

19 January 2017**Agenda Item: 5****Children's Trust Executive Sponsor: Steve Edwards****UPDATE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MULTI-AGENCY
SAFEGUARDING HUB (MASH)****Purpose of the report**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Children's Trust Executive with an update on the development of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

Overview of the MASH

2. Partners across Nottinghamshire worked together to establish the MASH, which opened in December 2012. The MASH deals with new safeguarding concerns about vulnerable children and adults, collating information from partner agencies and assessing risks to make better, faster and more consistent decisions about the most appropriate type of intervention.
3. The MASH involves over 65 representatives from Children's Social Care, Adult Safeguarding, Police, Health, Fire & Rescue, Schools, Early Help and Trading Standards working together in one secure room. Virtual links exist to other services and agencies such as probation, mental health, district councils and housing. This arrangement has significantly improved the sharing of information between agencies, helping to protect our most vulnerable children and adults from harm, neglect and abuse.
4. As a result of this improved information sharing, better decisions are being made about what action to take and support is being targeted on the most urgent cases. Better co-ordination between agencies is helping to ensure that vulnerable children and adults are kept safe and receive a more joined up, improved service. In addition, those reporting safeguarding concerns to the MASH are receiving a more professional service with better guidance and support.

Governance and engagement

5. The MASH is overseen by the MASH Governance Group, comprising senior representatives from partner agencies that have been meeting since December 2011, and now meet quarterly. Some members of the Children's Trust Executive have been members of the MASH Governance Group since its inception. At its meetings the Governance Group receive an update report from the MASH Operations Manager, two

performance reports and other reports as appropriate, as well as addressing strategic issues and those issues that have been escalated.

6. Changes in MASH arrangements are managed through the Operational Management Group, which reports to the Governance Group, meets monthly and includes representatives from all the partner agencies and teams that have staff in the MASH. At its meetings the Operational Management Group receive updates from each agency/team, two performance reports and other reports as appropriate, as well as addressing operational issues and any issues that have been delegated by the Governance Group.
7. These governance arrangements help to ensure the smooth running of the MASH, with operational issues and strategic issues being addressed by the appropriate group, and the two groups remaining linked through members' line management responsibilities.
8. The partner agencies involved in the MASH remain engaged and committed to it. This is demonstrated in the way that operational challenges are addressed, in partnership. Naturally operational issues and professional tensions arise in a multi-agency setting like the MASH. When they do, they are addressed by colleagues working together to find a solution, using the governance mechanisms that are in place.
9. At different times, each partner agency has found itself under pressure, often due to a spike in workload or a shortage of resources. For example, when the MASH first went live Children's Social Care experienced a significant rise in cases being passed for an Initial Assessment, causing major problems for teams downstream of the MASH. Additional staff were put in place and thresholds reasserted as part of a wide-ranging action plan that gradually resolved the situation.

Quality assurance

10. The MASH has been subject to a number of inspections and reviews which serve to quality assure the effectiveness of the MASH. These include inspections by Ofsted, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and the Information Commissioner's Office as well as internal reviews examining business processes, recording practices, Police safeguarding notifications and team working arrangements.
11. In addition, extensive quality assurance arrangements are in place to regularly audit cases, such as:
 - a. Monthly multi-agency case learning workshop
 - b. Quarterly MASH enquiry audits within the Children's Social Care Quality Management Framework
 - c. Monthly review of call recordings
 - d. Schedule of themed audits e.g. auditing re-referrals or cases signposted to the Early Help Unit

Operational improvements

12. Since the MASH opened four years ago a significant number of operational improvements have been made to make the MASH more effective and to cope with the changing demands upon the service. Some examples are provided below:
- a. Co-location of the MASH with the Early Help Unit, Adult Access Service and Safeguarding Children Information Management Team
 - b. Increase in Children's Social Care and Adult Safeguarding teams
 - c. Inclusion of new partners in the MASH – Early Help, Schools, Trading Standards and more recently Fire & Rescue Service, Quality & Market Management
 - d. Implementation of Encompass Nottinghamshire, informing schools and children's centres after an incident of domestic abuse is reported to Police
 - e. Redesign of processes for handling notifications of domestic abuse, including a daily multi-agency meeting to triage the notifications
 - f. Development of new electronic system for sharing information
 - g. Remodelling of team structures to improve case handling and team working
 - h. Improvement of business practices such as performance management, quality assurance, training and business continuity
 - i. Introduction of multi-agency case-learning workshops
13. Each of these changes have taken place with the active involvement of all the partners in the MASH, both through the governance mechanisms described above and multi-agency working groups.

Operational challenges

14. The MASH is currently facing a number of operational challenges which are described in more detail below.

Increase in referrals about children – There has been a sustained increase in the number of referrals about children which continues to affect the performance of Children's Social Care in the MASH. The proportion of cases handled within timescales has varied considerably and has been below expectations, with a backlog forming. Action is being taken to address the backlog, with additional Social Workers brought in and changes made to streamline processes. A review of resources and processes has been started, highlighting problem areas and identifying possible solutions, some of which can be implemented quickly. The review will be completed by April, reporting to the Children's Social Care Divisional Leadership Team.

Daily meeting about domestic abuse incidents – The move of the Police Domestic Abuse Support Unit from the MASH to Oxclose Lane Police station and the relocation of the MASH to the Piazza caused some temporary disruption to the daily meeting between Police, Children's Social Care and Education where high and medium risk domestic abuse incidents are triaged. The meetings now take place via video conference or telephone and practical procedures have been tightened up, following a review meeting. As a result, the arrangements are felt to be working well, but close monitoring continues.

Staffing vacancies – Six members of staff have left the MASH recently from Police, Health and Children’s Social Care. Agreement has been given for the vacant posts to be filled and recruitment is underway, however such staffing changes will temporarily reduce capacity in these areas and there will be some disruption as relationships with new staff are built.

Business continuity – The MASH relies heavily upon a wide range of technology, and frequently experiences system problems as a result. These range from short outages with limited impact to major incidents requiring teams to move to other offices in order to maintain services. The business continuity plan is reviewed after each incident and efforts continue to ensure the MASH can respond effectively to incidents in future.

Conclusion

15. As the MASH has evolved and developed over the past four years, the commitment of partners has allowed operational challenges to be addressed in a positive and structured way, with robust governance arrangements in place. This provides a firm foundation for the changes and improvements that the MASH will need to make in the future.

Recommendations

1. The Children’s Trust Executive to note the report.

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Background Papers

None