

9 December 2013**Agenda Item: 8****REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES
AND CULTURAL SERVICES****UPDATE ON THE MULTI-AGENCY SAFEGUARDING HUB INCLUDING
THE EARLY HELP UNIT****Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide the Children and Young People's Committee with an overview of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub after the first 11 months of operation, including performance information, and an update on the Early Help Unit.

Information and Advice**The Purpose of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub**

2. The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is the single point of contact for all new safeguarding concerns relating to children and adults. It became operational in December 2012 for Children's Social Care and in January 2013 for Adult Safeguarding.
3. The MASH was set up to receive safeguarding concerns from professionals such as teachers and doctors as well as members of the public and family members. The intention was that, for those concerns that meet the threshold for Adult Safeguarding or Children's Social Care involvement, representatives from the different agencies in the MASH would collate information from their respective sources to build up a holistic picture of the circumstances of the case and the associated risks to the child or adult. As a result, better decisions would be made about what action to take and support will be targeted on the most urgent cases. Better co-ordination between agencies leads to an improved service for children, adults and families.
4. The MASH also provides advice and guidance for professionals with safeguarding concerns about a child or adult. The intention was that this would help to enforce the application of need thresholds, improve the quality of information provided and ensure that the appropriate level of support is offered. For those concerns that do not meet the threshold for Adult Safeguarding or Children's Social Care involvement, the MASH ensures that cases are passed to Early Help or other services as and when this is appropriate.
5. There are currently in excess of 70 professionals in the MASH, which is based at Mercury House, Annesley. These include: MASH Officers and Senior MASH

Officers; Nottinghamshire Police representatives; Social Workers and Team Managers from Children's Social Care; Advanced Social Work Practitioners from Adult Social Care and Health; the Probation Service; Education Representatives (3 seconded Head Teachers making up one full-time equivalent term time post); Trading Standards representatives; Early Help representative; County Council and Health Business Support; and Senior Practitioners from Health.

6. The MASH is managed by an Operational Manager, who was appointed because of his experience of setting up a MASH in Devon. He is managed by Children's Social Care, and reports regularly to the MASH Governance Group, which is chaired by the Corporate Director for Children, Families and Cultural Services. Line management of professionals within the MASH is provided by their own agencies; the Operational Manager has an overall co-ordinating and performance management role. In addition, members of the MASH Governance Group have been keeping relevant stakeholder boards updated e.g. Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board, Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Adults Board and Police Command.
7. The MASH design and processes were agreed by a variety of multi-agency working groups which began in December 2011. The processes are underpinned by an Information-Sharing Protocol and Agreement which has been signed by the agencies represented in the MASH. Information shared in the MASH is electronically stored in a secure portal.
8. The MASH set-up costs of £375,000 were met from the NCC Improvement Programme budget. Policy Committee agreed in September 2012 that annual recurring costs were to be met from County Council contingencies.

Performance

9. Performance in the MASH is measured in a variety of ways by different systems. Monitoring of telephone calls into the MASH is done via the Customer Service Centre system. This shows that from becoming operational in December 2012 to the end of October 2013 20,887 calls have been taken. The average is 1,750 calls per month; June and July were exceptionally busy with over 2,000 calls being taken in each month. Call waiting times and abandonment rates are also monitored, and unsurprisingly show that call waiting times increase at times of peak activity. During November, the waiting time on the MASH children's public line averaged 2 minutes 21 seconds, and 2 minutes 32 seconds on the MASH children's professionals line. Waiting times do oscillate and various measures have been put into place to alleviate call waiting and abandonment rates. In November 3% of calls were abandoned on the MASH children's public line, and 11% on the MASH children's professionals line.
10. Enquiries can also come in by e-mail, fax and letter and an on-line referral form for non-urgent children's enquiries has recently been launched to give professionals another option to make a MASH enquiry at periods of peak demand and to try and address the rates of call abandonment.
11. MASH enquiries (i.e. those calls which result in information being taken for consideration by a social worker in the MASH) have totalled 15,547 children's

enquiries in 11 months. This equates to an average of just fewer than 1,500 per month; however there was a marked increase in July, when 1,904 enquiries were recorded.

12. Enquiries come in from a variety of sources and agencies. The Police refer the most cases (23%), followed by Health agencies (14%), schools and colleges (12%) and family members (11%).
13. In addition to the above enquiries the MASH also receives an average of 60 domestic violence notifications per day from the Police. This is a significant increase from 2012 when on average 25 notifications per day were generated. To cope with this increased demand a new process for dealing with a selection of domestic violence notifications was introduced in September 2013. This new process distinguishes between 'crimes' and 'non-crimes', or domestic violence as opposed to domestic abuse. A partnership domestic violence meeting is held on a daily basis to share information and make decisions. Agencies are responsible for delivering on the actions agreed at that meeting.
14. The volume of enquiries has created significant issues for agencies in the MASH in responding to requests for information. Timeliness of partner agencies' responses to information-sharing requests has been monitored and various approaches have been taken to managing the volume. Health partners have increased their business support and practitioner components; and decisions have been made at various stages about the type of enquiry for which information is requested.
15. In May 2013 Nottinghamshire was selected as one of eight authorities to be involved in a series of pilot projects on 'systems leadership', jointly supported through the Local Government Association and the NHS. The MASH was seen as an excellent example of partnership working, but offered a good opportunity to work on systems leadership to understand and find solutions to the information sharing challenges, particularly between the Health Service and the MASH. The outcomes from the review included increased resources from Police and Health, change in systems processes and workflow, improved access to health systems, a redrawn governance framework and a renewed commitment to underlying principles of the MASH, all of which are seen as important steps to integrating Health and Social Care services.
16. The percentage and number of children's MASH enquiries being passed through to Children's Social Care has increased since the MASH became operational.
17. In July 2013 1,046 Initial Assessments were completed, and in both August and September over 900 were completed each month. This is almost double the amount of assessments completed in the same period in 2012. There are a number of reasons for the increase in demand for children's social care services. For example, the MASH in Nottinghamshire is a new gateway which professionals want to use. There has also been a number of high profile cases in the national media regarding child protection: Kyra Ishaq, Daniel Pelka and Hamza Khan. The performance of child protection services in Birmingham and Doncaster has been in the spotlight of national government, and there is ongoing national high profile interest in child sexual exploitation. In this context, professionals understandably

interpret cases as meeting child protection thresholds and refer to the MASH rather than make more appropriate referrals to early help and targeted support services.

18. In recognition of the increasing numbers of assessments (some of which did not meet the threshold for Children's Social Care), plans were made to re-focus the Children's Social Work part of the MASH to give qualified social workers clearer responsibility for initial threshold discussions with referring agencies. This took effect during October and early indications are that this has had the desired effect of ensuring thresholds are being applied appropriately and therefore that the right children are being provided with appropriate protection. Just over 700 Initial Assessments were completed during October, allowing the service to focus on the most vulnerable children and families.
19. Performance in the MASH will come under particular scrutiny when the Council receives its inspection by OFSTED of services for children in need of help and protection. OFSTED will begin their inspection in the MASH to evidence the quality and safety of our referral and assessment services, and follow the journey of children and families through our early help and social care services. OFSTED are currently testing a new inspection framework in four local authorities, with a wider roll-out expected from January 2014.
20. There is a continuing challenge for staff in the MASH to gather good quality information from referrers. The Education representatives (seconded Head Teachers) in the MASH are doing some focussed work with schools, identifying those which consistently make poor quality referrals and working with them to improve the information provided. A similar model is being applied by Health representatives who are tackling poor quality referrals into the MASH. This approach will be extended in the future to colleagues in other agencies.
21. The success of the MASH is dependent on partners within it being able to share information on those children and families who meet the threshold for children's social care services, and the ability to process this information quickly and pass the assessments out to Children's Social Care. Children and families who have needs which do not meet the Children's Social Care threshold are directed to other services, and the relationship between Early Help services and Children's Social Care is crucial. In the future it is planned to unify the management arrangements between the MASH and the Early Help Unit to provide one point of contact for all vulnerable children and families.

Early Help Unit and early help dataset

22. The Early Help Unit became operational on 2 September 2013. Based at Meadow House in Mansfield, the Unit provides a first point of contact for practitioners, parents or carers and young people wanting support and advice. The Unit accepts referrals on behalf of the County Council's early help and targeted support services, or signposts referrers onto non-NCC services.
23. **Table 1** below provides details of the number of requests for information and advice; and the number of requests for early help services dealt with by the Unit in its first two months of operating:

Table 1: Summary of the Early Help Unit's business during September & October 2013

Nature of the business	September 2013	October 2013	Total
Requests for information and advice	563	657	1,220
Requests for early help services (referrals)	110	205	315

24. From November 2013, the Early Help Unit has included duty desk responsibility for the County Council's homelessness support activity for young people.
25. Alongside the establishment of the Early Help Unit, an early help dataset is being developed which will include information about cases open to Children's Centres, Targeted Support, the Joint Access Teams (JATs) and Common Assessment Framework (CAFs) assessments. The Early Help data set will also record and track the progress of all MASH enquiries signposted to the Early Help Unit and forwarded to Early Help services for allocation.
26. The Early Help data set will allow reporting on a wide range of fields including:
 - a. source of the referral
 - b. reason for the referral
 - c. reason for the referral being declined by Early Help services
 - d. personal characteristics of the child / young person subject of the referral including location
 - e. reason for closure including the outcomes for the child, young person and their family.

Statutory and Policy Implications

27. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, the public sector equality duty, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Implications for Service Users

28. The MASH information sharing and analysis process will result in a more comprehensive assessment of need and risk at an earlier stage, resulting in Children's Social Care Services being targeted at the most vulnerable.

Safeguarding of Children and Vulnerable Adults Implications

29. Information sharing between agencies in the MASH results in early identification of child protection cases; ensures that all relevant available information is shared as soon as possible; and that the receiving social work team begins the investigation with a complete multi-agency package of information.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That the Committee notes and comments on the update on the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Unit and the Early Help Unit.

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Constitutional Comments

30. As this report is for noting only, no Constitutional Comments are required.

Financial Comments (KLA 18/11/13)

31. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

None.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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