



‘Walsall children...Safe, Happy, Learning Well...’

Walsall's Step Up/ Step Down Practice Guidance



This guidance is aimed at all practitioners who are supporting children and their families. This guidance aims to:

- **Give practitioners a clear overview of what to do when they are concerned about a child and they think the threshold for child protection has been reached**
- **Get practitioners to reflect on the role they can play in supporting a child and their family successfully stepping down from a social care intervention.**
- **Provide some best practice for practitioners who are identified as Lead Professionals as part of a step down process**

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Foreword

Dear Colleague

Children and young people in Walsall tell us that what's really important to them is that:

*'I tell my story once,
Support and services join up around me,
People do what they say,
I feel better and safer'*

There are key points and times in children's and their families lives when they need more help and support – **'step up'** – and other points when, as they become stronger and more resilient, they need less additional help – **'step down'**. It is critical that the child's journey from needing to receiving help is as smooth and time limited as possible.

This practice guidance has been developed to improve the experiences of children and families where their need for help and support is **'stepped up'** or **'stepped down'**. The guidance is aimed at everyone working to support children and families. It sets out how, by recognising the collective contribution we all make to 'holding the baton' for children, we can be better together for children.

It recognises 'No single professional can have a full picture of a child's needs and circumstances and, if children and families are to receive the right help at the right time, everyone who comes into contact with them has a role to play in identifying concerns, sharing information and taking prompt action.' (Working Together: 2013)

We want to make sure we play our part in helping ensure that the right people, with the right skills, are working with Walsall children and families at the right time and that this work is underpinned by a system and a partnership approach that is altogether better for children across Walsall so they are safer, happier, healthier with a better today and a brighter future

And.....we'll know when we've got our **'step up'** and **'step down'** arrangements working well when every family can say as one local mum did:

'It was easy to speak to someone I'd already known...they lifted a burden off me, all the pieces are back in the puzzle again now...'

David Haley Executive Director Children's Services

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Context



The Framework for Continuing Support to Vulnerable Children (or Step Up Step Down) promotes a framework of a defined and gradually increasing or decreasing level of support to children and their families.

The process for 'Step Up' 'Step Down' should be read in conjunction with **Walsall Safeguarding Children's Board Thresholds** document which explains how Walsall Children's Services staff and partners apply thresholds to a referral made to children's services – social care. The threshold document sets out those circumstances in which children's specialist services will provide an intervention and those where, while there may be no further action for children's specialist services, other services and providers may provide an option for support through a single agency response or a multi-agency Early Help Assessment and Early Help Plan.

Deciding that a threshold has been reached for support under child protection or whether a child is ready to step down is not easy and the thresholds document provides guidance for those working with children and young people about the steps to take when their professional judgement indicates that this boundary has been or may have been reached.

This guidance is underpinned by an expectation of ongoing professional dialogue between all professionals about casework to ensure good information sharing and good understanding of each others roles. At all stages professionals need to take individual responsibility for sharing and proactively seeking information in relation to the children, young people and families they are supporting.

Partner agencies will be familiar with the concept of thresholds for access to services and with the framework of a 'step-up' approach which has led to a recognised path for children with an escalating level of need and/or concerns.

Children who are the most vulnerable and in the greatest need will receive services through a Child in Need Plan (CiN), Child Protection Plan (CPP) or via a Care Plan for a Looked After Child within children's specialist services. Work is planned and coordinated and may involve professionals from many agencies, statutory, voluntary and private sector.

Who is this guidance for?

This guidance is aimed at all practitioners who are supporting children and their families. The guidance aims to:

- Give practitioners a clear overview of what to do when they are concerned about a child and they think the threshold for child protection has been reached
- Get practitioners to reflect on the role they can play in supporting a child and their family successfully stepping up or down to or from a social care intervention.
- Provide some best practice for practitioners who are identified as the lead professionals as part of a step down process

A jargon buster is included at the end of the document to explain some of the terms and abbreviations used throughout.

What do we mean by 'Step Up' and 'Step Down'?

Where families' needs are escalating or they are not responding to the support being offered, a more intensive response may be required.

Similarly, as families' become stronger and more resilient they will need less additional help. These situations may require an increase or a decrease in the level of support that the family need, this is referred to as 'step up' or the 'step down' process.

It is critical that a child and their family experience a seamless continuum of support throughout the thresholds without delay.

Although the principles set out in this guidance document can be applied to support families moving across the thresholds, this guidance document focuses on the 'Step Up' and 'Step Down' to and from **Early Help** to **Child Protection/Social Care intervention**.

What is the role of a Lead Professional?

'...it was easy to speak to someone I'd already known...they lifted a burden off me. All the pieces are back in the puzzle again now...' (mum of two children)

Anyone working with children and young people can take on the role of lead professional.

The lead professional is a key role that ensures we are holding the baton for children in Walsall.

'The lead professional will act as a single point of contact that the child or young person and their family can trust, and who is able to support them in making choices and in navigating their way through various pathways for support.'

The lead professional should co-ordinate services from differing agencies, ensuring children receive appropriate interventions when needed, which are well planned, regularly reviewed and effectively delivered and making the required impact¹.

What do we do if we think a child or young person is in need of social care intervention – 'Step Up'?

Practitioners may need to seek advice and information when working with a child, young person and their family where the needs are not being met despite an Early Help Plan being in place. Where this is the case, practitioners can consult the threshold document or seek advice and information from their own agency line managers and agency safeguarding leads.

If this support is not available, practitioners can seek advice and information through a conversation with practitioners at the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub).

When a practitioner is concerned that a child is at risk of or is experiencing significant harm, they must follow their agencies policies and procedures and ensure contact with MASH is made immediately by telephoning 0300 5552866.

Practitioners will be requested to follow up a verbal referral with a written referral by using a Multi agency Referral form – MARF(downloadable from Walsall Safeguarding Board website) form. The MARF should then be send to: MASH@walsall.gcsx.gov.uk

Consent should be sought from the family prior to contact with MASH, unless it is not possible to obtain consent in a timely way and delay would be detrimental, or where

¹ Working together to safeguard children (2015)

seeking consent would place the child at increased risk of significant harm. If consent is not sought or provided, the rationale for this should be recorded on the MARF.

Outcomes of the contact to MASH include:

- Advice is given to the practitioner and no referral accepted.
- An Early Help Assessment and Early Help Plan is needed. The Early Help Hub will provide advice.
- A Child and Family Assessment is needed. The case will remain open to Early Help and any service provided by Early Help should continue while the assessment is carried out by a social worker to determine risk and if it has met the threshold for social care intervention. Communication between the Early Help lead professional and the social worker will be vital to ensure the appropriate service provision is maintained.
- An immediate emergency response involving social care professionals

Early Help Assessments, plans and reviews that have been registered and received by the Early Help Hub will be used to help inform the screening against thresholds and can be used to inform the Child and Family Assessment. This can save a lot of time and duplication for practitioners and for the child and their family.

Outcomes of a Child and Family Assessment undertaken by a social worker include:

- The child and family needs a statutory intervention and a social worker is allocated and a plan is developed to meet the need – this might be a Child in Need Plan or Child Protection Plan
- In rare occasions, emergency protective action may be taken and the child becomes Looked After either in the short term or longer term
- Ongoing social work service is not required and advice is given on:-
 - how to provide support through universal, single agency or
 - develop a multi-agency Early Help plan informed by needs identified through the Child and Family Assessment.

How do we support our children and young people stepping down from social care intervention?

‘Step down’ from Children’s Services - Social Care takes place either as an outcome of the Child and Family Assessment or following on-going social care involvement (through being in the care of the Local Authority, Child Protection or Child in Need) because the needs have been met and/or the risks to the child have decreased. As a partnership, we believe that the more robust the step down plan is, the more we will assist children to achieve improved and sustainable outcomes.

Whilst a child may no longer need to be Looked After by the Local Authority or to have a Child Protection Plan or Child in Need plan, it is highly likely that ongoing support will be needed to ensure change is sustained. They will continue to have needs at level 3 or 2 which may make them vulnerable.

The team around the family should continue to offer co-ordinated support and the lead professional role can be assumed by the most suitable professional. This will ensure that the child, young person and their family will benefit from a period of co-ordinated support from across the partnership at this stage in their journey.

Robust step down arrangements will ensure that the pattern of multi-agency and integrated working in Walsall is sustained whilst children and families build their sustainable strategies and resilience. This is important to avoid children and families bouncing back through the system in a way which is damaging to children and young people.

When a decision has been made that a child is no longer in need of social worker intervention, but a decreased ongoing level of support is required, and the family and child have given consent to continued support and for information to be shared, then a transfer will be made to Early Help using the step down process referred to below.

Plans to step down and transfer a case to Early Help should be discussed by the social worker with the family at the end of a Child and Family Assessment or agreed at a Child in Need review meeting. Steps should be taken to identify a Lead Professional from an agency already involved with the family or the relevant practitioner if a single agency response is the outcome of the assessment.

How we support children in stepping down from a Child and Family Assessment

Cases will be stepped down where a Child and Family Assessment, undertaken by a social worker, has identified needs which would be best met through a level 3, co-ordinated multi agency plan.

With consent of the parents, the child's details will be transferred through the Early Help pathway (see attachment 1) to identify a lead service and Lead Professional. As part of the transfer, the Child and Family Assessment will be shared with the Lead Professional through a 'step down' meeting.

The Child and Family Assessment will take the place of an Early Help Assessment and the Lead Professional will use the information to develop an Early Help plan. The Lead Professional will need to review the support plan at six weekly intervals which will enable the Lead Professional, together with the child and family and all professionals involved, to make a decision to continue with the support at Early Help Level 3 or further Step Down to Level 2.

When it is decided that outcomes for the child and family have improved, the family will be encouraged to continue to receive support through targeted or universal services.

Case study

A referral to MASH was made by a teacher for five children from the same family who attended a primary school. The concerns were related to the children looking unkempt, lack of concentration in class, frequent lateness and children sometimes arriving without breakfast. Screening by MASH identified the concerns initially met level four thresholds and so a Child and Family Assessment was undertaken. The social worker liaised with the community nurse and the teacher as part of the assessment. This identified that the support required mainly related to providing parents with an understanding of the needs of their children and their role and responsibilities as parents. The outcome of the Child and Family Assessment was an Early Help Plan which was agreed with the parents. As part of the plan the school was identified as the Lead Professional as they had the best relationship with the parents and children. The parents were offered a parenting course and are engaging well with school and health.

The joint working between school, health and social work ensured a timely response, good communication with the family and secured positive engagement with the family without the need for social care intervention.

How we support children in stepping down from a Child in Need (CiN) Plan

A decision to transfer a child from an existing CiN plan to a multi agency Early Help plan should be discussed and agreed at a CiN review meeting. This meeting should identify a new Lead Professional and produce an Early Help plan to ensure the identified needs for support are met through an early help offer.

If there is no Lead Professional that can be identified at the final CiN meeting, the child will be transferred through the Early Help pathway (see attachment 1) to identify a lead service and Lead Professional. The plan will be discussed as part of the final CiN meeting and will be passed on by the social worker to an identified Lead Professional through a 'Step Down' meeting.

The Early Help Lead Professional will need to review the support plan at six weekly intervals which will enable the Lead Professional, with the child and family to make a decision to continue with the support at Early Help Level 3 or further Step Down to Level 2.

When the child's circumstances are satisfactory at the review then the child and family will be encouraged to continue to receive support through targeted or universal services.

Case study

Family X was subject to a Child in Need Plan. The case was referred to the edge of Care Team because of concerns about poor parenting, poor home conditions, non attendance at medical appointments, lack of knowledge in healthy eating, poor school attendance

After eight weeks of intensive support which consisted of 3 visits per week it was agreed by all professionals that the family had made positive progress and that the case would be stepped down into Early Help with the 0-19 family Support team taking the Lead Professional role.

To ensure that there was a smooth transition into Early Help Services, the Edge of care team remained working with the family for up to 4 weeks and shared intervention plans that would inform future work with the family. This time allowed the family to build new relationships with a new service and new professionals to ensure continued engagement.

'Initially we did not want services involved with our family but the workers were approachable and listened to us. They showed us how to do things, and were non judgmental.' (parents comments)



How we support children in stepping down from a Child Protection Plan

A child who is on a Child Protection Plan can be stepped down to a Child in Need Plan.

Where a final core group considers a child no longer requires a Child Protection plan because the needs have been met and/or the risks to the child have decreased, and this has been endorsed by Conference, a decision can be made to step down the child to a CiN plan. A child can only be stepped down to Early Help once the ongoing positive change for the child has been confirmed through at least one Child in Need review meeting.

Case Study

A social Worker supported a family with five children through a Child Protection plan. The assessment had highlighted concerns regarding physical and verbal chastisement, drug misuse, poor parenting, missed health appointments and poor school attendance.

A Public Law Outline meeting (PLO)¹ was held, instigated after the father had exposed the children to risky adults and little progress had been made despite Child Protection Plans being in place for over 18 months. The meeting gave parents 8 weeks to evidence improvement. The plan for the PLO was reviewed which concluded that parents had evidenced significant progress, a Core Assessment had been completed in respect of all the children and a risk assessment had been completed on parents. Parents were engaging with all health appointments, attendance at school was described as good and the children were progressing well in school. Father was no longer associating with risky adults and was having negative screenings from his drug tests. The children had been spoken to and their wishes and feelings ascertained with no concerns being noted they were reporting positively about their home life.

As a result of this the Core Group felt that the risks to the children had been minimised and at the review child protection conference the children were delisted with a recommendation that the case was stepped down to a CIN plan for 6 month period. The CIN plan for the children involved parents, Intensive Family Support, CAMHS, Education Psychology, school, school health, health visitor, Lantern House, Bentley Children's Centre. The last CIN review took place all parties agreed that due to the significant improvements made and sustained that the case should step down to Early Help. The children's centre was identified as the Lead Professional, the family has engaged positively with the children's centre ensuring sustainable outcome and there has been no re-referral into MASH

¹ Public Law Outline (PLO) meeting requires the social services department to arrange a meeting with the parent(s) to see if it is possible to reach agreement about what needs to happen to protect the child from harm, so that court proceedings can be avoided.

How we support children in stepping down from Children with Disability Team

Children who have been supported through the Children with Disability Team and their needs have been met and/or the risk to the child have decreased, will be supported to be transferred to Early Help in the same way as described above.

However, in some circumstances the Child and Family Assessment undertaken by a social worker will identify the need for an ongoing low level Buddy package (6 hours/week or less). In this case the Buddy package, agreed through the complex need- and short break panel, will be managed and reviewed yearly through the SENDI family Support Staff as part of the locality 0-19 family Support team using the early Help Assessments. The outcome of the assessment will be presented to the complex need-and short break panel.

How we support Looked After children stepping down from a Care Plan

Consideration of a child who is Looked After by the local authority returning home to a parent or relative will be done in a very planned and structured way. In deciding to return home, the social worker will have carried out an assessment considering all of the issues relating to the reunification and identify a return home support plan that will address the identified needs. This assessment will include consultation with the child/young person and consideration of an Child In Need plan that will be able to support the child/young person and their family in returning home in a planned and effective way. The decision about a child returning home will be made at their statutory review and the child's social worker will give consideration to introducing targeted early help resources to the child/young person care plan at the earliest stage possible to ensure that the Step Down process is effective and sustainable.

Once the plan has been endorsed at the child's Looked After review, there will be five stages to support the child to return home:

- consideration of the issues in returning home and how they need to be addressed within the care plan
- start the planning for step down with all relevant agencies involved
- transition plan where the social worker and other Professionals (including Targeted Early Help) will work together to support the child and their family
- child and family have continued support through a Child in Need Plan when the child is back home and /or the care order has been discharged
- When the reunification is stable and the risk have further reduced the child and family will be fully supported by an ongoing and agreed Early Help offer and a lead Professional takes over from the social worker. This will be agreed as part of the step down from a CiN plan.

In Walsall we have a specialist early help team who provide support to children who are Looked after and are ready to return home:

- Edge of Care Team – a multi-disciplinary team who provide evidenced based support to children who need to come into care short term to ensure a timely and sustainable return home.
- The team will be using the reunification model

Where possible and appropriate, Family Group Conference will be used as part of the Step Down planning process to ensure the child/young person and the family are fully involved in drawing up a support plan.

Concern Resolution Process

When working with practitioners from other agencies there will at times be differences of opinion with regards to how to respond to an identified concern about a child, young person or family. Disagreements can arise in a number of areas but are most likely to arise around determining levels of need, roles and responsibilities and the need for action and communication. Disagreements can be a sign of developing thinking, and the value of exchanging ideas from different perspectives should not be under-estimated. However, disagreements may disadvantage the child or family involved if they are not resolved constructively and in a timely manner.

Throughout our work the safety and wellbeing of the child or young person is the primary concern; at no time must professional disagreement detract from ensuring a child is safeguarded. A child's welfare and safety must remain paramount throughout. If you feel that a practitioner or an agency is not acting in the best interest of the child, young person or family, you have a responsibility to respectfully challenge the practitioner or agency.

In order to support that challenge we have developed a clear process to ensure that all professionals involved in multi-agency work understand the steps they should take when there is a need to challenge.

When trying to resolve disagreements practitioners should work within following principles:

- The safety and wellbeing of the child or young person is paramount, and should they be considered to be at significant risk then the MASH should be contacted.
- Keeping the child, young person and their family at the centre of professional discussions.
- Ensuring that the right conversations are had with the right people at the right time, taking place face to face where possible.
- Disagreements must be resolved in a timely manner
- Concern, action, responses and outcomes must be recorded.

When disagreements arise, the following steps should be undertaken:

1. Immediate discussion with colleagues and your agencies designated lead for safeguarding to clarify thinking and practice and attempt to resolve any disagreements before initiating the full process. Inform the Lead Professional/IRO/Chair of multi agency meeting for information and monitoring.
2. If following this clarification, the disagreement remains unresolved discuss with your designated lead for safeguarding and immediately refer this to your line manager, for them to discuss with the line manager of the other practitioner. Where possible the concern should be raised within 1 working day and the response from the other line manager should be received within 5 working days.
3. If agreement cannot be reached following discussion between first line managers, the matter must be referred to the head of service for each agency involved.
4. In the unlikely event that the steps outlined above do not resolve the issue, and/or the discussions raise significant policy issues/or a number of similar concerns or disagreements have been recorded, the matter should be referred to the chair of the Walsall Safeguarding Children Board.

Quality Assurance

Compliance to this guidance will be demonstrated through Multi Agency Safeguarding Audits.

The results of these, together with any learning and relevant action plans will be presented to the Walsall Safeguarding Children Board.

Contacts

MASH MASH@walsall.gcsx
0300 555 2866 (option2)

Early Help Hub: Earlyhelpleadprofessional@walsall.gov.uk
or
0300 555 2866 (option1)

Walsall Safeguarding Children Board wscb@walsall.gov.uk

Related Guidance

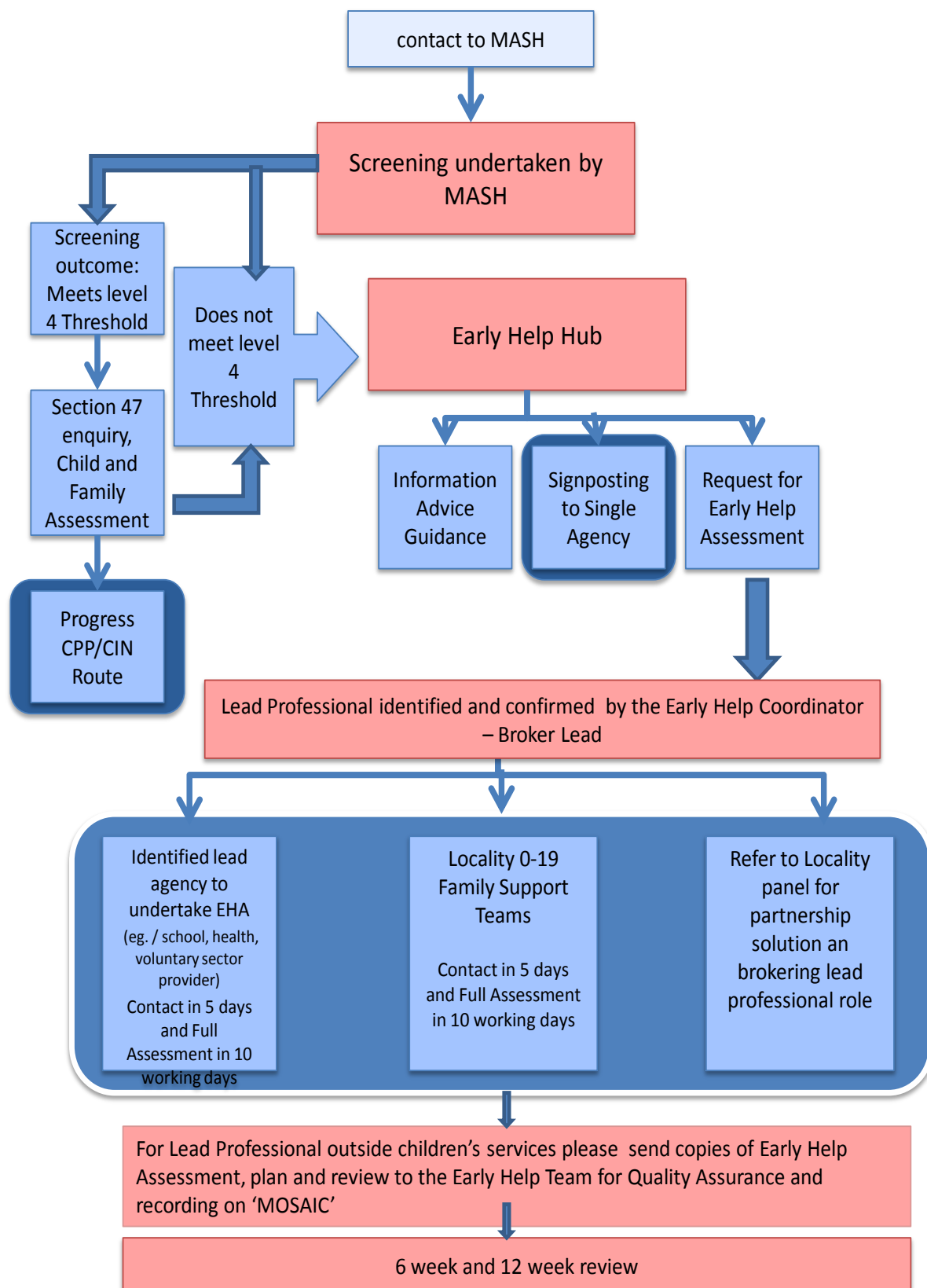
There is a range of key national practice guidance that should be read in conjunction with this Step Up Step Down guidance which will support practitioners in getting the best outcomes for children, young people and their families in Walsall. Key guidance includes:

- Working Together To Safeguard Children 2015, A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, HM Government, March 2015 can be found at www.education.gov.uk
- The Munro review of child protection: final report - a child-centred system, Professor Eileen Munro, May 2011. This can be found at www.gov.uk/government/publications
- Grasping the Nettle, early intervention for children, families and communities A practice guide to the challenges and opportunities in supporting children, families and communities through early intervention, based on effective local, national and international practice. Can be found at www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/earlyintervention/files/
- Returning home from care, What's best for children, NSPCC, April 2012. This can be found at www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/resourcesforprofessionals

Jargon Busters overview

MASH	Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub
EHH	Early Help Hub
MARF	Multi Agency Referral form
EHA	Early Help Assessment
CiN	Child in Need
CPP	Child Protection Plan
LAC	Looked After Children

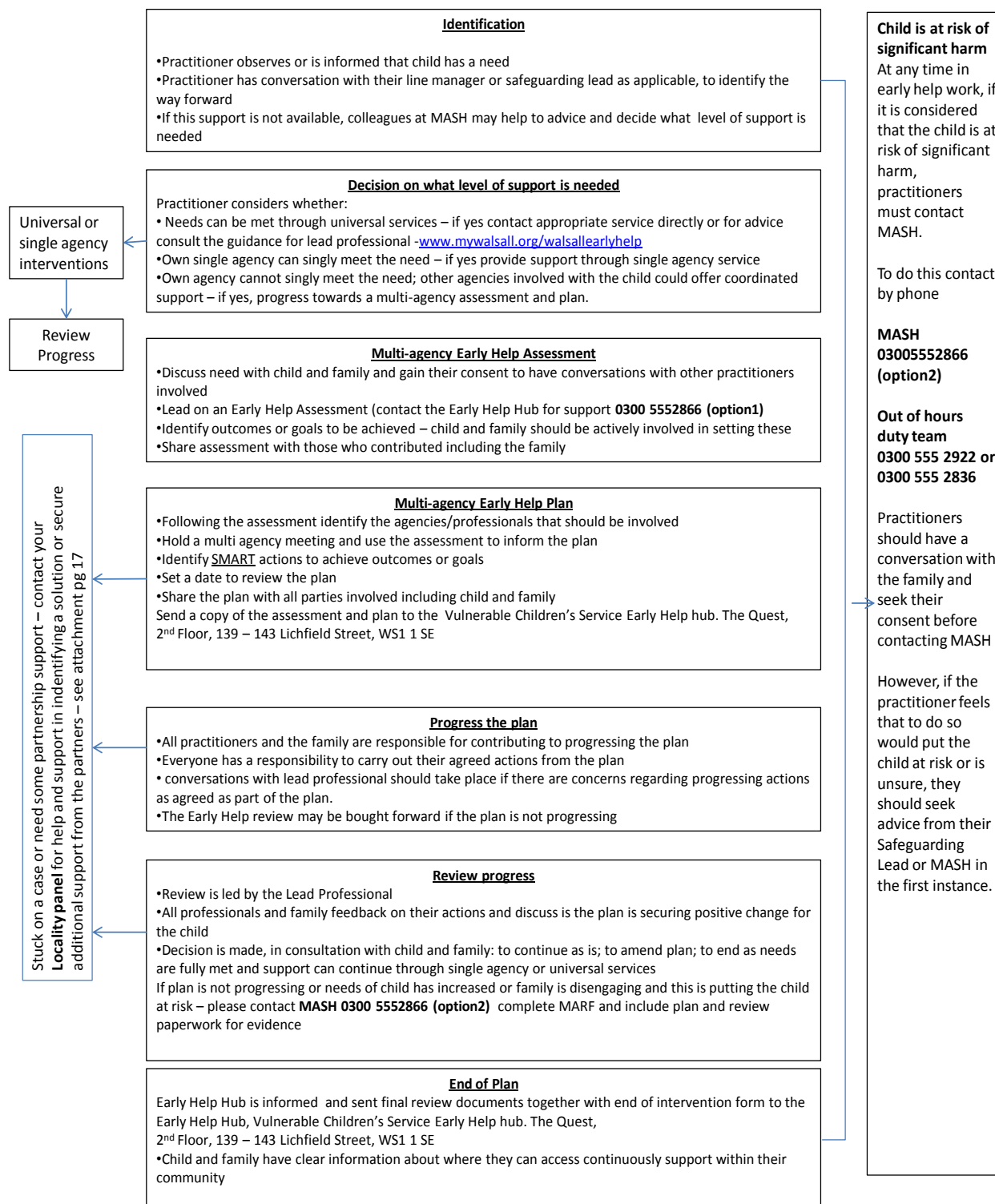
Safeguarding Concern about a child - workflow



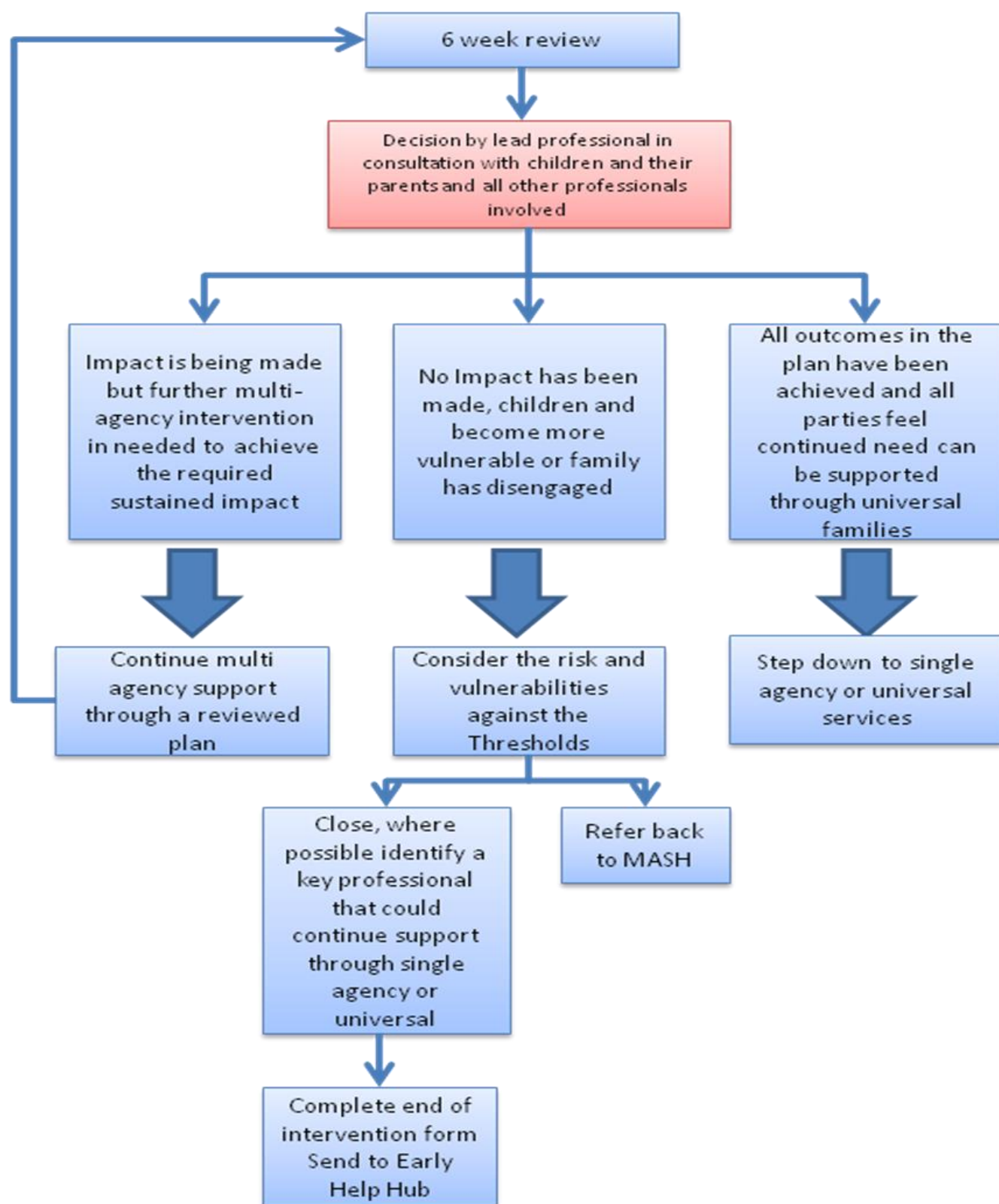
Early Help – What to do and how

Early Help work involves: identification, assessment, planning, providing services and reviewing the plan.

At any time in early help work, if it is considered that a child is at risk of significant harm, the practitioner must contact MASH – 0300 555 2866



Early Help Review process



Locality Panels process



Multi Agency Locality Panels are operating in Walsall to ensure an effective joined up early approach to children, young people and families in need of Early Help. Each locality panel sits every 4 weeks and includes a range of partners as panel members- such as schools, police, voluntary sector services, police, school health, health visiting, CAMHS, fire services, housing providers, Money Home job and area partnerships.

Each Locality panel invites professionals to bring forward cases and the panel offers advice and guidance and in some cases funding to ensure the needs of children, young people, families and groups of children and young people in their area can be met in a timely and effective way that ensures sustainable positive outcomes for children and young people within the family unit.

Partners are committed to ensure that they: play an active role in providing effective single agency services to prevent issues from escalating, getting the right help to families no matter what service or organisation they have been referred from, simplify systems in which we get help for families with a shared accountability and decision making.

The Panel Aims to:

- Support Lead professionals struggling with Early Help cases
- Review cases where Early Help hasn't been working to date and identify solutions and meet need
- Find the most suitable Lead professional for cases where this has been difficult, including Step down cases from Social Care and Troubled families where no Lead Professional has been identified.
- Provide services to individuals and families to ensure sustainable positive changes.
- Maximise community resources and support community and project work that can meet the needs of children and families across an area.
- Offer additional help for children on Child Protection Plans.

To make referrals to Locality panels or access the support of Locality Panel Chair contact:

Brownhills, Aldridge and William Cluster

School Support Adviser – Gemma Hatfield - 07538976253

Darlaston Cluster

School Support Adviser – Kellyanne Perry - 07539 466957

Bentley/Willenhall Cluster

School Support Adviser – Kerry Hinks - 075016 354263

Blakenall and Bloxwich Cluster

School Support Adviser – Ann Page – 07956 613866

Broadway and Central Cluster

School Support Adviser – Glen Kirby – 07507 636579

Alumwell and Birchills Cluster

School Support Adviser – Jo Phillips – 07557 758373



Walsall Council



Walsall FIS
Families Information Service

