
Meeting	Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date	14 th January 2014
Subject	Barnet Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)
Report of	Cabinet Member for Education Children and Families
Summary of Report	This report provides an update on the implementation of the Barnet MASH.

Officer Contributors	Carolyn Greenaway, Head of Assessment and Children In Need
Status (public or exempt)	Public
Wards Affected	All
Key Decision	No
Reason for urgency / exemption from call-in	Not applicable
Function of	Council
Enclosures	Appendix A – MASH Structure Charts
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1. RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 That the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the contents of the report and comment where appropriate.

2. RELEVANT PREVIOUS DECISIONS

- 2.1 Delegated Powers Report No 2063 (30/5/13): Establishment of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) team.

3. CORPORATE PRIORITIES AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 Safeguarding is a key priority for the Council and its partners and is reflected in strategic partnership goals including the Corporate Plan 2013-14, the Health and Well-Being Strategy, the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Commissioning Strategy.
- 3.2 The Corporate Plan includes the objective to 'create better life chances for children and young people across the borough' with an emphasis on early identification and intervention of children and young people requiring support. A further objective in the Corporate Plan is to 'promote family and community well-being' with a commitment to 'strengthen our approach to safeguarding'.
- 3.3 Safeguarding children and young people from harm or abuse underpins all work in the Children's Service and is the responsibility of everyone who works for the Council as well as our schools and our partner agencies.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 4.1 If referrals concerning children and young people at risk of harm are not received and responded to in a timely manner then there is a risk that children are not protected from harm.
- 4.2 If information from partner agencies is not shared at the point a concern is raised for a child or young person then this may result in less effective safeguarding activity.

5. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 5.1 The national statutory guidance, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013, states that 'the requirements of effective safeguarding systems are child centred'. A child centred approach is supported by the Children Act 1989 and 2004, and the Equality Act 2010.
- 5.2 The Equality Act puts a responsibility on the local authority to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity. This applies to the process of identification of need and risk faced by individual children, to the assessment process and to any intervention provided. No child or group of children must be treated less favourably than any others in being able to access effective services which meet their particular needs.

- 5.3 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child provides an international agreement that protects the rights of children and provides a child centred framework for the development of services to children. The UK government ratified this Convention in 1991.
- 5.4 The Corporate Plan states that one of the objectives of the Council is to 'work to create an equal Barnet by tackling discrimination, supporting community cohesion and delivering our values'.
- 5.5 Children and young people who are at risk of harm or abuse come from a range of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Both girls and boys experience abuse and this can be within homes where families are struggling with poverty as well as homes where there is financial security.
- 5.6 Research indicates that children with disabilities, including those with communication difficulties or behaviour disorders, are more likely to experience abuse than children without disabilities.
- 5.7 The MASH will respond to concerns about all children on the basis of the severity of the concern, ensuring that all families are treated equally and with understanding and respect.

6. USE OF RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS (Finance, Procurement, Performance & Value for Money, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)

- 6.1 The Barnet MASH is located in an adapted fire-walled room within North London Business Park.
- 6.2 The financial resources required to operate the MASH relate to staff expenditure. The MASH establishment for 2012/13 required funding of £382,069 for nine months of operation. This was found from existing council resources.
- 6.3 The MASH is subject to continual review and monitoring in relation to activity data, throughput and impact on work flow within both early intervention and other teams within social care in order to inform decisions about resourcing the MASH after March 2014. The expectation is that resources are found within existing Children's Service budgets. As further developments take place within the MASH, and its remit expands to ensure it is the central intelligence gathering point for the Children's Service, it may require additional resources which are as yet to be identified.
- 6.4 Partner agencies (Police, Health, Education, Probation, Housing) are contributing towards the effective operation of the MASH by providing staff resources.

7. LEGAL ISSUES

7.1 Working Together sets out how organisations and individuals should work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in accordance with the Children Act 1989 and 2004. This guidance is issued under:

- i) Section 7, Local Authority Social Services Act 1970, which requires local authorities in their social services functions to act under the general guidance of the Secretary of State;
- ii) Section 11(4), Children Act 2004, which requires each person or body to which the section 11 duty applies to have regard to any guidance given to them by the Secretary of State; and
- iii) Section 16, Children Act 2004, which states that local authorities and each of the statutory partners must, in exercising their functions relating to Local Safeguarding Boards, have regard to any guidance given to them by the Secretary of State.

7.2 Working Together is national statutory guidance and should be complied with unless exceptional circumstances arise.

7.3 The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 – Section 1(8)(h) requires the police and crime commissioner to hold the chief constable to account for the exercise of the latter's duties in relation to safeguarding children under section 10 and 11 of the Children Act 2004.

7.4 The Education Act 2002 – Section 175, places a duty on local authorities in relation to their education functions, the governing bodies of maintained schools and the governing bodies of further education institutions (which include sixth form colleges) to exercise their functions with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children who are either pupils at a school or who are students under 18 years of age attending further education institutions. The same duty applies to independent schools (which include Academies and Free Schools) by virtue of regulations made under section 157 of this Act.

7.5 The Data Protection Act 1998 sets out the basis for information sharing between agencies.

8. CONSTITUTIONAL POWERS (Relevant section from the Constitution, Key/Non-Key Decision)

8.1 The scope of Overview and Scrutiny committees is contained within Part 2, Article 6 of the Constitution. The Terms of Reference of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees are in the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules (Part 4 of the Constitution).

8.2 Council Constitution, Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules – the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee has responsibility:

- To scrutinise the Council and its partners in the discharge of statutory duties in relation to safeguarding; and
- To scrutinise the council's procedures in relation to the protection of children.

9. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

9.1 The Barnet MASH was developed in conjunction with the London MASH project which is an ambitious pan-London programme to improve the way that local safeguarding partnerships deal with referrals where there are concerns about the welfare of a child or young person.

9.2 The aim of a MASH is to bring a range of multi-agency partners together into a single hub to share information quickly, efficiently and safely as soon as a notification about the welfare of a child or young person is received.

9.3 The development of the Barnet MASH was led by a Strategic Steering Group, which was supported by an Operational Group. Both these groups chaired by Children's Social Care staff, were made up of multi-agency partners and there was an agreement of joint ownership for the success of the project. These working groups were supplemented by workshops involving partners, affected teams and other stakeholders.

9.4 The design of the MASH staff structure was based on data available from the Referral and Assessment Teams which was used to predict the volume of work at each stage of the process, and to allow for peaks and troughs in workflow.

9.5 The Barnet MASH is led by a dedicated children social care team manager who is responsible for assessing risk & risk rating all referrals together with the police sergeant. The Social Care team consists of three experienced social workers, five social work assistants and five duty support officers. They are co-located with the Police Public Protection Desk. Also co-located is a full time health visitor, education officer two days a week, probation officer two days a week, adult mental health worker, CAHMS social work manager and an officer from Barnet Homes attends one day a week. A social worker from the early intervention service and a Safer Families worker (domestic violence service) attends daily to advise on thresholds and appropriate agencies to offer early intervention. All other agencies provide the MASH with a link professional to respond to requests for information by telephone. Information Sharing Agreements are in place with all partner agencies.

9.6 The Barnet MASH went live in August 2013 and is now the single point of entry for all referrals to Children's Social Care, Disabled Children's Social Work Team, Children's Hospital Team, Family Focus, Safer Families and the CAF team for all children, unborn through to age 18, where there are concerns about their welfare. The benefits of this single point of entry are the application of common thresholds and a consistent approach which allows the co-ordinating of intelligence regarding identification of need and gaps in services, children subject to gang activity and sexual exploitation, children who go missing and police referrals regarding higher level crime. It is also hoped that

the single entry point will result in clarity for referrers and reduce the risk of referrals being 'lost' between a number of different systems. Information shared by professionals at an early stage assists in avoiding unnecessary repeat assessments and the associated stress which can be experienced by families as a result of referral to Children's Social Care.

- 9.7 The ability to identify needs early and direct referrals to Early Intervention services is in line with the recommendation of the Munro report.
- 9.8 When a referral is received about the welfare of a child or young person it is recorded and basic checks take place with agencies. The police and MASH social worker will BRAG (blue, red, amber, green) rate the referral according to risk, Red being the highest risk, requiring a response within 4 hours. If a child is at risk of significant harm an immediate referral is made to the Police Child Abuse Team and the case passed to the Duty and Assessment Team. Referrals rated Amber are dealt with within 24 hours and are likely to require a whole MASH information gathering process to establish level of risk. This informs if they require a referral for assessment by Children's Social Care or if they can be stepped down to the CAF/Early Intervention services. Referrals rated Green are dealt with the same day if possible but always within two working days and relate to concern for a child where if support is not offered this might lead to poor outcomes. Referrals rated Blue are children with no additional needs but who might benefit from the support from a single agency.
- 9.9. The benefit of interagency working results in enhanced understanding of the child and how the family can best be supported. In particular it facilitates early identification of need. Outcomes for referrals through the MASH include referral to Children's Social Care for assessment, to the CAF or one of the Early Intervention teams such as Family Focus or Safer Families, CAHMS service, Domestic Violence services, Targeted Youth Support and Children's Centres.
- 9.10 Based on the limited data we have since August 2013 the MASH has been receiving an average of 450-500 referrals per month which relate to over 1000 children per month. The highest number of referrals rated Red were as a result of physical harm, the highest number rated Amber and Green were as a result of domestic violence. Approximately 30% of cases were referred to the Children's Social Care Duty & Assessment Teams for an assessment.
- 9.11 A formal Launch Event was held in November 2013 during the Council's Safeguarding Month and was very well attended by over 150 partners and Council staff. Further bespoke briefing events will be arranged as required by specific agencies. Publicity and information about how to make referrals to the MASH are on Barnet's website.
- 9.12 The MASH is now the central point for information gathering and analysis regarding Domestic Violence, Gang activity, Child Sexual Exploitation, as well as responding to all referrals about the general welfare of children and young people.
- 9.13 The MASH is already evidencing positive outcomes for children and young people. For example, a referral was received regarding two children aged 8 and 11 from uniformed police who attended an incident of domestic violence; the father had tried to strangle the mother. Initially the mother said she would

pursue a criminal investigation but she then withdrew her allegation and stated she did not live with the father. Police and Children's Social Care checks revealed there had been an incidence of domestic violence in 2010 and mother had said she was separating from father. Checks with the MASH education representative revealed the father took the children to school daily and school did not have a separate address for him. Both parents were viewed as difficult and aggressive. Checks with the MASH health visitor revealed the mother had failed to follow through with health appointments for the child. As a result of information from police, health and education the case was referred immediately to Children's Social Care for an urgent assessment in order to safeguard the children. Effective communication enabled a fuller picture at an early stage so immediate and subsequent risks could be identified and addressed.

9.14 Next Steps:

9.14.1 An evaluation of the MASH is planned for April 2014. This will be an early indication of its effectiveness as a process for safeguarding children and young people. The outcome of the evaluation will inform the development of an Adults MASH.

10. LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 Appendix A - MASH Structure Charts

10.2 Working Together to Safeguard Children.

<http://www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/statutory/g00213160/working-together-to-safeguard-children>;

10.3 Munro Review of Child Protection 2011.

<http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm80/8062/8062.pdf>;

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