



15 April 2024

Agenda Item: 5

REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

DEVELOPING THE APPROACH TO MEETING CHILDREN'S NEEDS THROUGH THE MULTI-AGENCY SAFEGUARDING HUB (MASH)

Purpose of the Report

1. To brief Children and Families Select Committee on work being undertaken to further develop the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) in Nottinghamshire so that the approach enables more children to be able to access the right early help support through signposting, advice and guidance to community-based professionals or direct access to early help services, in addition to it providing swift and timely access to social work assessment and support.

Information

2. The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) was established in December 2012 as the single point of contact for safeguarding concerns to be reported about vulnerable children and adults, with the aim of improving information sharing between key partners (local authority, police, health and probation) to help protect the most vulnerable from significant harm and abuse. The last time the MASH was inspected by Ofsted (October 2019), it was reported that: "Children identified as being in need of urgent protection and considered to be at risk of significant harm receive a quick and effective response from the multiagency safeguarding hub (MASH)." Reviews and audits since have supported this view. An independent social worker was commissioned to audit 100 children's cases in November 2023 and the outcome provided assurance that this remains the case, with a timely and effective response to risk seen in all of the referrals reviewed.
3. Over the ten years that the MASH has been operational, the number of safeguarding concerns reported about children has doubled, from 15,642 to 31,652, however the number of Child and Family Assessments (completed if there is evidence of significant risk of abuse or neglect of a child) has not increased significantly in the same period, suggesting that need has not increased. This has created significant operational pressure on colleagues working within the MASH, and whilst agencies have increased the staffing resources in the MASH to accommodate this rise in workload, continuing to grow the MASH is not a sustainable option. The Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (NSCP) Strategic Leadership Group (SLG) commissioned a high-level review from the Service Director, Transformation and Improvement in April 2023. The review primarily involved discussions with key stakeholders individually and in groups, coupled with some

limited reviews of models in other areas and data analysis. SLG considered the recommendations in July 2023.

4. The review noted *that there appear to be a number of key areas of challenge around thresholds and the roles and responsibilities of partners. These seem to be culturally embedded and will require significant partnership commitment over a long period of time to work through. Understanding human motivation, the operational contexts that colleagues are working within and being able to understand each other's perspectives will be key to making progress in this area.* SLG accepted this view and delegated project oversight to the Service Director for Help, Care and Protection from Nottinghamshire County Council, the Deputy Chief Nurse from the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and the Detective Superintendent for Nottinghamshire Police's Public Protection Unit. The group is known as Platinum and an external organisation, Public Digital, was commissioned to work with the partnership for 3 months in in autumn 2023 (dates) in order to support in addressing this identified challenge. This work was funded from the NSCP reserve with SLG (through Platinum) maintaining the governance oversight of the project.
5. The first phase of the project involved 26 interviews (some single and some groups) with professionals who refer to the MASH, who work in the MASH, partnership leaders and the teams providing support such as data reporting and recording system design. They also read reviews, reports and documents from across the partnership providing the background and context for the MASH. A series of workshops were facilitated to identify the pain points for referrers and develop opportunities to address these, as a partnership.
6. A multi-agency working group (referred to as Diamond) was established with an operational manager from each of the agencies and teams in the MASH: police, health, probation and from NCC Children's Social Care, Early Help, Adult Social Care, Business Support, MASH Operations and an open invitation for colleagues from other disciplines (such as Mosaic (case management system) design). A Project Manager and Project Officer were allocated by NCC to support the project, along with the NSCP Service Manager and the MASH Operations Manager. These four act as the project team supporting Platinum and Diamond. The approach taken by the multi-agency working group involved coalescing around an agreed problem statement and set of operating principles:

What we are solving:

- Children, young people and families who are referred to the MASH often need support beyond safeguarding or social care.
- These needs aren't always being met because until now, the MASH has been optimised to identify safeguarding and social care service needs.
- The NSCP wants to be able to identify these other needs and provide the right support earlier, to prevent children, young people and family's situations from deteriorating further and from needing social care in the future.

How we work:

- Children, young people and families come first
- We make decisions based on needs, not thresholds
- No big bangs. We are improving our service one step at a time
- We learn through doing. When we don't know, we test safely and learn
- We are open and honest; we are proactive about showing people what we are doing
- We won't be restricted by technology or process

- We thrive with high support, and high challenge
 - Our partnership is one team. We involve everyone who has a stake in the service or how it's delivered when we are making changes.
7. Working in an open and honest way combines involving everyone with a stake within the approach to improvement, with a transparent approach to communicating. Each Friday of the project (27 weeks to date) the project officer sends 'week notes' which are a brief, accessible summary of what has happened in the project that week and what is coming up. The current distribution list is to 400 professionals from across the County. Diamond also run a 'Show and Tell' session every 6-8 weeks which is both in person in the MASH and on MS Teams, where they provide a more detailed project update and a Q and A session. The week notes and show and tell slides are also available on the NSCP website. Members of Diamond also rotate in attending various forums, such as the NSCP Safeguarding Children Today seminar and the Joint Notts ICB group, to seek wider views.
8. Learning through doing involves taking a 'test and iterate' approach to making change. Decisions about what to test are made within the Diamond working group. Tests are then designed with a wider operational group, including referrers. To date the following tests have been run:

Test 1: A Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) on duty reviewing and responding to referrals together based on the needs of the child

What was involved

In the normal operating environment, professional disciplines sit separately and information is requested and shared via email with minimal discussion. The process is transactional rather than relational. This test involved reconfiguring the workplace so that health, police, children's social care, business support, a MASH officer, an early help officer and the Education Adviser in the MASH sat together to review, discuss and confirm actions on each referral.

What was learned

The test was small scale, short and designed rapidly leaving the team to work out many of the details and how the processes would work during the test. This meant that the process was not as efficient as it could have been, the number of referrals seen was low, and the data collected was inconsistent. Despite this, there is evidence to suggest that having a multi-agency team at the front door receiving referrals, triaging and making joint outcome decisions have:

- Built and strengthened partnership relationships and ways of working, which led to improved partners experience
- Enabled faster development of multi-agency action plans which documented how the needs-led outcomes were made by the team
- Contributed to a cultural shift among the partners involved in the test, focusing on the needs of the child rather than just deciding if the child's situation met the threshold for an assessment by Children's Social Care or not.

Feedback received

From the test team:

“We talked about children :)”

“We genuinely improved outcomes for children yesterday”

“Conversations today have led to informed decisions”

“We identified who could help with fam[ily] straightaway.”

“We identified the most appropriate team - helped to have everyone’s input and find the most appropriate service.”

Test 2: Optimising the MDT and Recording Proportionately

What was involved

The same group of professionals from test one, with the addition of adult’s social care and probation being on call for the MDT where needed. The police colleague was also available remotely. The test focussed on education referrals for the first week and health referrals in the second. The test also used a shorter form on the Mosaic case management system which simplified how the referral was recorded, so it was proportionate to the needs identified, and allowed the analysis, actions and decisions from the multi-disciplinary discussion to be noted.

What was learned

The same positive learning was taken as in Test 1. By refining certain aspects of the test, such as the members of the MDT and the structure of discussions, more efficient and effective discussions were held that did more to ensure that children received the right support at the right time. In addition, more team members were involved in testing, helping to build relationships between individuals and teams in the MASH.

During the test colleagues from the Mosaic team were present which enabled them, with the help from team participants, to find an interim solution to simplify recording on Mosaic. This has now been implemented to the wider MASH team and received positive feedback.

Feedback received

From the test team:

“We genuinely made kids safer today”

“I didn’t get why we were doing this (test), partners sit in the same room anyway. But we don’t do this”

“Can I do testing all the time please?”

“It looks like a real team” - referring to the test team.

Test 3: Routes In, which was run in tandem with testing an outreach role, currently referred to as Team Around the Family Support Officer (TAFSO), led by the Early Help System Redesign project team.

What was involved

In the current operating model non-urgent referrals are received via online form or email. Telephone calls where the referrer believes the situation to be urgent (requiring a same day social work response) are triaged by a MASH officer. In this test all of the schools in the Newark area were asked to phone through all referrals. The phone calls were answered by social workers and the test was to look at how social workers might be able to coach and support referrers to feel safer in managing appropriate needs and risk in the community and to signpost to the services best placed to meet children's needs. An early help officer sat with the test social workers to provide advice as needed. At the same time, the Early Help System Redesign Project ran a test of an early help unit officer working with the same group of Newark schools to provide advice and support to them in working with families they were concerned about before referring to the MASH.

What was learned

Anecdotally, it is clear from the test team and referrer feedback that this approach created a positive user experience for referrers. Significant improvements were also made to the process for gaining referrer feedback compared to the first two tests. The in-depth learning from the test including impact and outcomes for children and families is still being pulled together and will inform next steps in terms of decision-making around future ways of working.

Feedback received

Reflections and feedback shared from referrers:

“Being able to speak about concerns directly with someone, getting an outcome straight away, with much faster service, means we can feedback to students straight away...”

“The test referral process is so much more efficient, the quick and easy process gives a clear outcome at the point of referral. We find out immediately if this is being taken as a referral or information only.”

“We were able to discuss as professionals the best way forward to meet the needs of the children...”

“...I was asked if things had been done by the school that hadn't been done, this gave me thoughts about what we can improve on for the next time.”

“...felt confident talking about a situation which led to immediate action and a Social Worker coming to school that same day”

“Preferred this way of referral as I felt I was having a conversation with someone who could give their opinion of where they felt it should go, able to have that two-way conversation”

9. Whilst running the tests to iterate and scale towards an improved operating model, Diamond are also working on workstreams known as 'upstream', 'culture shift and identity' and 'how we know how we're doing'.

10. 'Upstream' is work on how to influence a shift in the mindset of those working with children in the community who are likely to contact the front door to move from a focus on thresholds, to identifying needs and thinking about the best way to meet those needs. The key artefact for this workstream is re-working the Pathway to Provision thresholds document away from a threshold-based ladder to a needs-based map of services in collaboration with professionals working in the community. The rollout of Family Hubs across the County will be critical in supporting community-based services to provide effective, joined up support to families at the earliest point of need being identified. The TAFSO test referred to previously also forms part of the 'upstream' work.
11. 'Culture shift and identity' is work on supporting those working in the existing MASH and the professionals around it to move to a truly needs-based rather than threshold driven culture. The strengths-based practice team from NCC are starting work in the MASH on changing language and the Diamond group are encouraging change through the professional disciplines sitting together as a multi-disciplinary team.
12. 'How we know how we're doing' looks to create a partnership set of qualitative and quantitative data with an agreed set of measures that the partnership leaders can use to understand the health of the MASH. In the past data from different partners has not matched, prompting uncertainty about the true performance of the MASH and an over-reliance on misleading measures, such as the proportion of referrals resulting in 'no further action'.

Next steps

13. The Diamond group are working on a decision about the next test. This will either involve iterating and scaling one of the previous tests or joining the previous tests together. The decision will be made by Diamond on 28/03/2024, following which the test will need to be designed and any approvals sought from Platinum as needed.
14. Within NCC, governance of the front door project and the early help system re-design project has been joined into one Board meeting to carefully map and address interdependencies. There are also colleagues from the adult safeguarding front door project in the Platinum and Diamond Groups to map and address interdependencies there. Project Managers from the respective projects meet regularly to manage interdependencies and share ideas. This will remain ongoing and will ensure that changes to the children's front door and adults front door will be carried out in a co-ordinated way, recognising that many partner agencies make referrals about both adults and children.
15. There are some proven areas from the tests that are currently being or have been implemented. These include a change to the Mosaic recording process to save NCC professionals time and social workers being allowed to sign off specific pieces of work without management oversight. The team will continue to implement 'quick wins' where testing proves their safety and effectiveness whilst working towards the larger implementation.
16. Diamond and colleagues from the early help system re-design project are in frequent touch with other areas to both understand what others are doing and to share what is happening in Nottinghamshire. Colleagues from the Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Partnership

visited the MASH recently to understand the ongoing work, and meetings are arranged with Staffordshire and Lincolnshire in the next two weeks to understand their equivalent of a TAFSO role, which is well embedded in both partnerships. This relationship building and learning from others will continue.

17. Within NCC the Business Intelligence Unit and the Mosaic design team from Information and Systems are working together with the front door project team to design a workshop to review the Mosaic and reporting requirements for a child's journey through Early Help and through a MASH referral. The goals are to create more streamlined processes for the practitioners recording the information on Mosaic, a clearer record of the child's journey and for the reporting from the Mosaic records to better align with the Local Authority's practice standards and vision for children.
18. Diamond colleagues are also focussing on how best to respond to needs identified through Public Protection Notifications from the police. PPNs represent a significant proportion of referrals to the MASH. The demand from these has increased and is forecast to continue to do so, but is more complex (as with all emergency service referrals) to respond to because Police Officers attending the incident have limited information at the time of submitting the PPNs. This is a particularly challenging area for the partnership to work together on because it reflects the very different operating contexts for different referrers, but positive solutions are being sought.
19. The project will continue to work in open, sending an update each week in the form of weeknotes, and regular show and tells. Representatives will continue to attend partnership events to provide updates and build relationships with the wider community.

Financial Implications

20. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That the Children and Families Select Committee considers and comments on this report.

Councillor Tracey Taylor
Cabinet Member – Children and Families

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Sam Harris
Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Manager
E: samantha.harris@nottscc.gov.uk

Constitutional Comments (CM 28/03/2024)

21. The report falls within the terms of reference of the Children and Families Select Committee.

Financial Comments (CDS 27/03/24)

22. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

CFS0022