

MERTON COUNCIL

MASH

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub Guide for Professionals

www.merton.gov.uk/



What is the MASH?

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is the single point of contact for all safeguarding concerns regarding children and young people in Merton. It brings together expert professionals, called “navigators”, from services that have contact with children, young people and families, making the best possible use of their combined knowledge to keep children safe from harm.

What does the MASH do?

The MASH:

- Is the 'front door' to manage children's social care referrals.
- Researches information held on professional databases.
- Provides a secure and confidential environment for professionals to share information.
- Identifies low-level repeat referrals which taken in isolation may not appear concerning.
- Prioritises referrals using a BRAG (Blue/Red/Amber/Green) rating (see opposite).
- Refers families to other agencies.
- Can activate 'first response' social work services to provide immediate protection for a child.

BRAG ratings

- **Red:** There is a potential child protection issue (e.g. serious injury to the child).
Requires immediate action, and information from MASH navigators is expected within 2 hours.
- **Amber:** There are significant concerns but immediate action is not required (e.g. ongoing domestic violence issues in the household).
Requires information from MASH navigators within 6 hours.
- **Green:** There are concerns regarding a child's wellbeing but these do not meet statutory requirements (e.g. poor school attendance).
Requires information from selected MASH navigators within 24 hours.
- **Blue:** There is no safeguarding concern and the issue can be dealt with by a Universal service.

How does the MASH process work?

When the MASH receives a contact, the MASH screening officers first check if the child already has a social worker. If there is an allocated social worker, they are considered to be the best person to support the child, so the family is referred directly to them.

If there is no social worker, then the MASH screening officers assess the level of risk. The MASH manager confirms the risk level with a BRAG rating.

If the rating is Blue then the contact is directed to a Universal service, or closed with no further action.

If it is Amber or Green, the contact is passed to the MASH navigators.

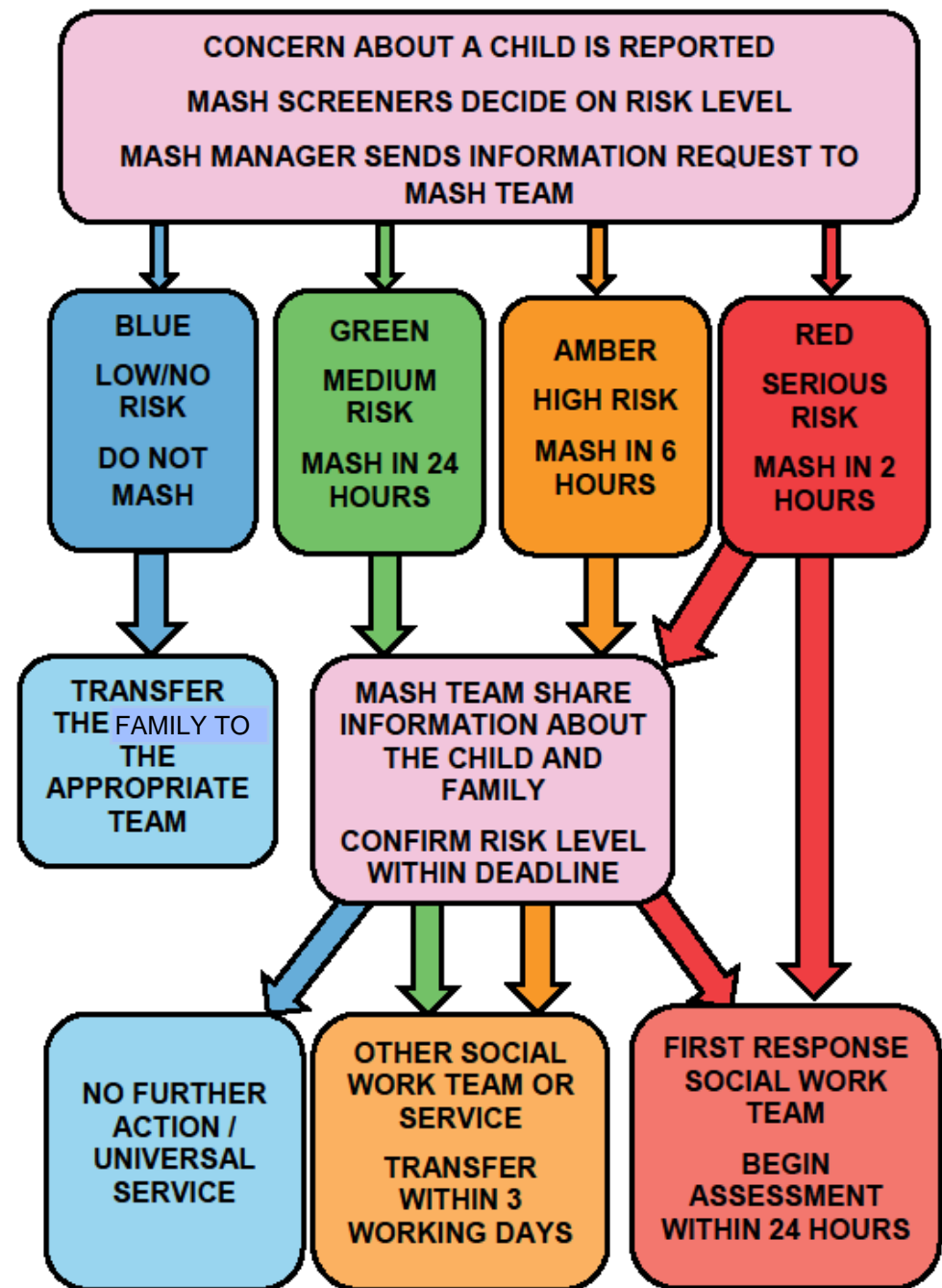
If it is Red, the contact is passed to both the MASH navigators and the First Response team at the same time, so they can start an assessment immediately.

Next, the navigators research and share information about the child. The MASH manager may change the BRAG rating as new information comes to light.

The MASH manager uses the collected information to decide the best response to meet the child's needs. The manager may:

- Refer the family to the First Response team (or leave it with them, if they've already started their assessment);
- Refer the family to another social work team, a multi-disciplinary team, or a Universal service; or
- Close the case with no further action.

The service that receives the case will receive a summary of any appropriate information gathered by the MASH.



Who is in the MASH?

The MASH is composed of staff from different teams and partner agencies. Children's Social Care staff are managed and supervised by the Team Manager. MASH navigators are supervised by their own agencies, and the Team Manager coordinates them within the MASH.

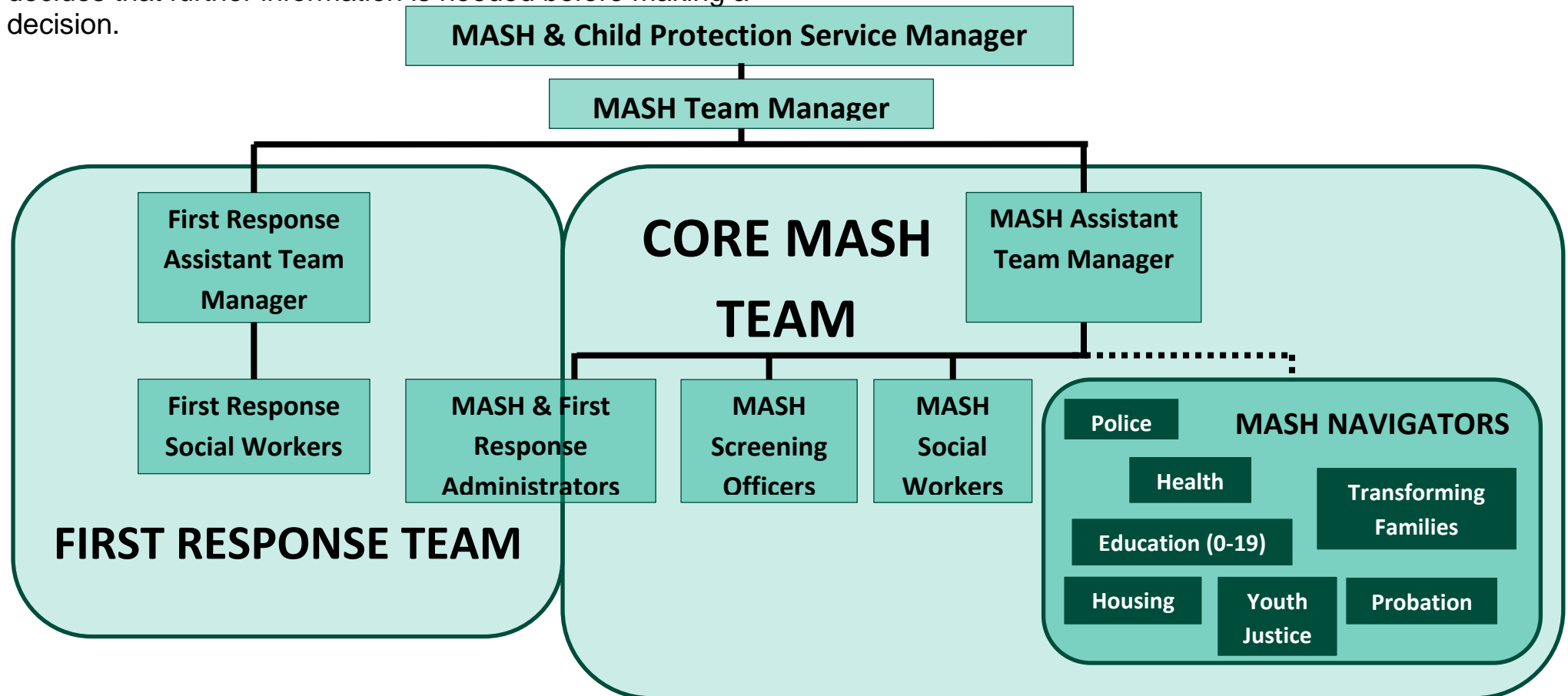
The First Response Team sits with the MASH team. Their role is to carry out assessments where there is an urgent child protection issue or where the MASH Manager decides that further information is needed before making a decision.

Core partners

- Children's Social Care
- Police
- Health
- Education

Additional partners

- Probation
- Youth Justice
- Housing



When to make an enquiry

Enquiries should be made when your assessment has identified needs which can only be met through Enhanced Services at upper Level 2 or Specialist Services at level 3 of the Merton Wellbeing Model.

The Merton Wellbeing Model can be found at www.merton.gov.uk/mwbm.htm

You can talk about your decision with social care professionals based in the MASH and any decision reached should be clearly recorded by the agencies involved.

Before making a MASH enquiry

Before making a MASH enquiry you need to consider if the child or young person's needs can be met by services from within your own agency, or by other professionals already involved with the family.

We know that it is sometimes difficult to decide the appropriate point of intervention. To help you to determine levels of need when making your own assessment, please refer to the multi-agency additional needs descriptors at www.merton.gov.uk/mwbm-additional-needs-indicators.

You can always contact the MASH team for advice on completion of the Child Protection Referral Form or the Common and Shared Assessment (CASA)

Before making an enquiry you should always get the consent of the parents or carers, except where a child is considered to be at risk of harm and you believe that seeking parental consent may increase this risk.

How to make an enquiry

Urgent referrals relating to Child Protection

If you believe that urgent action is needed because, for example, a child is in immediate danger or needs accommodation (upper Level 3 of the Merton Wellbeing Model), phone the MASH on **020 8545 4226** or **020 8545 4227** (Out of hours: **020 8770 5000**).

Your call will be passed immediately to the manager who will make a decision on the risk level and acknowledge this with you within one hour. You must follow up your telephone call by sending a completed Child Protection Referral form to the MASH within 24 hours.

Other Child Protection concerns

If you have a Child Protection concern but urgent and action is not needed (lower Level 3 of the Merton Wellbeing Model), you must complete a Child Protection Referral form in as much detail as possible and send it to the MASH at mash@merton.gov.uk.

All other concerns

For any other concerns, or where a CASA is already in process, you should complete a CASA form, providing as much up-to-date detail as possible. Whichever form is used, it should be shared with the parent or carer and, where appropriate, with the child, prior to making the enquiry. The information you provide will support threshold decisions and contribute to any subsequent assessments, such as a Single Assessment.

The CASA and Child Protection Referral forms are found at www.merton.gov.uk/mash/mash-refer.htm.

After the MASH process

Once a fuller picture about the case has been established, the MASH manager will decide on the most appropriate decision to take.

This may mean passing it to the First Response team along with the information gathered by the navigators, or referring the case to an Enhanced or Specialist service.

Where the MASH manager decides that the case does not require an Enhanced or Specialist service, but that the family may benefit from some identified lower-level support, the family will be offered signposting to an appropriate Universal Service.

If there is no wellbeing or safeguarding issue and the family does not need any additional support, then the case can be closed and no further action will be taken.

Referrers and professionals will be notified as to the outcome of the contact.

Governance of the MASH

The core MASH team and the First Response team are a part of Children's Social Care.

The MASH team manager, who has the final say in all safeguarding decisions, reports to the MASH & Child Protection Service Manager in Children's Social Care.

A multi-agency Strategic Board meets quarterly to oversee the performance of the MASH.

A governance agreement between the MASH partners is published online at www.merton.gov.uk/mash/mash-develop

Data Sharing and Fair Processing

Section 10 of the Children Act 2004 places a duty on key people and bodies to cooperate to improve the wellbeing of children and young people. This includes the proportionate sharing of information, where appropriate, to make the best decisions for children and young people at risk.

All partners will sign up to an Information Sharing Agreement that specifies what data can be shared within the MASH, and what happens to that data once the MASH manager makes a decision. The MASH will have physical, electronic and managerial safeguards to ensure that sensitive information is only accessed by those who 'need to know' about it.

Glossary of Terms

BRAG – *Blue/Red/Amber/Green* risk rating (see p. 3)

Contact – *When a professional or member of the public reports a concern about a child’s welfare to the MASH.*

First Response team – *A team of social workers who deal with urgent child protection cases.*

Navigator – *The multi-agency MASH professionals who will research information about referrals.*

Referral – *When the MASH screening officers decide there is a risk to the child’s welfare, and refer the case to be researched by the MASH navigators.*

Safeguarding Children – *Protecting children and young people from maltreatment; preventing impairment of their health or development; and ensuring that they are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care.*

Universal/Enhanced/Specialist – *The different levels of children’s service defined by the Merton Wellbeing Model.*

Contact us

If you would like to find out more, please visit the website at www.merton.gov.uk/mash. If you are concerned about a child’s welfare, please contact the MASH using the phone number below.

Address

MASH Team
12th Floor, Merton Civic Centre
London Road, Morden
SM4 5DX

Telephone/Email/Fax

020 8545 4226 or
020 8545 4227 or
020 8770 5000 (out of hours)
020 8545 4204 (fax)
mash@merton.gov.uk