

## **Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 15 February 2024**

### **MASH Review and Adoption of a Staffordshire Childrens Front Door**

#### **Recommendation**

I recommend that the Committee:

- a. Receive an update in respect of changes to the MASH and Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements for comment and observations.

#### **Local Member Interest:**

N/A

#### **Report of Mark Sutton, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People**

#### **Summary**

##### **What is the Overview and Scrutiny Committee being asked to do and why?**

1. Consider the report for comment and observations. The MASH is the current arrangement for The MASH is the current arrangement in Staffordshire for multi-agency information sharing between statutory partners. Arrangements have been updated due to Stoke on Trent LA leaving the arrangement formally in March 2023.

#### **Report**

##### **Background**

2. In common with many local authority areas the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent MASH was originally developed in 2011.
3. A MASH or Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub co-locates a range of agencies, including police, children's social care, adult social care, education, probation, and health staff, to share information and in addition to meeting statutory functions, identify emerging risks and issues, particularly in relation to domestic abuse. It should be noted that the success of the MASH model is that information sharing between agencies is much improved by co-location and a shared sense of identity

and purpose which speaks to a physical location and is not just about shared systems or processes.

4. Since its inception the MASH has been under constant informal and formal review including the use of internal and external change management, the most significant of which resulted in a new operating model delivered by the 'Doing More' project delivered in 2015-2016. This defined the responsibility for specific cohorts in terms of owning agency namely:
  5. Children's Services – concerns about the welfare of a child
  - Adult Services – concerns about the welfare of a vulnerable adult
  - Police – concerns regarding a domestic abuse situation (no children or vulnerable adults.
6. Referrals then move into the MASH for information-sharing by the owning agency when a defined indicative threshold (for that cohort) is assessed as being met.
7. This is fundamentally the abiding operating model supported by an information sharing system the ISL (Information Sharing Log) which is provided on a system and server developed and maintained by Staffordshire County Council.
8. In March 2019, an inadequate Ofsted judgement in respect of Stoke on Trent Childrens Services led to an examination of various elements of practice within that authority. Whilst the original Ofsted judgement had not criticised the MASH, it did comment on the authority's interaction with it.
9. As a result, there was a clear indication from interim and permanent senior managers in Stoke on Trent that they wished to leave the current arrangements in the MASH and create separate arrangements of their own. In July 2021 Stoke on Trent staff physically left the building and have since carried out their MASH functions remotely.
10. In early 2023 senior managers, in Stoke on Trent Childrens Social Care agreed to separate out their governance arrangements and explore the formation of a separate MASH function with specific accountability and design for the City of Stoke-on-Trent Council.
11. This precipitated a final separation of governance arrangements in March 2023 from those in Staffordshire County Council.
12. This separation creates a clear opportunity for Staffordshire Childrens Services to develop a specific Staffordshire Childrens multi-agency

safeguarding arrangement, and for partners in adult services to consider how they may wish to develop corresponding arrangements using shared technology and the continued benefits of co-location with police and other partners.

## **MASH**

13. Research would suggest that up to 80% of outstanding local authorities do not have a formal MASH and it should be clear at the outset that a MASH is not the only model for effective multi agency cooperation and information sharing.

The DfE in their most recent evaluation of MASH had agreed with the national Panel to stop using the term 'MASH'.

14. To signal a change and to focus the emphasis on evidence of impact on children and less about the structure of MASH, there has been some discussion that the usage of the term MASH be stopped. This would correspond with the new version of Working Together (to safeguard children) 2023 which talks about MASA's (Multi agency safeguarding arrangements) at all levels of the system.

15. The scope of the current MASH arrangements is focussed primarily on statutory partners, that is, police and health and not necessarily partners in Housing, Education, Probation, and the youth offending service for example. As the MASA's are developed there will need to be discussion about what functions are retained in a centralised service and which are developed using a district footprint which corresponds to a place-based approach and the development of Family Hubs and for the police, Harm Reduction Hubs.

16. There is also the opportunity for co-location and participation of partners and local authority functions in respect of Child Sexual Exploitation and missing children which are not integrated into MASH arrangements currently but would also benefit from co-location.

## **MASH Transition**

17. The departure of colleagues from Stoke on Trent LA has required some consideration in terms of specific areas of operation specifically:

## **ISL (Information Sharing Log) Replacement**

18. The current MASH arrangements use a System developed by the Staffordshire ICT for information sharing between partners known as the ISL Information Sharing Log. The system was implemented in the first instance as a short-term measure in 2013, believing that there would be

systems developed which would offer interoperability across systems operated by statutory partners.

19. Becoming a 'Staffordshire only' MASH does offer the opportunity to develop an information sharing system integrated with the Care Director CSC system however, that is no longer an option and in December 2023 several software providers demonstrated similar systems to members of the Operational Management Group, also invited were colleagues from adult social care. In January 2024 a decision was reached to continue with the current ISL until a pending social care recording system is identified.

### **Governance**

20. Governance arrangements have been disaggregated and there is now a bimonthly Childrens services Operational group chaired by the Head of Access to Services and attended by statutory and other partners. There are quarterly updates to Staffordshire Safeguarding Board Q&A and the activity is overseen by the MASH project Board which currently accepts updates from Stoke and Staffordshire Childrens and adult services.
21. As part of the Ways of Working strand post transformation, the monthly 'Future Vision Planning Partnership' meeting has now moved to '*Early Help Access Development - Partnership Working Group*' to focus on and develop the Family Hub, Early Help offer.

### **Information Sharing agreements.**

22. The current MASH information sharing agreement to be updated by colleagues from IGU and agreed with partners once Stoke on Trent LA leave the ISL.

### **Performance management**

23. The current arrangements including the ISL provide a wealth of information however it is difficult to interpret as the information relates to both Stoke and Staffs. It is also mixed with adult services information and has been notoriously difficult to establish an effective framework. Once functions are disaggregated there will be scope for accurate reporting and development of a meaningful performance framework.

### **Location**

24. The current location remains the preferred option for co-location alongside colleagues from police, health, and adult services.

## **Developments**

25. Customer Services, with oversight and advice from one or more Consultant Social Workers have provided, since November 2023, an early and brief initial Triage to consider an indicative level of need and then direct the enquiry to an Early Help Gateway staffed by unqualified Advice and Support Workers (SCAS) supported by a consultant Social Worker and Family Practitioner Lead. This gives a better consistency of referral and proper oversight of the appropriate team.
26. Where the indicative threshold is CIN/ Sec 17 these are directed to the Social Work Gateway (SCAS) with a further route to a direct line (SCAS) for serious and immediate concerns including where a Sec 47 is indicated.
27. Customer services are ideally placed to provide information and advice where neither of these thresholds is reached and this is where development of pathways and processes are required in terms of Tier 2 and Family Hubs for example and the opportunities for engaging with PBA and services offered by way of Staffordshire Connects.

## **Link to Strategic Plan**

28. To offer every Staffordshire child and young person the best start in life, and the chance to achieve their potential.

## **Contact Details**

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