.

Aspiration:

To reduce communication points to the MASH and ensure they are effective e.g:

- MASH partners use the Portal to share information for checks/MASH assessments, and not rely upon the use emails to request/share information,
- the Portal functions with ease for public and professionals making referrals and requests for information,
- the MASH line is used for MASH enquiries and not for general enquiries for the whole of children's services in Croydon,
- there is a generic email for enquiries to Children's Services for partners to use, or there is larger resource allocated specifically to manage email enquiries to MASH/CSC.

MASH to be accessible - How can this be supported for people who have differing needs such as non-English readers, sight impaired, etc?

3. Understanding need, harm, and risk

Levels of need, harm and risk can vary depending on the circumstances and context of the child, young person, or family. Need, harm, and risk also alter, sometimes rapidly, as circumstances change.

To protect children or to provide support firstly requires the authorities charged with delivering the services to be able to see the need, harm, or risk as early as possible. They need to assess it as best they can and, based on this understanding, make the best decision they can concerning support as well as prevention, diversion, or intervention. This understanding of the need, harm, and risk can be used to make proportionate decisions concerning the levels of prevention and intervention.

In simplified terms, the law and professional practice at present describes various levels of need, harm, and risk in two distinct ways:

1. Harm and risk that require a statutory response, commonly referred to as 'being above the threshold' (referring to a statutory threshold above which a local authority is required to intervene through social work practice) and,
2. Need, harm and risk that falls below this threshold.

Working Together (2023) states:

The safeguarding partners should publish a [threshold document](#), which sets out the local criteria for action in a way that is transparent, accessible, and easily understood. This should include:

- the process for early help assessments, and the type and level of early help and targeted early help services to be provided under sections 10 and 11 of the Children Act 2004
- the criteria, including the level of need, for when a case should be referred to local authority children's social care for assessment and for statutory services under:
 - section 17 of the Children Act 1989 (children in need, including how this applies for disabled children)
 - section 47 of the Children Act 1989 (reasonable cause to suspect a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm)
 - section 31 of the Children Act 1989 (care and supervision orders)
 - section 20 of the Children Act 1989 (duty to accommodate a child)
- clear procedures and processes for cases relating to:
 - the abuse, neglect, and exploitation of children
 - children managed within the youth secure estate
 - disabled children

All children and young people resident within England and Wales are entitled to the range of services that sit on a continuum, including universal services, targeted services for vulnerable children, and safeguarding and specialist services if their needs are assessed as being complex or acute.

The levels identified are:

Universal: Level 1 - An Early Help intervention led by the most appropriate agency in the community (most often by the original referring agency).

Universal Plus: Level 2 - An intervention from the Early Help Service

Targeted support: Level 3 - A Child in Need Assessment

Specialist/ Acute: Level 4 - A Child Protection Strategy Meeting

To provide the appropriate intervention or support, it is critical to establish whether cases are below or above the threshold. On occasions, the decision will be to use a statutory power to ensure services are provided for children sometimes without the consent and agreement of the individual or, if appropriate, the parents. These decisions are therefore hugely important and should be based on the best information available at the time.

These decisions, which due to their legal standing can be challenged in court, need to be recorded with both the reasons and rationale as well as the information underpinning them.

Cases for children and young people that do not require the statutory intervention of the local authority may attract support and interventions with the consent of the individual or family, from a wide range of different organisations and services.

This early intervention for children and young people is known as Early Help. For this support and challenge to be enabled the children and families need to be identified as early as possible.

It is this initial sharing and communication that is the starting point for all services to help identify need, harm and risk. This identification and understanding of need, harm and risk underpins the decision as to which diversion, prevention or intervention services or actions should be delivered in support of vulnerable people and families.

4. Information sharing and confidentiality

Information sharing and the law

There are many pieces of legislation in England and Wales that provide legal justification for the sharing of personal information.

In respect of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, the relevant acts of Parliament are:

- [The Data Protection Act \(2018\)](#)
- [The Children Act \(1989\)](#)
- [The Children Act 2004](#) (as amended by the Social Work Act 2017)
- [Keeping Children Safe in Education 2023](#)
- [Information Sharing Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services for children, young people, parents and carers \(May 2024\)](#)

The [Caldicott Principles](#) and [Golden Rules of Information Sharing](#) provide a common framework for understanding information sharing arrangements:

- All professionals must understand their responsibilities in relation to data protection legislation, **which is not a barrier to sharing information** but a framework to ensure that personal information about living persons is used and shared appropriately.
- **Information sharing must be necessary, proportionate, relevant, 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 people who need to have it, is accurate and up to- date, is shared in a timely fashion, and is shared securely. Access to personal information should be on a need-to-know basis.
- **Be open and honest** with the person who is the subject of the information (children/young people and their families) from the outset about why, what, how and with whom information will or could be shared and have clear privacy notices for our work on our forms.
- **Seek advice from the Data Protection Officer/Information Governance team** if you are unsure.
- **Be accountable by keeping a record of your decision to share 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.

Necessity, proportionality, and relevance

Once a professional has considered the legality of sharing a person's personal information and decided about the matter of consent, they need to consider three further tests before they share any personal information with another professional or organisation.

Some professionals find it useful to remember this as the NP&R test. It is vital all three tests are considered, not either or.

N – the amount and type of information shared should only be that **necessary** to achieve the lawful aim.

P – information is always to be considered in terms of its **proportionality** in each set of circumstances, but it must always be remembered that the right to life is paramount.

R – only **relevant** information should be shared. This should be decided on a case-by-case basis.

The Criminal Procedures Investigations Act 1996 (CPIA)

All partners must ensure that they are mindful of the requirements of the Criminal Procedures Investigation Act 1996 (CPIA) in relation to the disclosure of information. Permission must be sought to share or store the information outside of the MASH.

The Data Protection Act (2018), Duty of confidence

All partners must ensure that information held may have been gathered where a duty of confidence is owed to both the holder of the information and to the person subject of that information (i.e. The common law presumption that certain information will be confidential). However, duty of confidence is not an absolute bar to disclosure, as information can be shared where consent has been provided or where there is a strong enough public interest to do so.

The Data Protection Act (2018) identifies:

“processing of personal data that is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of the controller's official authority includes processing of personal data that is necessary for the administration of justice.”

While a professional should always ensure they consider the proportionality and necessity of sharing any item of personal information, doing so for the protection of children or other vulnerable persons clearly fulfils the public interest test.

All information shared with a partner agency must also be relevant to the concern under review.

All partner agencies agree that:

- Sharing information within the MASH takes place where relevant and necessary.
- Information should not be shared outside the MASH except as agreed for the purpose of referring a family on for services and interventions.
- Must be used only for the purposes of safeguarding children and improving their wellbeing.
- Should only be passed on to third parties with the permission of the agency who provided the information.

5. Consent

The starting point for any sharing of information is that practitioners should be open and honest with individuals and families from the outset about why, what, how and with whom information will or could be shared.

Consent should be obtained from a person who is legally competent to do so. The Data Protection Act 2018 together with the GDPR identifies that a child of 16 years and over can consent to their information being shared.

The local authority is responsible for clarifying that the partnership has received consent for relevant cases before any action is decided.

Children and young people

In most circumstances for those under 16, specific consent must come from a parent who holds parental responsibility or a carer who has obtained this from a court. There should be consideration about whether there is capacity to consent for 16-18 years olds as per the [Mental Capacity Act 2005](#).

Consent should not be a barrier to sharing information where an agency believes there is a safeguarding response required or to promote the welfare of a child provided that there is a lawful basis to process any personal information required as detailed in Working Together 2023.

It is good practice to seek consent from the parent/carer before any referral is made to the local authority.

There are however a few exceptions in the following circumstances:

Police referrals and notifications -

Police referrals and notifications are made on the basis that there is a considered need for a safeguarding response or to promote the welfare of a child.

Where there are child protection concerns -

- When suspected that if attempts are made to seek consent this will place the child at risk of significant harm the referrer must stipulate safeguarding concerns in writing and indicate the escalation of need, risk, or harm to the child for a decision to be made to override consent based on the concerns raised.
- When the referrer has sought consent, and the parent has refused permission – if this is the case and the referrer believes that by not referring the concerns and it is likely to escalate and may place the child at risk of significant harm/potential harm the referrer must consider and record the overriding of consent.
- If the rationale for a refusal to consent is unclear to the local authority, the case should be immediately discussed with the referrer and a decision should be made as to whether to proceed or not.
- Decisions to overrule consent must be recorded and clarified based on safeguarding concerns.
- Where it is believed the aims of the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children might be compromised if agencies were to seek consent, the disclosing agency must consider and record the grounds to override consent.

If there is a significant change in the way the information is to be used at any time, or a change in the relationship between the agency and the individual, consent should be sought again. It is also important to remember that individuals have a right to withdraw or limit consent at any time.

6. The Team

Croydon MASH is situated within Children's Social Care structures and is supported by a partnership of co-located agencies. Other partners support the MASH through virtual support and access to information.

Agency	Resource & Role	Email	Aspiration	Agency Database
Children's Social Care & Early Help Service	<p>x1 Head of Service x1 Service Manager of MASH & EDT</p> <p>x6 TM's</p> <p>x15 Advanced Social Workers x1 Senior Social Practitioner</p> <p>x1 Lead Contact & Referral Officer x8 Contact & Referral Officers x1.5 IDVA's x5 Senior Early Help Navigators</p> <p>x1 FT Young Croydon Consultant Practitioner (on rotation between the YC Consultant Practitioners). They support MASH Social Workers & Manager's when completing initial exploitation screening.</p>	mash@croydon.gov.uk	<p>IDVA posts are at present funded by Public Health and the contract ends at the end of November. CSC reviewing the sustainability of these roles.</p> <p>IDVA based with Early Help Triage – enhancement of the interface with FJS.</p> <p>There are a number of roles within CSC that are additional resources at present. Maintaining these roles for the longer term is yet to be decided upon.</p>	Liquid Logic (EHM & CRS)
Police Co-Located in the MASH	<p>MASH Police</p> <p>CAIT Police</p> <p>The below staff cover three LA's (Croydon, Sutton, & Bromley).</p> <p>Police Sergeants x 3 Police Constables x 12 Researchers x 9</p>	<p>SNMailbox-SafeguardingMashReferralsCroydon@met.police.uk</p> <p>SNMailbox-PublicProtectionReferrals@met.police.uk</p>	HMIC requirements to be resolved with the MASH Operational Group.	<p>Connect IIP PND</p> <p>Croydon CSC have provided Police with 2 laptops to enable progression of workflow.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review new notifications and check EHM/CRS to ascertain if the child/family are currently open to current CSC involvement. - Ensure all new notifications are assigned a Priority Status for research. - Share missing reports. - Where child has an allocated social worker, reports are shared without research completed. - Ensure all remaining vulnerable person to notice reports are risk assessed and level of risk is shown using the children's threshold document. - Ensure where a crime identified within the notification that an investigation report exists for the incident. - Research, interpret & determine what information is proportionate and relevant to share. - Complete risk assessments & provide initial analysis of the risk areas identified during research. - E-mail reports that reach Levels 2, 3 or 4 to Children's Service and ensure that Level 1 reports are completed and 'Put Away'. - For MASH enquiries, check risk level and ensure research is completed within the timescale set. 			
<p>Health Satellite Partner</p>	<p>Safeguarding Children (SGC) Advisor (band 7 - 1 full whole time equivalent, 37.5 hours).</p> <p>1. The advisors work as part of a multi-agency integrated team assessing notifications and referrals regarding children aged 0-18 that are received by MASH.</p>	<p>ch-tr.mash@nhs.net</p> <p>ch-tr.safeguardingchildren@nhs.net</p> <p>ch-tr.safeguardingmaternity@nhs.net</p>		<p>Cerner and EMIS</p>

	<p>2. As part of the MASH process the SGC advisors search for and collate health information from a range of NHS providers locally with due regard to patient confidentiality, the MASH health professional will interpret, analyse and share information that is necessary to safeguard and/or promote the welfare of a child.</p> <p>3. SGC advisors attend strategy meetings ahead of which they complete health research and contribute to the decision-making process as to whether the threshold has been met for section 47 investigation.</p> <p>4. The SGC advisors will participate in MASH case discussion to support decision making in the best interest of the child.</p> <p>5. The SGC advisors will manage the MASH Health email box where request for health information is sent from the MASH.</p>			
<p>CAMHS</p> <p>Satellite Partner</p>		croydoncamhsmail@slam.nhs.uk	<p>To have a consistent agency representative for MASH.</p>	
<p>SLaM</p> <p>Adult Mental Health Services</p> <p>Satellite Partner</p>	<p>No formal link with MASH.</p> <p>2 Safeguarding Leads manage contacts from MASH (this is alongside advising on safeguarding across SLaM and providing safeguarding supervision to staff in the trust).</p> <p>Key tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide intelligence for threshold decisions. - Link social care staff with SLaM staff. 	safeguardingadmin@slamnhs.uk	<p>Work is being undertaken to establish a SLA between SLaM and MASH to define the expectations between the services.</p> <p>Police would benefit from viewing access to Adult Mental Health Services systems to expedite information sharing for the benefit of the partnership.</p>	<p>EPJS</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide information for strategy discussions. - Release information for Care proceedings. 			
<p>Education</p> <p>1day co-located in the MASH.</p> <p>1 day in Education.</p> <p>3 days WFH or school based.</p>	<p>1x full time MASH Education monitoring officer (Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm).</p> <p>1x Education safeguarding lead who has oversight and is a point of contact for advice on education safeguarding concerns.</p> <p>Cover of the MASH Education mailbox if the officer is unwell or on annual leave.</p> <p>Role of the MASH Education Officer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete welfare checks with nursery, school or post 16 provisions on behalf of the social worker and within expected RAG rated timescales, - Explore family compositions, gather addresses, and phone numbers where information is missing from referrals. - Provide school safeguarding lead contact details for social worker contacts and strategy discussion invites. - Point of contact for schools to check progress of referrals, updates on social worker contact details or status of a case. <p>Role of the Education Safeguarding Lead</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Oversight of the work of the MASH Education Officer. - Quality assure referrals from education providers and analysis of data - Point of contact for schools to seek advice on concerns they have. - Available for social worker consultation on education matters ad-hoc. 	<p>mash.education@croydon.gov.uk</p> <p>missingmonday@croydon.gov.uk</p> <p>Exclusions@croydon.gov.uk</p>		
<p>Probation</p>	<p>No staff are co-located</p>	<p>LondonPS.Croydon.Safeguarding@justice.gov.uk</p>	<p>This arrangement is in its early stages of implementation and the</p>	

Satellite Partner	<p>x1 Senior Probation Officer SPOC – who attends operational meetings and is the lead for Safeguarding in the PDU</p> <p>x1 Probation Officer SPOC – attends MASH meetings, provides information as necessary.</p> <p>X1 Administrator (central) resource who will deal with initial enquiries.</p>		specific arrangements and start date are being confirmed.	
Housing	<p>Give housing advice and updates on housing interventions.</p> <p>There is a Housing representative located in MASH that provides housing advice checks from their systems about housing interventions.</p> <p>Current Housing interface with MASH to be confirmed for short- and longer-term permanent arrangements. This is being followed up by MASH Head of Service who informed there is a commitment from Housing.</p>	<p>HSG-HousingNeeds&AssessmentsReferrals@croydon.gov.uk</p>	<p>For there to be a permanent Housing representative.</p> <p>For the MASH Housing representative to have read access to Children's Services systems to enable working together for families.</p>	
Change, Grow, Live Substance Misuse Service	<p>No current link or interface with MASH.</p> <p>Initial contact has been established between SM for MASH & CGL and further plan for regular meetings or interface between the two services to be agreed.</p>	<p>croydon.info@cgl.org.uk</p>	<p>CGL and CSC wish to establish a link between the services.</p> <p>Julie Daley advised a post is in development with Public Health to interface with CSC overall – to be confirmed.</p>	
Family Justice Service Domestic Abuse Service	<p>The Family Justice Service do not currently have any of their team co-located within the MASH.</p> <p>FJS do not have oversight of the work undertaken by the current IDVA's in MASH.</p>	<p>fjs@croydon.gov.uk</p>	<p>Interface between FJS and MASH to be enhanced.</p>	
LADO	<p>1.6 FTE LADO x1 Business Support Officer.</p>	<p>LADO@croydon.gov.uk</p>		CRS for referrals

Satellite Partner	Provides information to MASH regarding referrals regarding adults and what actions taken by employers, including if S.47 warranted or if LADO processes are more appropriate. These duties are undertaken alongside other LADO duties.			and standalone spreadsheet for consultations
Youth Justice Services	There is not a specific link or dedicated role in MASH.	croydonyos@croydon.gov.uk	Emma Carter agreeable to re-visiting the weekly presence of a TM from YJS, Turnaround and Engage as this was previous arrangement but recently 'dropped off'.	Core+
Satellite Partner	YJS receive Merlin's/Radars and check to see if children are open or not and/or to refer into prevention programmes Turnaround, CLIP and Engage.			
Adult Services	AEISS@croydon.gov.uk Adult Social Care do not have a dedicated resource in the MASH at present. There are effective working relationships between the MASH and key teams in Adult Social Care, in particular the Adult Early Intervention and Support Service and the s42 Care Act Adult Safeguarding Enquiries team.		To review the interface between the MASH and Adult Social Care and identify whether there are any improvements to be made. To consider the feasibility of having a MASH-type arrangement in place for referrals to Croydon Council Adult Social Care. This would include consideration of the impact on MASH partners who work with both children and adults.	

Aspiration:

Should Croydon's MASH be in a separate and secure location that is only for MASH colleagues from each partner agency? Building Review underway to see if an alternative location should be considered.

7. How to contact Croydon MASH

Referrals or requests for advice can be made:

- Online via [Croydon Access Portal](#)
- Calling the MASH Line 0208 255 2888 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)
- After 5pm and at weekends contacting the Out of Hours Emergency Duty Team by phone on 0208 726 6400.

8. How Croydon MASH works

The term 'contact' is used to describe information that is received in the MASH. A contact can be police reports, EDT reports, notifications, or referrals from members of the public or professionals who want to report a concern about a child's welfare, development or safety.

The MASH has 4 core responsibilities:

1. Log, screen and process all contacts received into the MASH for decision making.
2. Research, gather, provide and analyse information to enable appropriate decision making.
3. Make a decision within 1 working day, or more quickly if needed, on the outcome of the contact.
4. Provide advice and guidance to professionals and members of the public.

Contacts and Referrals

Usually contacts to the MASH are made online using the [Portal](#) on the Croydon Council website. Currently Kings and large tertiary hospitals, LAS and 111 are not required to use the portal. The Police also do not use the Portal and contacts from them will be from their RADARs.

The MASH referral form is not required in one of the situations below:

- Referrals requiring an immediate safeguarding response (professionals will be required to complete the MASH referral form within 24 hours of making contact with the service).
- Notifications or enquiries from the police Safeguarding Investigation Unit (SIU).
- Legal notifications or instructions from solicitors or the court.

Managing Contacts and Referrals

MASH Team Managers provide initial screening of all contacts received into the MASH.

The screening process filters information requests, requests for early help and contacts that are requesting a safeguarding referral. The Team Manager will either outcome a contact or if felt that further work needs to be undertaken, they will give each contact a priority rating.

- If the contact is about a child who is currently allocated to a social worker the information will be sent to the relevant team for the contact to be uploaded on the child's records in CRS and the allocated social worker and practice manager will be alerted within 24 hours.
- If the contact is about a child that is not known to the council and does not have a record on the system, a file will be created as a new contact and linked to any other family members by the Contact & Referral Officer.
- If the contact is about a child who is known to the council but is not currently receiving services, the contact information will be loaded onto the child's file.
- If a contact is an allegation against a professional or volunteer working with children, the above criteria apply, and the contact must also be forwarded to the LADO.

Decision Making and Rag Rating of Contacts

Croydon MASH is trialling a "Triage Meeting" this meeting takes place at the same agreed time, several times a week to enable rapid, multi-agency "mashing" of information known to ascertain risk and relevant response.

The 'Decision Maker' for all contacts received into the Croydon MASH are the MASH Team Managers. The Decision Maker will review all contact records to establish the level of need. Key information will be passed to the statutory partners within the MASH for further analysis.

The Decision Maker must make a decision **within 1 working day** as to what needs to happen next and record the outcome.

All contacts that require further information via the MASH process will be given **an initial RAG** (Red, Amber, Green) rating which will provide a framework for prioritizing agency checks, decisions and actions.

MASH partners, including Children Social Care will gather information about a family using their own individual electronic agency database systems and pass this information back to the Decision Maker with their agency RAG rating. It is expected that the MASH social worker will analyse the information provided by the multi-agency and provide a recommendation to the Decision Maker.

The Decision Maker will consider the contributions, advice, guidance and expertise available within the partnership and will make a final decision. This management oversight will be clearly recorded on the contact record.

RAG Rating	Priority	Action & Timescales	Decision to
Red	High	<p>Immediate – Within 4 hours:</p> <p>Contacts rated as Red could be passed directly to Children’s Social Care without having MASH checks undertaken to avoid delay where significant risk is considered, however some ragged as Red will have MASH checks undertaken for a statutory Child & Family Assessment of risk and need to be undertaken or a strategy discussion.</p>	<p>Progress to a Child & Family Assessment</p> <p>and/or</p> <p>Strategy Discussion/S47 investigation</p>
Amber	Medium High	<p>Within 24 Hours post initial decision:</p> <p>Contacts rated as Amber may require further agency checks to gather historical and current information. The Decision Maker may ask a Social Worker to speak with the young person (when appropriate) or parent(s) to gather or clarify further information.</p>	<p>MASH for further information to decide whether the contact should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Progress to a Child & Family Assessment - Progress to Early Help - Progress to Universal Early Help. - No further action
Green	Medium Low	<p>Within 48 hours post initial decision:</p> <p>Contacts rated as Green may require a level 1 or 2 response. The Decision Maker may ask an Early Help Navigator to speak with the young person (when appropriate) or parent(s) to gather or clarify further information.</p>	<p>MASH for further information to decide whether the contact should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Progress to a Child & Family Assessment. - Progress to Early Help - Progress to Universal Early Help. - No further action

Aspiration:

For MASH to have a generic email with scripts for all possible outcomes that they can provide as feedback to referrers.

Final decisions must be fed back to the referrer as soon as practicably possible and no later than 1 working day after a decision has been made to ensure that referrers are aware of allocations and next steps, including rationale for NFA (no further action) decisions. The outcome will be provided by the allocated MASH Practitioner directly to the referrer.

9. Early Help Service

If a MASH contact identifies that the presenting need of a child meets threshold for Early Help the contact will be progressed as such. This is allocated to the Early Help Triage Team to analyse the information, contact the family and gain consent for checks, then a decision is made about navigating the right pathway to Early Help, which may include Universal Early Help, Family Hubs, and/or targeted Early Help with the Family Solutions Service.

There is a distinction between targeted Early Help services within the LA and Universal Early Help Services which will be considered when making recommendations. Where families are agreeable, a referral can be made, or families will be provided information and signposted to community services.

Croydon has many services and groups that can help children and families with various needs. The [Croydon Early Help Directory](#) provides information from a wide range of voluntary, community, and faith organisations who can also offer support and advice.

10. Referring allegations against professionals to the LADO

A referral to the LADO should be made in all cases where it is believed that a person who works with children has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child
- Behaved towards a child in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children

When a referral regarding an allegation is received by the MASH, unless a child is at risk of immediate harm, the referral should be passed to the LADO via the LADO email LADO@croydon.gov.uk .

11. Data Access, Recording and Retention

System and information access

- No agency will have access to the others' databases. Co-located agencies needing access to their originating agency databases will do so separately from the council's IT infrastructure to ensure the integrity and security of the system and data.
- Staff from all MASH agencies must comply with their respective agency's information security policies e.g. use of passwords, locking computers when away from desks etc.
- Each agency will provide requested information to the Decision Maker through a written summary by email which is then recorded on EHM (Liquid Logic).

Aspiration:

Each partner agency will have individual, dedicated lines and routers into the building that allow access to their systems.

Core MASH partners working on the same recording system. Consider exploring whether this has been achieved by other LA's and how to see if this is possible for Croydon's MASH?

Information and recording

The child's unique identifier is the Children Social Care database ID number. When seeking information from partner agencies personal details are used as identifiers.

All information gathered in from the initial contact and assessment process will be summarised with a clear rationale for decisions made. This will be recorded on EHM.

Retentions

- MASH records on EHM will be retained in line with local authority file retention policies.
- Staff from MASH agencies will follow their agency's policies for information held on their Systems.

12. Training

- MASH partners are responsible for training their own staff on appropriate information handling and data protection.
- Training on MASH procedures and systems will be provided by the council for all representatives of MASH partner agencies.

13. Statistics and Reporting

The following information is routinely collected, monitored, and analysed:

- Volume of contacts to MASH
- Referral source
- Referral outcome
- Referrals that progress to assessment
- Contacts that progress to Early Help
- Re-referral rate
- Timeliness of initial decision making and completion of contacts.

Aspiration:

For there to be agreement and confirmation that each partner agency collates and monitors this information, the regularity of this information being viewed, and in which forum it is shared and overseen to enable the MASH progress and development when responding to the needs of children, young people and their families.

14. Quality Assurance

Multi-agency audits will be undertaken on a regular basis (via the MASH operational group) to measure the quality and effectiveness of the partnership responses to contacts received in the MASH.

The multi-agency audits will review:

- Application and understanding of thresholds
- Quality and timeliness of decision making
- Quality and timeliness of information shared in the MASH
- Effectiveness of multi-agency working
- Outcomes achieved for children
- What good looks like for children

Reports on the quality and effectiveness of the MASH partnership will be provided to the Croydon Safeguarding Children Partnership (CSCP).

Children Social Care Quality and Assurance Service will also partake in 2 days of unannounced audits per month through 'live auditing' of MASH decision making. These audits will be undertaken in line with the Quality Assurance Framework.

15. Resolving disagreements

In the event of any disagreements arising between partner agencies relating to MASH operations or decision-making, this will be dealt with, in the first instance, at local level through discussion with relevant partner agencies and managers. Agencies may also escalate issues within their own organisation when local resolution cannot be achieved.

Where a resolution cannot be achieved within a reasonable timescale, it should be escalated to the MASH Service Lead. For further information please refer to the Croydon Safeguarding Children's Partnership Resolution protocol.

Croydon Children's Social Care welcome feedback from professionals so we can continually build on what we do well, learn from our mistakes and improve our services. Compliments and Complaints can be registered [here](#) or sent to complaints@croydon.gov.uk.

16. Updating this Protocol

This Protocol will be reviewed every year, or where changes in legislation or practices occur. The MASH Strategic Group (QIG) will decide what updates are required and will make recommended changes.

The overarching governance is by the CSCP Quality Improvement Group for document, version control and quality assurance and to ensure timely uploading to Tri.X following approval.

The Croydon Safeguarding Children’s Partnership (CSCP) and Practice Improvement Service (from Children’s Social Care’s Quality and Assurance Service) will ensure that amendments and updates to the previous version is decommissioned, and the new approved update will go on the document register.

The list of MASH Operational Group Members is in the Terms of Reference.

Other useful [guidance and resources](#) for partner agencies can be found on the CSCP Website and the [Croydon Early Help Directory](#).

17. Flowchart of process and timelines

