



Bedfordshire
county council

Children's Services



Business Process for The Common Assessment Framework and Multi Agency Allocation Group

Bedfordshire Children & Young People's
Strategic Partnership
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1. Introduction and Overview

The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and Multi-Agency Allocation Groups (MAAG) form a core element of the CYPSP's Early Intervention Strategy. Together, they create a process that promotes effective, integrated services to ensure that children, young people and their families have access to the services they need, when they need them. These processes also recognise that children, young people and their families will have different needs at different times of their lives and may therefore require different services. The CAF/MAAG and Lead professional role is aimed at early intervention and targeted services where children have identified additional needs (see appendix 1).

Key principles that underpin this approach are:

- Children, young people and their families need access to a broad range of services
- Early assessment of need leads to earlier intervention and the promotion of children's well-being
- Services provide a timely, needs lead response
- Work with children, young people and families takes an holistic approach, building on strengths and developing resilience factors
- Services are efficiently co-ordinated
- All work has clearly identified outcomes

Common Assessment Framework (CAF)

The Common Assessment Framework is a vital aspect of integrated working arrangements. It provides professionals with a simple means of:

- working in partnership with parents and carers
- sharing information and concerns with colleagues
- identifying the needs of children and
- arranging the best means of meeting them, if necessary by referring the child to a multi-agency panel.

The CAF enables a group of professionals and the family to:

- pool their knowledge of the child and family
- identify areas of need and strengths in the family
- agree a shared view of desired outcomes that everyone is going to work to for the child
- appoint a lead professional who will co-ordinate the work

There are three options after a CAF has been completed.

- a referral to a single agency for a specific piece of work;
- a referral to MAAG; or
- a further meeting with the family and appropriate professionals.

1. Introduction and Overview

Multi Agency Allocation Group (MAAG)

Bedfordshire's Multi Agency Allocation Group (MAAG) has been developed by the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership to deliver timely, responsive, needs led services to children, young people and families.

Three MAAG panels have been set up in south, mid and north Bedfordshire. They meet fortnightly to identify the services that could best support children and families referred to them.

The remit of the panel is to consider referrals (made using a Common Assessment Framework form) by a range of professionals and devise a package of intervention to meet the needs identified using the resources of the participating agencies or referring the family to another agency having assessed its suitability.

The group is chaired by a manager from the Children's Commissioning service or Youth Offending Team and includes representatives from Health, Youth Offending Service, Education services, the Connexions Partnership, voluntary sector family support providers, substance misuse services and children's centre/extended school services. This approach also ensures that families do not have to be passed from one service to the next and repeat their stories.

Lead professional

A lead professional can ensure that work with a family is effectively co-ordinated.

Key roles of the lead professional are described in the government guidance as the following:

- a) Build a trusting relationship with the child or young person and family (or other carers) to secure their involvement in the process.
- b) Be the single point of contact for the family and a sounding board for them to ask questions and discuss concerns. In some cases other practitioners will need to make direct contact with them, and it will be important for them to keep the lead professional informed of this.
- c) Be the single point of contact for all practitioners who are delivering services to the child, including staff in universal health and education services, to ensure that the child continues to access this support.
- d) Co-ordinate the effective delivery of a package of 'solution focused' actions and also establish a process by which this will be reviewed regularly.
- e) Identify where additional services may need to be involved and put processes in place for brokering their involvement (this may need to be carried out by the line manager rather than by the lead professional themselves).
- f) Be the main point of contact for all practitioners who are delivering services to the child or young person, including staff in universal health and education services, to ensure that the child or young person continues to access this support.

1. Introduction and Overview

- g) Continue to support the child or family if more specialist assessments need to be carried out.
- h) Support the child or young person through key transition points but, where necessary, ensure a careful and planned 'handover' takes place if it is more appropriate for someone else to be the lead professional.

2. Common Assessment Framework Procedures

The Common Assessment Framework is a vital aspect of integrated working arrangements. It provides professionals with a simple means of:

- working in partnership with parents and carers
- sharing information and concerns with colleagues
- identifying the needs of children

The CAF enables a group of professionals and the family to:

- pool their knowledge of the child and family
- identify areas of needs and strengths in the family
- agree a shared view of desired outcomes that everyone is going to work to for the child
- appoint a lead professional who will co-ordinate the work

Initial steps to be taken in relation to a child or young person who may be vulnerable

A family member or any professional or staff member working with a child or young person may identify concerns.

Attempt to identify the additional needs and understand the reasons for the concerns through the steps you would normally take:

- discussion with colleagues
- trying to work with the child in a different way or arranging additional input within your own team, agency or educational setting
- further discussion with the child / young person,

- further contact with the family such as a home visit
- a referral for a simple, specific identified service or resource which does not require any further assessment

Use the pre-assessment checklist to identify the outcome areas which are not satisfactory and measure the progress that is being made. Try to record as much information as you can on this format. Alternatively individual agencies/ educational settings may have their own formats. Discuss the outcome with a supervisor / manager / or the person identified in the establishment with responsibility for the implementation of Every Child Matters.

Monitor the success of this approach and its effect on the child. The Common Assessment Framework approach should be used if:

- despite the additional input provided, there are continuing concerns about the progress the child is making in relation to any of the five Every Child Matters outcomes or
- The reasons for the child's vulnerability / possible vulnerability have not been fully identified.

3. Implementation of the CAF

Initiating the caf process

From this point, all further work will be based on the common assessment process. Depending on the type of need and the complexity of the case, this could result in one of three outcomes:

- a) a referral to an individual agency for a more complex assessment or service using the CAF
- b) a local meeting of the professionals involved to co-ordinate their work
- c) a referral to the Multi Agency Allocation Group (MAAG)

You need to gather enough information to decide which the best way to proceed is. The first steps are the same, though the order may vary according to the exact circumstances:

- Identify one person / member of staff to discuss the proposal to complete a CAF with the family. Until the CAF is completed this person will be considered as the lead professional.
- Contact the CAF co-ordinator / CAF administrator to see if there is already a completed CAF form - in the early stages of the CAF roll out this is unlikely but as the roll out gathers pace, it will be an essential step . The CAF administrator can be contacted at CAFadmin@bedscc.gov.uk or 01234 276750.
- Discuss the CAF with the family in order to explain what the process will involve, why you think it will help and what you hope it will achieve.
- Seek the agreement of a parent (or young person themselves if appropriate) to carry out a CAF.

- Identify which other professionals are working with the family and should be involved. The work on the CAF may be carried out by one person or it may be better to divide the work between different professionals involved.
- Agree a timescale to complete the CAF. There should be a maximum of a month between the first contact with the CAF administrator, to sending in the completed CAF.

It is recognised that there will be variation from case to case as to how much information can be obtained for the CAF.

- All completed CAF's should be emailed to the CAF administrator: CAFadmin@bedscc.gov.uk

3. Implementation of the CAF

Possible outcomes from the common assessment

Once you have obtained as much information as you can under all of the categories included in the CAF form, review the next steps with your supervisor and the local CAF lead.

There are three options:

Option 1: If A Referral To Another Agency Is Required

- If you believe you have a good understanding of what the child needs and you are clear which agency and service is needed to help the child, you should make a referral. Agencies are gradually reviewing their referral arrangements to bring them into line with the Common Assessment Framework, so you should complete as much of the CAF as you can and then make the referral.
- The CAF form is also a multi-agency referral form, so agencies will accept this in place of their own form – but they may need to request additional information.

Option 2: if the common assessment indicates that progress can be made by the network of professionals coming together to plan and co-ordinate their work and appoint a lead professional

If you decide that further multi-agency intervention and co-ordination will be needed, the team / educational setting which identified the unmet needs should arrange a meeting of those who have been involved in order to:

- Compile the information from different agencies into a CAF if that hasn't already been done
- Agree on the needs identified

- Discuss and agree a plan of action to meet the needs identified
- Agree the actions that will be taken by the family and each of the professionals present
- Agree one person who will be the lead professional who will:
 - > Meet periodically with the family to discuss progress
 - > Take simple steps to make sure that the family and all the professionals involved are kept aware of all developments
 - > Co-ordinate a review

Option 3: if the local network of professionals cannot identify a service which will meet the child's needs, refer the child and family to the multi-agency allocation group

Refer the child and family to the Multi-Agency Allocation Group, using the CAF form. The Multi Agency Allocation Group will refer the child and family to one of the resources available in the county and will recommend to the agencies who should act as the Lead Professional.

3. Implementation of the CAF

Links with other assessment processes

The CAF overlaps with other, existing assessment processes. Over time the CAF should become the earliest assessment process, and some existing processes will be able to adapt to this. The CAF steering group will continue to address this as the implementation is carried out across the county.

Currently, the following has been agreed:

a) SEN Code of Practice

The SEN Code of practice has to be followed by schools for any child with special educational needs. The CAF process runs parallel to this, and can be used alongside any stage of the SEN processes, where the child's needs have been identified as broader than a purely educational need. The CAF should particularly be considered when the child has reached the School Action Plus stage if there are concerns about the child's progress and there are additional needs. The existing access routes to Local Authority support services continue to be in use, but to prevent duplication of paperwork, if a CAF exists already it can also be used to access these services (additional information may be requested).

b) Social Care Initial Assessment / Core Assessment

Referrals into Social Care teams within Children's Services come into the Intake and Assessment teams. A CAF can be used as a referral into these teams, and may be able to contribute to the Initial Assessment that the team undertakes. Over time the CAF may take the place of this assessment, but the Core Assessment will remain as a specialist social care assessment.

c) Asset

The Youth Offending Team Asset process will remain in place. The CAF may be used to lead to a referral to the team and may contribute to the Asset.

d) APIR

The Connexions APIR process also remains in place, and again, the CAF may contribute to this.

3. Role of the Lead Professional

As part of the first phase of the Common Assessment Framework roll out, professionals identified by their agencies will be expected to join discussions about the appointment of a lead professional and adopt the lead professional role in appropriate cases. All agencies have agreed to participate in this aspect of the project so the burden will not fall disproportionately on any one group.

The lead professional will be appointed from the network of professionals already working with the family and will not be a specific post or an extra professional added to the network.

It is recognised that this is an experimental aspect of the CAF roll out and the multi-agency project steering group will monitor its implementation carefully and take into account feedback from staff involved. Training and briefing sessions will provide an opportunity to understand the role better.

It is intended that the lead professional role will be in the first instance a limited one which will make many of the roles that many professionals are already fulfilling more coherent.

This includes:

- liaising with a network of colleagues
- co-ordinating the services that families receive and contributing to reviews
- ensuring that families have a good understanding of the services they are receiving or which might be available to help them.

At present many staff act as a key worker within one service or educational setting. The lead professional role will develop this to take account of the full range of services which the family is receiving.

The lead professional role does not include:

- Any authority to take action on behalf of another agency, unless that is specifically agreed
- Any requirement to take action outside of their professional competence and training
- Any budget holding responsibility.

Initial arrangements for the role of the lead professional

- a) Lead professional role whilst the CAF is being completed

If you (or someone else in your agency) has initiated the work on the CAF, you will remain responsible for ensuring that it is completed on time and remain the lead professional until another person is appointed.

- b) Lead professional role once the CAF is completed

If you make a referral to another agency using the CAF, you will remain the lead professional until someone else takes over the role. The CAF / MAAG Manager will be able to advise as to which professional is best placed to hold the role.

If you convene a local multi-agency meeting, the group of local professionals and the family will recommend which person should act as the lead professional. This may be the person who was originally concerned about the child, or it may be another worker who is better placed to do this or in more regular contact with the family.

The person nominated needs to check with their supervisor (preferably before the meeting but if not then afterwards) that they are able to take on the role.

3. Role of the Lead Professional

If there are difficulties appointing a lead professional the problem should be referred to the local leads for CAF in the area who will liaise with the managers concerned. If this is not successful the difficulties should be referred to the CAF / MAAG Manager.

The child and family need to understand the Lead Professional's role and be in agreement.

Once appointed the Lead professional should:

- Meet periodically with the family to discuss progress overall and implementation of the plan
- Take simple steps to make sure that the family and all the professionals involved are kept aware of all developments
- Co-ordinate a review at which all professionals involved contribute on:
 - > Outcomes for the child of which they have knowledge
 - > Input from their agency
- Refer the child and family to the Multi-Agency Allocation Group if necessary
- Complete review paperwork and update CAF Administrator, including date case is to be closed where applicable.

4. Multi-Agency Allocation Group (MAAG)

a) Rationale and Principles

The purpose of the Multi-Agency Allocation Group is to make appropriate and timely allocation of services to children and families in need.

By using a multi-agency approach, the group uses the skills, knowledge and expertise of a variety of services to ensure that families do not have to be passed from one service to the next and repeat their stories; co-working can be encouraged as appropriate; more than one service can be allocated from the same referral if appropriate; gaps in services can be identified; a holistic approach to working with children and families can be promoted, and a more 'joined up', co-ordinated approach to services can be provided to families.

The group works because it is a multi agency group, with representatives from statutory and voluntary agencies. A full list of agencies can be found on the Multi-Agency Allocation Group leaflet.

The multi-agency approach is in keeping with the principles behind the Children Act 2004 and the integration agenda under Every Child Matters. The five outcomes for children and young people underpin the services that are represented on MAAG.

MAAG is also well placed to identify the lead agency for referrals. As the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is introduced, MAAG will play a crucial role in the allocation of services to meet identified need, and at the same time identify a lead professional to co-ordinate the support plan for the child.

b) Criteria

The groups will allocate services promoting early intervention. These will predominantly fall into the category of children with additional needs (see appendix 1). Many agencies are able to accept referrals directly, without going through MAAG, however referrals should come to MAAG where there is a variety or complexity of needs that could potentially be met from more than one service; where the referrer is not clear which service is the most appropriate; or where there needs to be a multi-agency response. As a general guide, if you are not able to meet the identified need within your agency, nor by one single referral, then a MAAG referral should be considered.

Referrals should outline the identified needs, desired outcome, and SMART goals of the intervention.

YISP (Youth Inclusion Support Panel) operates within MAAG and follows the same administration process.

c) Sharing Information and Confidentiality

The multi-agency approach described above means that agencies also need to share information with each other in order to identify the most appropriate service for families. The Multi-agency referral form asks for families consent to the information being shared at MAAG, and the information requested on the form is kept at the minimum level necessary to identify need and services. This is in keeping with the Children Act 2004, the principles of integrated service delivery in Every Child Matters, and the Local Safeguarding Children Board's information sharing protocol.

4. Multi-Agency Allocation Group (MAAG)

d) Role of group members

There are a wide range of services represented on MAAG, from statutory and voluntary organisations. Each agency has agreed that their representatives are:

- To represent their service / agency on MAAG, not just individual role or team.
- To bring their experience / skills / knowledge to contribute to multi-agency discussions.
- To liaise with their service / agency about referrals prior to MAAG – to bring relevant, updated information about referrals.
- To feedback relevant information to their service / agency after MAAG – about case decisions and practice issues.
- To promote the role of MAAG within their service / organisation to encourage practitioners to make appropriate referrals.
- To be able to agree to allocate work at MAAG on behalf of their service / agency and to promote a multi-agency approach where this best meets the needs of children and families.
- To receive and distribute updated contact lists

Attending MAAG frequently can be a time-commitment that small organizations particularly have few resources for. When an agency is unable to attend, the representative will email the chair with any information for the meeting.

e) Role of MAAG Chair

The role of the MAAG chair is to facilitate discussion and ensure that appropriate allocation of services are made. The Chair will ensure that case discussions remain focussed and that each MAAG keeps to time.

MAAG chairs are not expected to know all aspects of each service that is represented at MAAG, and will rely on each representative to give information about their service if it relates to an individual referral. In order to do this they will briefly present the request and highlight any issues.

At the end of the discussion the MAAG Chair will identify which services have been allocated and what their role is and will record these on the decision sheet.

As far as possible, all referrals should have a service/action identified – in exceptional circumstances, where this is not possible, the Chair may ask for the referral to be re-presented with additional information.

4. Multi-Agency Allocation Group (MAAG)

f) Referral Process

Any agency can refer in to the MAAG, using the Multi-Agency/CAF Form. This form should be signed by the parent to show they have given consent to the information being shared. A decision sheet will be sent to the referrer and any allocated service after each group meeting, and the referrer will be expected to share this with the family, and to liaise with the allocated service to commence work. Any family can be re-referred to the group if appropriate.

Referrers are not expected to attend the group to discuss their referral, although they can do so if they want to – this should be arranged through the Chair.

All administration is electronic. Referrals should be sent to the appropriate MAAG email address; agenda and paperwork will be distributed via email to representatives on the Monday before MAAG, and the decision sheets sent by email on the Friday after.

There are three MAAG panels: -

MAAGnorth@bedscc.gov.uk

MAAGsouth@bedscc.gov.uk

MAAGmid@bedscc.gov.uk

g) Allocation of services

Once MAAG has allocated services, those services should make contact with the original referrer (unless otherwise stated on the decision sheet) to give an expected start date and to arrange how to make contact with the family.

In the case of services having waiting lists, it is up to the original referrer to discuss with the family any expected delay and if this is not appropriate to bring the referral back to MAAG for further discussion and allocation.

h) Disagreements

If a family or the referrer disagrees with the group decision, the referrer can discuss this with the group chair. The referral can be re-heard at panel if this is agreed following this discussion.

If there is a disagreement about the way in which the service is provided, either from the family or the referrer, this needs to be addressed through the agency providing the service, either their representative on MAAG, the person carrying out the work, or their Manager. The named Lead Professional can also be contacted to resolve difficulties. If after going through these routes there is still disagreement, the issue should be raised with the CAF/MAAG Manager within Bedfordshire Children's Services..

5. Performance Monitoring

There are three key levels of performance monitoring of the CAF/MAAG process –

Stay Safe Group

CAF/MAAG Steering Group

Champions Groups

Stay Safe Group

The CAF/MAAG processes sit within the Stay Safe element of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, and regular updates are provided to the Stay Safe meetings. These updates include figures of how many CAF's have been completed which outcomes have been identified, and which agencies have carried these out. It also receives data on how many MAAG referrals there have been, from which agencies and how many allocations. Any unresolved partnership issues should be raised here for resolution.

The Stay Safe group also signs off any recommendations for training, implementation and embedding that are made by the CAF/MAAG Steering Group.

CAF/MAAG Steering Group

As a sub-group of the Stay Safe group, the CAF/MAAG steering Group is responsible for ensuring the delivery of the CAF/MAAG action plan and for ensuring that the process is performing well.

This group has representatives from all key agencies, of sufficient authority to make decisions on behalf of their agency and to deal with the multi-agency issues that arise.

The group meets a maximum of quarterly, and will receive updates from the Champions Groups about any key unresolved issues that need resolution. In turn this group develops strategy for training, implementation and embedding of the CAF/MAAG process to make recommendation to the Stay Safe group.

The steering group receives updates on data as above.

Champions Group

Champions play a central role in supporting their agencies in the use of the CAF/MAAG process. They are the first point of contact for agencies with any queries, and in turn Champions can access support from the CAF/MAAG Manager. Champions are also responsible for running Lead Professional training within their agency.

Champions Groups meet quarterly and bring together Champions from a range of agencies across a geographical area. All practice issues should be able to be resolved here but any that need more senior agreement or strategic direction should be referred to the CAF/MAAG Steering Group. In order to aid this, each Champions Group will be presented with the same data as above but broken down further by each agency.

Quality Assurance

The role of Quality Assurance of CAF/MAAG is to ensure that the process is operating well, and contributing to the early identification of need and allocation of services. It is not the role of this QA process to assess the quality of individual services, and where these issues arise they will be feedback to the appropriate manager and commissioner of that service.

5. Performance Monitoring

Annual Audit

The central purpose of the CAF/MAAG process is to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families. In order to ensure that this is happening, an annual audit will be undertaken by the Commissioning Service on behalf of the CAF/MAAG Steering Group, to gather feedback from referrers, children young people and families, and panel representatives. This will be an audit of how well the processes are ensuring appropriate and timely assessment and allocation of services.

Quarterly Audit

In addition, once a quarter a feedback sheet will be sent from the CAF/MAAG administrator to all services that have been allocated via MAAG to ask for confirmation that the allocations have in fact been made and to give a start date.

Lead Professional updates

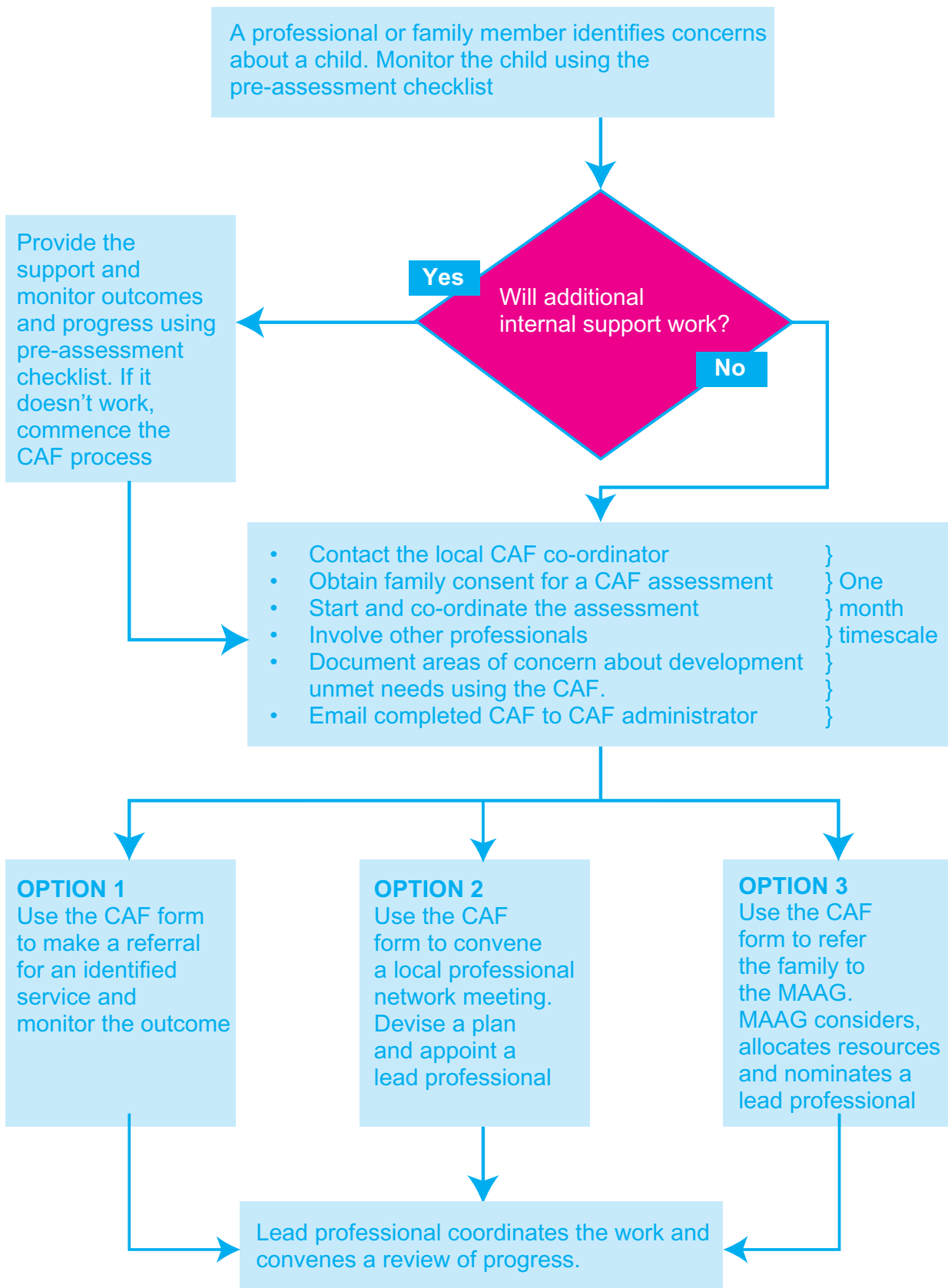
The Lead Professional process also provides a quality assurance role as the updates sent in to the CAF/MAAG Administrator will ensure that multi-agency plans remain in place.

Storage of CAFs

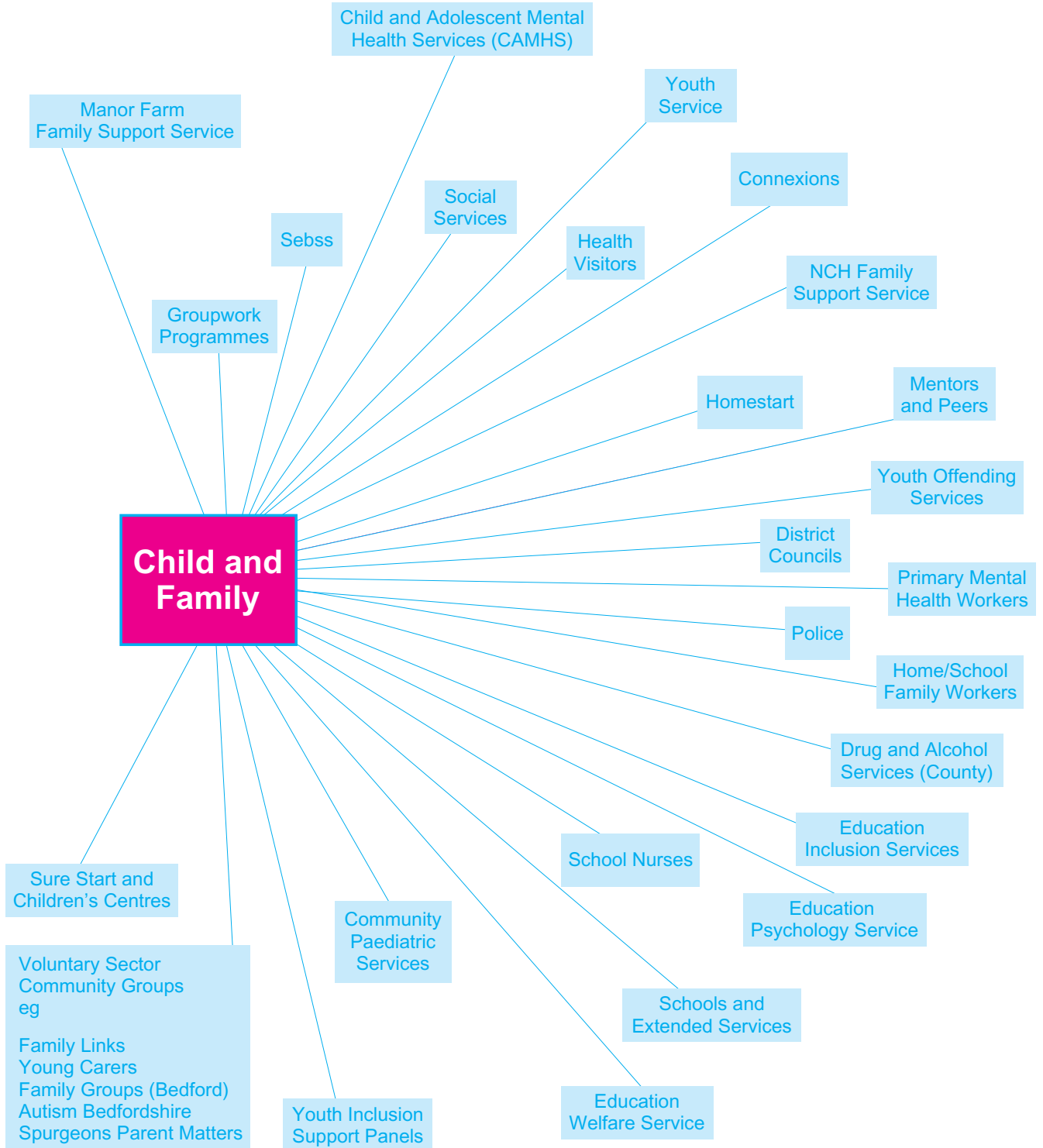
CAF's will be stored electronically for 5 years from date of closure. This is in line with Bedfordshire County Council policy, as there is no national guidance on how long CAF's should be stored for.

If a child with a CAF moves to a different area and the CAF is sent to that area, storage will be dependant on local arrangements.

Appendix 1



Appendix 2



Appendix 3

CONTACT DETAILS

1. CAF Administrator

CAFadmin@bedscc.gov.uk

01234 276750

2. CAF Process, guidelines and paperwork

www.bedfordshirelscb.org.uk

6.MAAG

- Referrals to

maagnorth@bedscc.gov.uk

maagmid@bedscc.gov.uk

maagsouth@bedscc.gov.uk