Introduction
This document describes how children, young people and their families are supported through Multi-Agency Support Groups [MASGs], Early Help Assessments including the Common Assessment Framework [CAF] and the Lead Professional.

Rationale for Multi Agency Support Groups [MASGs]
We recognise that children, young people and their families may need support from different services at different times in their lives. We want to ensure that services are available as soon as needed, without having to wait until problems escalate.

We have revised how our services are delivered and will continue to do so to ensure that there is a broad range of resources that meet earlier levels of need as well as appropriate specialist services that meet more complex and severe needs.

We will strive to make sure that the principles below underpin all our work:

- early assessment of need leads to earlier intervention and the prevention of problems escalating;
- services provide a timely, needs led response;
- work with children, young people and their families takes an holistic approach, building on strengths and developing resilience factors;
- services are efficiently coordinated and where appropriate a Lead Professional identified
- all work has clearly identified outcomes;
- families are part of the solution/decision making process about what services they would want to access/need.

What is a Multi-Agency Support Group [MASG]?
MASG’s have been operating in each of the three localities in Peterborough [Central and East, North, West & Rural and South] since September 2012. They meet to co-ordinate appropriate resources to meet the needs of children, young people and families according to an evidenced based assessment captured by completing the Common Assessment Framework tool [CAF].

The MASG is a multi-agency group of professionals that use their skills, knowledge and expertise to consider multi-agency interventions that will best meet the assessed needs of a child/family. The CAF coordinators organise the MASGs. MASGs agree a temporary Lead Professional to coordinate service delivery. The Lead Professional may be the referrer or a worker from any of the services working with the child/family. The temporary Lead Professional may change following the first Team Around the Child Meeting.
How does the MASG operate?

1. Making a Referral to the MASG

Referrals are sent to the CAF co-ordinator. Any agency or organisation can refer to the MASG using a CAF assessment. Referrers must ensure they follow appropriate information sharing guidance to obtain consent from young people/families prior to referring to the MASG. Consent should include consent to share information with all panel members and agencies recommended to support the family and consent to engage in the process.

MASG will accept any referrals that require a multi-agency approach. However, those cases where it is clear which agencies will need to be involved to support a family and there are no obstacles in getting the work started do not need to be referred to MASG – the MASG is there to assist with cases where it is either not clear which agencies should be involved, or where attempts have been made to develop a multi-agency support plan, but these have been frustrated for some reason. For further detail on which cases should and should not be referred to MASG, please see the process diagram included in this leaflet.

MASG will accept de-escalation from Children’s Social Care where an assessment has been completed where it is considered that the family do not require CSC intervention, but would benefit from multi-agency support at a targeted level.

2. Processing the Referral

Referrals for a single agency should go straight from the referrer to the agency identified, using the appropriate agency referral form. The CAF co-ordinator will advise if the referrer is unsure if a single agency or multi-agency approach is required.

CAFs referred to the MASG that require a multi-agency approach are reviewed by the CAF Co-ordinator. The co-ordinator will either contact the referrer for more information and if inappropriate for the MASG, the co-ordinator will discuss with the referrer. For appropriate referrals the co-ordinator will arrange for a discussion at a MASG meeting.

While there is no requirement for a referrer to attend the MASG, it is often helpful if they can be there, as they can often provide additional information about the needs of the children, young people and family concerned. Referrers will therefore be given a time slot for when their case will be discussed and are asked to confirm whether or not they will be attending.

MASG meetings will be held fortnightly in each locality. The CAF team will ensure agendas and background information is sent to attendees ahead of the meeting.

After the MASG meeting, a decision sheet will be sent to the referrer by the CAF team. This will include details of services agreed by the panel to support the family and the agreed identified temporary Lead Professional.

The referrer must then share this information with the family and if the family agree to accept services agreed by the MASG, the referrer will then advise the Lead Professional. The identified Lead Professional will liaise with services that have been agreed and where appropriate set up a Team Around the Child meeting, with the family, to agree how services will work together to meet the needs of the child, young
person and family. This will include setting future meetings to review work. CAF co-ordinators can assist Lead Professionals where this is needed.

3. Reviewing the Effectiveness of Services
The MASG will set a review date where the effectiveness of the package of support can be assessed and to enable further or different resources to be accessed if necessary. A decision will be taken at this first review as to whether further reviews within the MASG are likely to be needed.

Where it is agreed that further reviews by the MASG are not needed, the case will be closed to panel. Should the Lead Professional, in consultation with the family and other agencies involved, decide that further discussion and support from the MASG is needed, they can re-refer the family to MASG at any time.

The Lead Professional is able to contact the CAF co-ordinator at any time for advice and guidance.

Responsibilities of MASG Members
Every member is there to:

- represent their service;
- bring their experience and skills to the group [Core members only];
- liaise and feedback information to their own service or organisation about referrals to MASG;
- promote MASG within their service or organisation;
- be able to agree to allocate work from MASG on behalf of their service or organisation;
- bring local knowledge about services and the communities they work in [Core members only];
- be a Lead Professional or be able to allocate to the most appropriate practitioner within their organisation who will become the Lead Professional;
- attend multi agency training which will support their role within the MASG.

Note 1: The MASG does not replace existing education panels, but existing panels may want to refer to the MASG’s.

Note 2: For non-Peterborough children that attend Peterborough schools contact the CAF Coordinators for advice on appropriate pathways for services.
Membership of the MASH:

Core Group Members

Outer Circle Group Members

Note that the responsibilities of MASH members listed above apply to both core and outer circle members, except that ‘Outer Circle’ members do not usually need to attend MASH meetings.
Worried about a child/young person

- Child in danger of immediate harm?
  - Yes: Contact Social Care immediately
  - No: Find out whether CYP already has a CAF or other involvement

Find out whether CYP already has a CAF or other involvement

- Existing CAF?
  - Yes: Contact Lead Professional
  - No: Speak to CYP and/or parent about initiating CAF and gain consent

Speak to CYP and/or parent about initiating CAF and gain consent

- Are other practitioners needed for the assessment?
  - Yes: Invite other practitioners to be part of the assessment provided family agree
  - No: Initiate CAF and complete assessment

Initiate CAF and complete assessment

What kind of support is required?

- Own agency
  - If you can meet all of the needs within your own agency:
    - Use the CAF as the basis for an action plan for the child, their family and the practitioners in your agency.

- Single/Specialist agency
  - If the needs you have identified require further investigation or support by a specialist agency:
    - Make referral to the appropriate agency, providing a copy of the CAF (if consent provided) to inform their detailed assessment of the needs in that area.

- TAC meeting
  - If a multi-agency response is required and you know which practitioners you want to involve:
    - Organise a Team Around the Child Meeting.

- Referral to Multi Agency Support Group
  - If a multi-agency response is required, AND:
    - the needs are either unclear or are such that additional resources are needed;
    - or there have been difficulties in developing an effective multi-agency support plan:
      - Refer to CAF Co-ordinator

Confirm practitioners to form the team around the child and choose Lead Professional (if multi-agency response)

Agree and implement an action plan for support

Review as necessary through further TACs until needs are met

Final review and CAF closure
Disagreements

If a family or referrer does not wish to accept the MASG’s suggested provision then the referrer should discuss this with the CAF co-ordinator. If the CAF co-ordinator agrees the case may be discussed again.

If there is a disagreement regarding the way a service is provided this must be communicated to and dealt with by the agency providing the service, their representative on MASG, the person carrying out the work or their Manager.

Reviewing the Effectiveness of Services

Any services allocated by the MASG will be reviewed by the agencies providing them, as part of the normal Team Around the Child review process. The Lead Professional will also review the overall package of services and the progress being made. However, the MASG will also review the effectiveness of the support package at least once, and will set a date for a first review when the case is first discussed. Further reviews by the MASG may be set subsequently where it is agreed that this would be helpful. Otherwise, reviews will continue to take place as part of the normal Team Around the Child review process, as above.

If more help is required the case may be discussed by the MASG again.

Sharing information and confidentiality

Having a multi-agency group means that members must share information with each other to identify the most appropriate services for families. The CAF asks for families to give consent for information about them to be shared with other professionals in the interest of providing services to them, which includes MASG. All of the information requested is kept at the minimum level necessary.
Contact details

For further information about MASGs please contact the relevant CAF Coordinator:

South Locality
Lisa Waller
01733 864031

Central & East locality
Vikki Gioia
01733 864032

North, West & Rural
Gemma Barry
01733 864033

CAF helpline
01733 863649

Address: 3rd floor, Bayard Place, Broadway, Peterborough, PE1 1FB
Frequently Asked Questions: Multi-Agency Support Groups

Who Chairs MASGs?
MASGs are chaired by the Assistant director for Specialist Commissioning or the Head of Prevention and Early Help Services.

How long does each meeting last?
The fortnightly meetings last for approximately three hours. MASGs continue to meet throughout school holidays.

When are the agendas sent out?
Agendas are sent out three days in advance of each MASG.

Should referrers attend the MASG to discuss the cases they refer?
When a referral is accepted by the MASG, the referrer will be given a time-slot when their case will be discussed. Cases will still be discussed even if the referrer is unable to attend. However, referrers should attend whenever possible. Attendance by the referrer enables the MASG to gain a fuller picture of the needs of the family. This in turn will help to ensure that the most appropriate resources are agreed.

Do the same people from each agency sit on the panels each time?
Yes, wherever possible the same member of staff from each agency attends each MASG meeting. This helps to build good relationships and expertise.

Is there a role for specialist providers?
Specialist agencies are consulted as and when required.

How are agencies kept engaged?
High level strategic decision makers sit on the panel, with the authority to ensure agencies engage as required. In addition to this, it has been written into all new provider contracts that agencies have to take referrals from MASGs.

Is membership be reviewed?
Membership of both the inner and outer circle is reviewed termly.

Are the MASGs a gateway for discussing cases? Are cases referred onto a further case conference or Task and Finish type group?
Cases referred to MASGs are not referred on. All decisions are made by the MASGs.

Does it problem-solve cases or unblock blockages?
The answer to both questions is ‘yes’. MASGs look at how they can best support families. MASG members are high level decision makers who have the expertise and authority to solve and unblock cases.

Do MASGs look at any case that requires multi-agency intervention or only intractable or difficult cases?
Peterborough has a highly skilled and competent workforce that can take the role of Lead Professional, Chair the TAC and implement action plans. This work will continue. The MASGs only look at cases that require multi-agency
intervention where needs are very complex and additional resources are required, or where there are difficulties in developing an effective multi-agency approach to meet the needs identified.

Are MASGs for families who are non-compliant and therefore more difficult to work with and engage with?

No. Cases that don’t have consent can’t be taken to the MASGs.

Where do the MASGs sit within the TAC structure?

Once cases have been heard, it is likely that they will go to a TAC. However cases do not need to go through the MASGs in order to get to the TAC.

Do the MASGs monitor and review cases?

To a limited extent, yes: MASGs review all cases at least once. A review date will be set when a case is discussed for the first time at the MASG. The review will be to ensure that effective progress against outcomes is being made. This review provides an opportunity for different or additional resources to be agreed where progress has not been made.

At this first review, the MASG will agree whether or not further reviews by MASG would be helpful.

How are decisions recorded?

A recommendation sheet will arise from each panel. This sheet will be sent to the original referrer and the Lead Professional.

How do MASGs know who is working with the family that has been referred?

Other agencies working with the family will be recorded in Section Seven of the CAF: ‘Services already working with the family’.

How is the Lead Professional identified?

The Lead Professional is identified at the MASGs, until the case goes to TAC. The family may wish another Lead Professional to be identified or the TAC may consider another professional to be more appropriate.

How does MASG ensure that all services/ agencies working with the family are communicated with?

It is the role of the Lead Professional to ensure this happens.

Is there a cap on the number of cases the MASG hear/deal with? If so, how does MASGs prioritise the cases?

Three hours is ample to hear all cases –that each case is allocated a 15 minute slot. Where emergencies arise that cannot wait for panel the panel chair can take the decision to agree resource outside the panel and hear retrospectively.

How does the process support families where English is a second language?

The Lead Professional should pick this up from the CAF; there is a section to record if an interpreter is needed. [Section Four: ‘Parent and carer details’].

If need cannot be met at MASG where does it go?

Such cases will be escalated to the Director of Communities.

What is the process for escalation?

The MASG Chair will escalate to the Assistant Director for Specialist Commissioning and/or the Director of Communities.
What if the recommended service / intervention does not have capacity?

Such instances will be referred back to the Assistant Director for Specialist Commissioning.

How will non-attendance at TAC’s be addressed?

Through the MASG chair to the Director of Communities who has agreed with all agencies their co-operation.

In terms of panel decisions, how does the panel prioritise who gets what?

Decisions are made on identified needs, and the best way that these needs can be met within the resource envelope available.

How do the services providing support prioritise their work i.e. do cases received from MASG have to take priority?

Each service has their own system for prioritisation and this will continue. There is no doubt that there will be identified gaps in service provision and it is the job of all agencies commissioners to work together to get the most resources they can for the money they have available. The Children’s Partnership Commissioning and Delivery Board will draw together agencies to discuss available resources and commissioning priorities.