

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 MAY 2016

FUTURE DIRECTION FOR THE MULTI-AGENCY SAFEGUARDING HUB

Report by the Deputy Director, Children's Social Care
& Early Intervention Service

Background and context

1. On the 26 November 2013, Cabinet received a paper from the Director of Children Services recommending the development of a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) in conjunction with partner agencies.
2. This was in response to two main drivers. Firstly, an acknowledgement that the overwhelming majority of Serious Case Reviews published in the last four decades had the same issues of poor interagency communication and failed handover arrangements as key contributors to tragic outcomes for children. And secondly, recommendations arising from a Home Office Select Committee on Child Sexual Exploitation in 2013 strongly advocated the setting up of MASH's across the country. This was strengthened by a joint letter from four government departments which went to all Local Authority Chief Executives and Police and Crime Commissioners in March 2015 which stated that their Secretaries of State were 'clear on the need for integrated multi-agency approaches to underpin information sharing ... every agency should commit to this approach.'
3. Following Cabinet's decision in 2013, the Oxfordshire MASH opened with a phased go live, with work from the Children Social Care Assessments teams and all domestic abuse notifications going live on 22 September 2014 and a full roll out on the 27 October 2014.
4. It is interesting to note how the MASH model has been developed across the country. Not every area has adopted a MASH and for those that do there are a variety of models. Whilst most early MASH models focused on children most at risk, later models developed for instance in Sandwell, Leicester and Cheshire have increasingly turned away from this approach and looked at early help intelligence sharing to manage cases lower down the continuum of risk. This model also has a strong focus on key issues such as domestic violence and neglect, or hidden harm. This is a model we are currently exploring with partners.
5. The MASH in Oxfordshire is made up of representatives from Oxfordshire County Council, Thames Valley Police, Oxford Health, Oxford University Hospital Trusts, Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group, National Probation Service, Fire and Rescue Services, Drug and Alcohol Services, Ambulance Service and Education with links to city and district council. It is a multi-agency team of people based at the Cowley Road police centre. It operates as a sealed

intelligence hub where information is shared and decisions about what further action should be taken are made.

6. Whilst the commitment of partner agencies to the MASH is strong and it has made real advances in the handling of domestic violence notifications, performance in the MASH has been of concern. A recent Joint Targeted Area Inspection in Oxfordshire which focused on child sexual exploitation, missing children and the front door which will be published on the 10th May is likely to be critical of our current model in the MASH. Added to this, the transformation of Childrens Social Care over the next year will include elements such as the development of locality and community support teams which will lead to a reshaping of Childrens Social Care's front door. Anticipating these changes, Oxfordshire County Council alongside partners, had already begun a review of the MASH. A new remodelled front door service for Children Social Care will be put in place by the autumn of this year.
7. This paper reflects on what the current issues in the MASH are, what has worked well and outlines the next steps.

Performance Issues

8. Performance Scrutiny has received regular updates on the performance for the MASH via its regular business monitoring meetings. Timeliness of decision-making and issues of capacity have been a concern almost since its inception. In February 2016, the Director of Children Services informed Performance Scrutiny of the necessity to review the MASH. The issues of capacity experienced by Children Social Care have been compounded by the growth in activity, particularly in relation to the increase in the number of assessments and contacts and referrals . These issues have been well rehearsed with Performance Scrutiny.

	Apr 15 to Mar 16
New enquiries in period	20062
Enquiries completed in period	20786
Family enquiries completed in period	11296
Enquiries leading to Referral	6597
Enquiries open at end of period	634
Assessments started	5589
Assessments completed	5510

	1 year pre- MASH	Apr 15 to Mar 16	change
Contacts	18803	20062	7%
Referrals	5769	6603	14%
Single Assessments per working day	11.8	21.0	78%

9. A MASH enquiry is given a 'RAG' rating when it is received. The most urgent enquiries (rated Red) are required to be complete within 240 working minutes (4 hours), Amber rated 480 working minutes (8 hours), and less urgent (Green and un-rated) within 1440 working minutes (24 hours). The timeliness of the enquiry is then calculated from receipt, to a manager's decision being made on further action. Although performance on the most urgent enquiries has remained fairly good, there remain concerns about amber, green and non-rated enquiries.

Timeliness enquiry start to manager decision October 15 - March 16	Working minutes allocated	% enquiries completed on time
Red	240	75%
Amber	480	17%
Green	1440	8%
No RAG/No Info share	1440	61%
Overall		42%

10. The rate of contacts and referrals has risen slightly in the 2 years around the implementation of the MASH, but assessments have increased by 78%. This has led to a drop in the timeliness of completing assessments and impacted on the capacity of the whole of the front door.
11. We are seeking to review the MASH with partners to improve timeliness and to reduce the number of enquiries that require No Further Action (NFA). Currently, 75% of all enquiries into the MASH are designated NFA. This is where enquiries are made to the MASH which do not meet the criteria for further work by Children Social Care. It is believed that Children Social Care can handle these enquiries in a more productive way through the development of its future model. In particular, the introduction of new locality and community support teams will be developed to support professionals worried about a child at an earlier stage and triage enquiries before they get to the MASH.

Resources in the MASH

12. There were difficulties in recruiting to social work posts at the beginning of the MASH. The delay in recruitment meant that the MASH was already experiencing a backlog of cases by December 2014. This was a particular issue for children social care but other partners experienced issues with capacity and backlog as well.
13. In May 2015, a team of additional agency workers were appointed on a 12-week period to add capacity and provide a diagnostic service regarding MASH processes. Whilst this improved the backlog dramatically, issues of timeliness remain.
14. All agencies have put in additional resources to increase capacity and cope with demand. However, this has impacted on the cost and delivery of the MASH. For

instance, this has meant that children social care spent over £1m on the MASH in the last financial year compared to its budget of 750k. Children Social Care currently have a team of 15 workers in the MASH (including admin), this will be reviewed as part of the changes we will make to the front door.

Liaison with referral organisations

15. Other professionals, have informed us that they do not consistently receive feedback on the outcome of their MASH enquiry. This has been a particular issue for schools. Since June 2015, a specific education post was created to work with schools and develop those relationships. It is proposed that the new model with its locality and community support teams can provide direct contact for teachers and other professionals needing advice and guidance regarding children.

Domestic Abuse

16. The development of the MASH has brought some key benefits to the work carried out by Thames Valley Police and Children Social Care on domestic abuse notifications. A new system is now in place where by Thames Valley Police triage all notifications before they refer on to Children Social Care.
17. This has led to an easier identification of domestic abuse cases which need further action. In response to a serious case review involving the murder of a young woman by her abusive partner, the MASH has also implemented a new pathway for young people experiencing domestic abuse.

Next steps

18. The Director of Childrens Services will be taking a paper to Cabinet on May 24 2016 which outlines the future model of Children Social Care services. This will lead to a redevelopment of the front door with the introduction of locality and community support services.
19. A review of the MASH is underway with partner organisations and a new model will be agreed to implement alongside the other changes within Children Social Care. This will enable us to address the concerns raised in this paper and develop a model which improves outcomes for children and families in Oxfordshire, whilst holding on to the key benefits such as strong partnership working and work on domestic abuse.
20. We will take the learning from the Joint Targeted Area Inspection and incorporate those areas for improvement within our new model (please see Annex 1, which is an extract from the letter of findings on Oxfordshire's Joint Targeted Area Inspection which will be published on 10 May 2016. This information is embargoed until that date and at this stage is provided for Committee Members only).

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21. We will agree the new model with our partners by the end of May and begin implementation alongside our wider transformation over the summer with a view to full implementation in Autumn.
22. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to consider the issues outlined in this paper and make any comments to Cabinet on the next steps.**

LUCY BUTLER

Deputy Director, Children's Social Care & Early Intervention Service
Oxfordshire County Council
Tel: 01865 815 165