

Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

5 January 2016

An overview of the work currently being undertaken in the Walsall Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Cllr E Hughes - Portfolio Holder for Children's Services

Executive Summary:

This report provides an overview of current work being undertaken in the Walsall Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), which was established on 12 October 2015.

Reason for scrutiny:

The report was requested by Members of the Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel to provide them with a current overview of the functioning of the MASH and to enable them to challenge and scrutinise its function.

Recommendations:

That:

Scrutiny notes and supports the contents of this report and is assured that the Multi-Agency systems and processes to protect and safeguard children and young people in Walsall are effective.

Background papers:

The following reports provide an overview in to issues of Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH)

- *Working Together to Safeguard Children* A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, March 2015
- *Working Together to Safeguard Children: Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs*, Home Office & The Rt Hon Norman Baker, 29th July 2014
- *Multi Agency Working & Information Sharing Project, Final Report*, Home Office, July 2014
- *Assessing the Early Impact of Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) in London*, Rachel Crockett et al, December 2013
- *Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs*, Centre of Excellence for Information Sharing, 2015
- *Will MASH make our Children safer?* Journal of Family Health Care Vol 22 No6.
- *Looking Inside Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs*, Journal of Family Health, March 2013

Resource and legal considerations:

Protecting and safeguarding children at risk of significant harm is a statutory duty placed on Local Authority Chief Executives, Directors of Children's Services, Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) Chairs and senior managers within organisations who commission and provide services for children, young people and families. This includes social workers, professionals from health services, adult services, the police, academy trusts, education and voluntary and community sectors that have contact with children, young people and families.

The resources required to respond to this statutory requirement comes from within the existing resources across the Partnership of organisations working in Walsall to protect vulnerable children and those at risk of harm. The majority of this resource is funded by the Council.

Citizen impact:

The effective delivery of high quality services to protect children and young people from significant harm has a direct impact on the welfare and well being of children and Young people in Walsall. It directly links to the corporate priority to improve Health and Wellbeing and the Children's Services priority that all children and young people in Walsall are safe, protected and supported.

Environmental impact:

There is no direct environmental impact.

Performance management:

Walsall Safeguarding Children's Board actively monitors and scrutinises the performance of the Partnership in successfully identifying and supporting children and young people at risk of significant harm or who are likely to be if their circumstances remain unchanged.

Equality Implications:

The co-ordinated provision of services designed to address the protection of children provides specific support for those children and young people who are at risk of significant harm.

Consultation:

This report has been prepared by Walsall Children's Services.

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Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

1. Several national high profile cases, where children have been seriously harmed or died, highlight the tragic consequences which can result when information that indicates risk and concern about the welfare of a child held by one agency is not shared appropriately by others. Multi agency working is key to early identification of risk, improved information sharing and communication, joint decision making, management of risk and coordinated protective action.
2. *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2015)* paragraph 24, page 17 states that –
3. *Fears about sharing information cannot be allowed to stand in the way of the need to promote the welfare and protect the safety of children. To ensure effective safeguarding arrangements:*
 - *all organisations should have arrangements in place which set out clearly the processes and the principles for sharing information between each other, with other professionals and with the LSCB; and*
 - *no professional should assume that someone else will pass on information which they think may be critical to keeping a child safe. If a professional has concerns about a child's welfare and believes they are suffering or likely to suffer harm, then they should share the information with local authority children's social care.*
4. Walsall's Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) became operational on 12 October 2015. The partners currently within the Hub are Children's Services, West Midlands Police, Education and Early Help. The Hub ensures that information relating to children and young people and the adults in their lives can be shared at the earliest opportunity. In order to safeguard children and young people and ensure robust risk assessment and the best safeguarding decisions that deliver timely, necessary and proportionate interventions, decision makers need to consider the full information set regarding an individual and their circumstances. The information that is held by a single agency is unlikely to give the full picture or identify the true risk. All the relevant information held by a wide range of agencies needs to be available to key decision makers and partners within the MASH operate on a full disclosure principal. Agreed Partnership protocols and procedures are in place to ensure and enable this.
5. All contacts made by both professionals and members of the public regarding safeguarding issues relating to a child will be directed into the MASH. The contact will be screened and information gathered from all agencies in the MASH. A recommendation will then be made as to the next course of action, which will be approved by a manager. At present there is no health representation within the MASH, however there is agreement for the sharing of health information requests to be made within one hour of the request being made. Health representatives will be located in the MASH once professional clearances have been undertaken. In time further partners will be invited to become part of the MASH. Governance arrangements for the MASH are provided through Children's Services Leadership Team and with Partners of the Walsall Safeguarding Children's Board.
6. If a referral is considered to be child protection, the MASH will screen the referral and hold a strategy meeting to agree how the enquiry will proceed. The agreed standard for the Walsall MASH to progress a child protection concern is within a maximum of 2 hours.

7. There are contacts made to the MASH that once screened do not require social services intervention and the family can be supported through services within Early Help, this recommendation is always approved by a manager to ensure that support and intervention with families is proportionate to the presenting risk and need.
8. To ensure that there is a joined up approach, a social worker is located within the Early Help hub and ensures that all contacts are appropriate for Early Help and do not have safeguarding concerns. If a contact to the Early Help hub is assessed to have safeguarding concerns then this is passed immediately to the MASH to ensure that it is screened and actioned appropriately.
9. Since being in operation, the MASH has been between 2 children's electronic recording systems and therefore the data below is manually tracked and can only be viewed as 'headline'. It cannot be relied upon for total accuracy as for example sibling groups are not always known at the time of referral. In the last 7 weeks the MASH has received:

	Total	Avg Per Week
Contacts	3,675	525
Referrals	1,117	160
Advice & Guidance	2,510	359
Strategy Discussions	72	10
Conversion of contacts to Child & Family Assessments on MASH decision	254	36
Child & Family Assessments undertaken within the IRS teams	285 (6 wks data available)	48