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## Report to the Children's Social Care and Learning Select Committee

**Title:** The Buckinghamshire Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

**Committee date:** Tuesday 5 July 2016

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**Cabinet Member sign-off:** Cllr. Lin Hazell

### Purpose of Agenda Item

- The purpose of this report is to provide a brief overview and to update Select Committee on the developments of work undertaken in Buckinghamshire MASH by Children's Social Care.
- This report is provided for **information** so that members can be appraised of Children's Social Care response to this critical area of work.

### Background

Contact and MASH is a single point of contact for all professionals, members of the public and family members who have a concern about a child or where a child and family need the support of coordinated multi agency services. Key partners (Social Care, Education, Thames Valley Police and Health) have been co-located at the Police Station since September 2014. In March 2016 there was a change in the accommodation which has resulted in more partners located together which improves our initial response to safeguarding concerns. The primary objective of the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) is to identify risk through effective information sharing, to enable better informed safeguarding decisions to be made in relation to both adults and children. This change has led to a greater level of collaboration and information sharing taking place.

## Summary

### Referrals

All referrals in respect of children should be made using the Multi- Agency Referral Form (MARF) which can be found on County Council and Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children's Board (BSCB) websites. In exceptional circumstances referrals are taken by telephone but should, where possible be confirmed in writing using the MARF. This ensures clarity and adequate detail to give a timely and fully informed response.

Referrals should be made with consent of person(s) holding Parental Responsibility for the referred child/ren unless to do so would compromise the safeguarding of the child/ren. Referrals will be processed only when meeting the criteria for levels 3 and 4 against the threshold criteria (also found on BCC and BSCB websites).

All referrals received by Contact and MASH will be reviewed by a Team Manager who will decide if a referral needs to be progressed to a Children's Social Care Assessment Team for an assessment, or if the referral needs to be passed to the Early Help Panel for consideration of a coordinated Multi Agency approach for support. Decisions on referrals will be made within 24 hours. Sometimes more complex children's circumstances will be considered by the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) where, at the point of the referral, partner agencies will share information on the referred family to help decide which service is appropriate for the family to be offered. Where a child's needs are considered through MASH this may take up to 72 hours for a decision to be made due to the need to gather additional partner agency information. Referrers will be advised in writing of the outcome of the referral within 72 hours of the referral being received.

The sharing of information within the MASH is undertaken within the parameters of the Buckinghamshire MASH Information Sharing Protocol, under existing information sharing agreements. Sound, professional judgement must be underpinned by timely, accurate and comprehensive information available from a wide range of sources.

At the point of the Ofsted inspection in June 2014 the available Children's Social Care staffing resource for processing referrals and completing all resultant assessments was 13 staff. This has now increased to 56 - 19 of this staffing resource are based in Contact and MASH and 37 are based in the Assessment Teams to complete all the safeguarding and child in need assessments resultant from referrals.

### **Contact and MASH Children Social Care staffing comprises of:**

- 1 x Team Manager
- 3 x Assistant Team Managers
- 6 x Social Workers
- 9 x Contact & Referral Officers

A significant improvement has been made in the recruitment to children's social care posts within Contact and MASH, which has led to a greater stability in the workforce. Recent permanent appointments to the Team Manager and 2 of the Assistant Team Manager posts have been made leaving 1 permanent vacancy which is covered by an agency work. All 9 of the Contact and Referral Officer posts have all been permanently recruited to.

This means that the service is now 89% resourced by permanent BCC staff, with the remaining posts being covered by agency staff. Recruitment to these posts is currently being progressed.

### **Key Partner Agencies currently based in the MASH**

- Thames Valley Police
- Buckinghamshire County Council Children's Social Care
- Buckinghamshire County Council Adult Social Care
- Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust
- Education Safeguarding Services
- Buckinghamshire Family Information Service
- Drug and Alcohol worker – currently recruiting to the post
- CSC - DV specialist workers
- R U Safe (Barnardos) – based in the Swan unit but available for consultation

### **Virtual Partners**

Although these organisations do not currently have staff members physically located within the MASH environment, they can work with the MASH in a systemic way by acting as 'virtual' partners in the MASH process.

The Service Level Agreement details how this virtual partnership works in practice.

- National Probation Service Oxon and Bucks
- Buckinghamshire County Council Youth Offending Service
- Oxford Health NHS Foundation (provision of mental health services to adults and children)
- Women's Aid
- Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust
- Thames Valley Community Rehabilitation Company
- Drugs and Alcohol Action Team
- Thames Valley Police – prevent co-ordinator

### **Governance of the MASH**

The MASH is governed by a multi-agency Operational Delivery Group (ODG) and a Strategic Management Group (SMG). These Groups consist of, respectively, middle and senior ranking representatives from the partner agencies. The ODG is chaired by Carol Douch (Service Director – Children's Social Care). The SMG is chaired by David Johnson, Managing Director of Children's Services

## Performance

Since Ofsted's inspection of Buckinghamshire in 2014, a series of internal and external audits have taken place, in general these audits have identified that thresholds for decision making in First Response/ MASH are correct and that services are being offered in line with the agreed BSCB thresholds.

In January 2016, the Department for Education (DfE) commissioned an independent review of some parts of the child's journey - Please see below extract of findings from the Ineson Report for DfE January 2016

*We reviewed 40 contacts into the service.*

*We found that the management decision at the conclusion of the contact for the next step, whether this was for no further action or for an assessment or any other disposal, was generally very sound. We fully agreed with the decision at the conclusion of the contact on 36 matters (or 90% of the sample). We had more some questions with the disposal decisions on the remaining 4 contacts, but these were arguable either way and did not concern the immediate safety of children.*

*In terms of timeliness, Working Together 2015 allows 24 hours (or one working day) for decision making on contacts. 26 of the sample reviewed (65%) were processed within one day and the remaining 14 (35%) took longer because of activity within the MASH (multi-agency safeguarding hub) process. This process usually comprised database checks and telephone calls to parents and professionals. Sometimes MASH enquiries added little information and often our judgement was that it was clear at the contact stage – before any MASH process – that an assessment would be required in any case. Care therefore will need to be taken to ensure that MASH enquiries are timely and completed within the 24 hours permitted for decision making.*

*This report reinforced that the level and type of decision making in Contact & MASH on the whole was fit for purpose and also identified some areas for consideration and improvement*

## Data for the last 6 months

Month	Dec 2015	Jan 2016	Feb 2016	March 2016	April 2016	May 2016
<b>Contacts</b>	1374	1343	1414	1241	1191	1300
<b>Referrals</b>	694	737	688	737	821	796
<b>MASH</b>	172	205	107	72	116	105
<b>Strategy Meetings</b>	N/K	N/K	N/K	50	51	50
<b>Assessments</b>	400	459	459	387	377	372

The above table details level of referral and throughput of referrals in Contact and MASH. It is important to note that from October 2015 the decision to hold multi agency strategy discussions/meetings for children at risk of significant harm has been an addition to the work of MASH and has been found to enhance the decision making for the child.

The Ingson Report states:

*1.3.6. Turning to the strategy discussion (or meeting) which should be held at the outset of all CPEs to plan the enquiry, we were in agreement with the threshold for all of these.*

To ensure that work is timely and decisions are made within timescales the performance framework has recently been refreshed and this is now being embedded to ensure the work meets the required standards.

### **Resource Implications**

All current work is funded through existing arrangements/budgets.

It will be critical to maintain the current level of resources to ensure that the high volume of work that is being referred continues to meet our statutory requirements and ensures good outcomes for children and families in Buckinghamshire.

Where vacancies exist, these are backfilled by agency staff. Whilst it is acknowledged that this puts pressure on the budget, the alternative of leaving such business critical posts unfilled would mean a deterioration in the service that Contact and MASH currently provides thereby leaving vulnerable children at risk.

### **Next Steps**

Propose that an updated report is submitted to Select Committee in 12 months' time to provide an update on performance.