

# Children & Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee

16<sup>th</sup> March 2022

## Progress in the Children and Families Front Door (Formally the MASH)

### 1. Recommendation

- 1.1 Committee note the updated report detailing the changes and progress made to the Children and Families Front Door, formally the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

### 2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 Warwickshire's Safeguarding Partnership established the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) in 2016. Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs are structures designed to facilitate information-sharing and decision-making on a multi-agency basis through co-locating staff from the local authority, health agencies, the police, and other partners.
- 2.2 Since 2016 there have been several changes both to legislation, guidance and organisational constructs across not only in Children and Families Services but partner agencies as well. In addition, Warwickshire Children and Families Service were part way through an Ofsted Inspection (March 2020) which was abandoned due to the Coronavirus Pandemic. During the time Ofsted were undertaking the inspection they raised concerns regarding the effectiveness of the MASH.
- 2.3 Warwickshire Children and Families Service and partner agencies, making up the Chief Officer Board, agreed to undertake a review of the MASH in October 2020. The purpose of the review was to look at; the current structure, operating model and delivery of services to children and families to establish if it is safe, efficient, robust and whether it offers best value in terms of resource allocation.

- 2.4 In December 2020 a new permanent Service Manager overseeing the MASH, Initial Response Team, Emergency Duty Team and Family Information Service started and following this, a new Operations Manager was appointed in February 2021.
- 2.5 The outcome of the review was the development of an Integrated Front Door, which was agreed by partners and its development a major priority within the Service, with the new model officially launching in September 2021.
- 2.6 The Ofsted Report published in February 2022 highlighted the progress made in the Front Door noting this was an area of focus for Senior Managers, the benefits of the new structure, quality of management oversight and strong partnership relationships as some of its strengths.
- 2.7 Ofsted did highlight that it found a couple of examples where it felt a Strategy Discussion should have taken place, statutory multi agency meeting, adding to the planning around a concern. Whilst noting that they did not feel the outcomes would have changed in the examples they reviewed.

### **3. Financial Implications**

- 3.1 None.

### **4. Environmental Implications**

- 4.1 None.

### **5. Supporting Information**

- 5.1 The review of the MASH included consultation with a number of Teams and Services, including within the Children and Families Service, Police, Health, Education, MARAC/MAPPA Chairs, Probation and Commissioning. Targeted Focus Groups also took place with operational staff. In addition, performance information was reviewed, quality assurance activity was undertaken for the review and consultation with the draft threshold document.
- 5.2 There is no single model for the establishment of a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub however a consistent purpose is that through the co-location and integration of partnership agencies alongside children's social care; there will exist a safe environment in which to share information about children and families. This enables more accurate assessment of need/risk and subsequently better identification and provision of services.

- 5.3 The sharing of information, between partners is a critical function of a MASH, however this should only be required if the threshold of need cannot be determined by the information contained within the contact and from the information already known by the Children and Family's database. Warwickshire MASH were viewed to have adopted the practice of information sharing on every child even if the threshold for intervention was clear, which contributed to the poor performance of the MASH. At the time of the aborted Ofsted and in subsequent months there was a backlog of contacts (referrals) within the MASH which was leading to a delay in decision making on safeguarding contacts.
- 5.4 The review raised issues in relation to the structures of the MASH and the number of partners engaged in safeguarding within this Hub. The lack of partners within the MASH were seen as indicative of a lack of clarity around the function of the MASH. It was also noted that the Early Help Service was not present within the MASH which takes away the potential for joint discussion which enables more holistic, informed decision making and reduces the risk of children and families being bounced from one part of the service to another and back.
- 5.5 MASH partners engaging in discussion and consultation about their service changes was highlighted as missed opportunities. In particular the report highlighted the need to review and define the roles and responsibilities of all partners within the MASH and to have a shared understanding of thresholds. Through this work it is hoped that the culture of the MASH begins to be more collaborative.
- 5.6 The main recommendation of the review was the development of an Integrated Front Door, moving the MASH from being the Children and Family's Front Door, to making it an element of a Front Door. The development of an Integrated Front Door would help ensure a focus on prevention, by supporting children and families at the earliest opportunity. The recommendations of the review were endorsed by the Chief Officer Board, chaired by Nigel Minns (Strategic Director – People) in March 2021.
- 5.7 The new Front Door model was developed to allow Children and Families Service to provide a holistic view. It created one pathway to support and publicise one number for all worries relating to children regardless of risk and complexity. This will simplify the process for the public and professionals and potentially reducing unnecessary social work interventions as we continue to focus the right support at the right time for children.

5.8 The Front Door consists of three interlinked Hubs, with their own distinct functions:

Triage Hub – Initial Screening and Contact

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub – Complex/High Risk concerns

Early Help and Support Hub – Support through early intervention

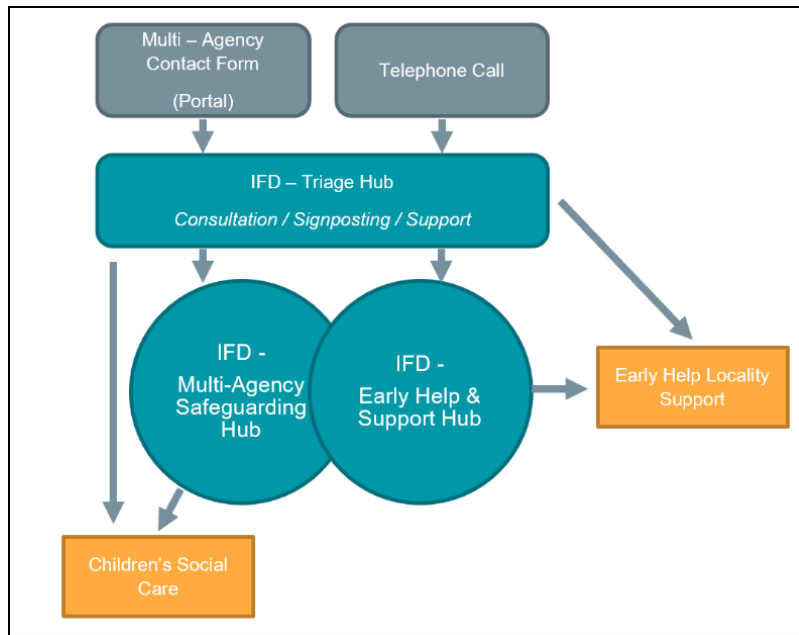


Table 1 – Front Door Structure

5.9 The Front Door saw a reshaping of the Children and Families workforce which saw both an investment of more experienced Social Workers, whilst investing in additional Child and Families Advisors to increase the availability of support to members of the public and professional referrers making contact with Safeguarding concerns.

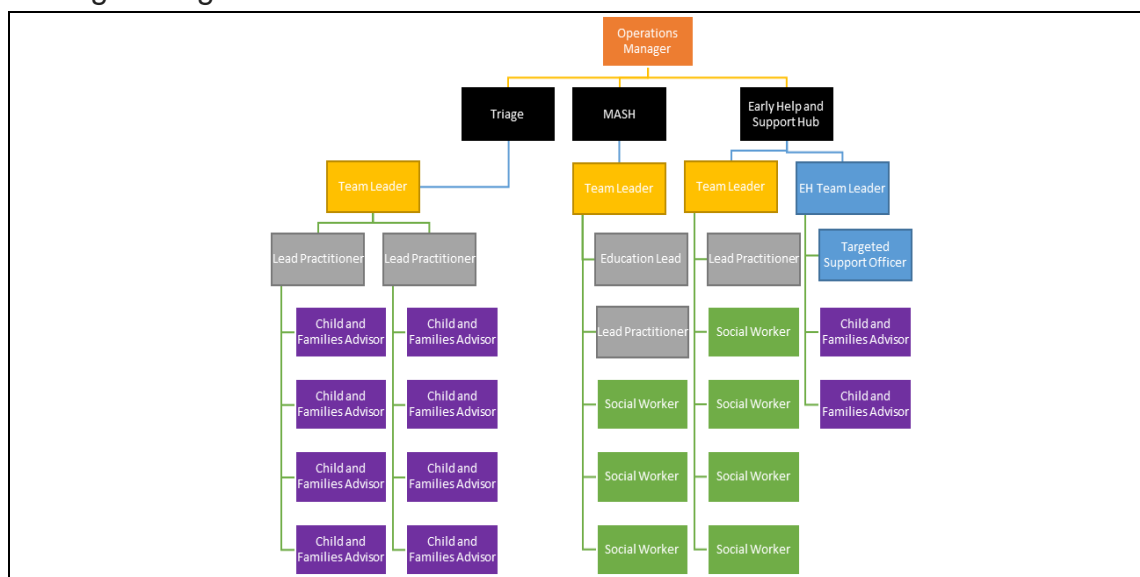


Table 2 – Front Door Children and Families Structure

- 5.10 In addition to reshaping the structure of Children and Families Front Door workforce, including bringing in Early Help, there has been a development of partnerships which have further enhanced the ability to ensure children and families can access the correct support. Established partners such as the Police and Health remain committed to the new approach, but other agencies include:

Refuge

Education

Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA)

Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

Probation

Child Exploitation

RISE (CAMHS)

COMPASS – Young People’s Substance Misuse Support

- 5.11 The new structure has seen performance in relation to both qualitative and quantitative measures show significant progress with timeliness of decision making, within three working days, increasing from 50% in February 2021 to consistently above 85% from August 2021. Changes to the form used by the Front Door and the service’s performance reporting from February 2022 will support drives to improve performance even further. Quality Assurance, including multi-agency audits, take place regularly with a continued learning approach adopted by the Service alongside core partners.

- 5.12 Ofsted noted in the Inspection report that:

*Senior managers have strengthened the arrangements to manage contacts and referrals to ensure that they are timely and effective. The integrated front door, composed of three hubs, operates cohesively and efficiently, providing a clear structure for allocation and completion of work. Strong relationships with partner agencies ensure that information is shared and action agreed to support and improve the circumstances of children and families, such as an agreement with schools to provide children with counselling and preventative work around exploitation. Consent from parents to share information between agencies is sought when necessary.*

*Managers provide clear direction and regular oversight to inform decision-making and planning. When serious safeguarding concerns arise, action is taken to ensure the immediate safety of children.*

*Domestic abuse contacts are managed well through a daily triage meeting with the police and social care within the multi-agency safeguarding hub.*

*Partner agencies consider a wide range of factors, such as the family history and the impact on the child, so that if patterns emerge, even if the risks are considered to be low, consideration is given to referring the family for early help support to prevent further escalation.*

- 5.13 Ofsted did note that in a small number of cases that a Strategy Discussion should have taken place. They noted, *'for these children, information was shared, and safety plans put in place, but a subsequent review of any pattern of concerns would not highlight that the threshold of a risk of significant harm had previously been met'*. The Service is taking the learning from this, which will include additional quality assurance of decision making in the Front Door in relation to both those have a Strategy Discussion and those cases progressing for further Social Care involvement, including from independent quality assurance auditors, to ensure that the learned is embedded.
- 5.14 The other area of challenge from the Front Door has been in relation to Covid-19 pandemic. During this period it has inevitably led to periods of peaks and troughs in referral numbers, most notably around reopening and closures of education settings. Additional resources were required within the MASH/Front Door have been required to meet the additional demand.
- 5.15 Contact (Referrals to Children's Services) remain high and work is ongoing with partner agencies to ensure the appropriateness of contacts to the Front Door. Due to the changes in how contacts and referral recording has taken place impacts direct comparisons with previous years is difficult. However, referral (Assessments) data shows that the rate per 10,000 increased from 382.50 in Q1 20/21 to 475.9 in Q1 in 21/22. This was the second highest increase in the West Midlands, behind only Coventry.
- 5.16 Work is ongoing with partners through the use of our new Spectrum of Support Document (June 2021) which replaced the Threshold document to support the identification of the appropriate support for children and young people dependent on their needs to ensure that appropriate contacts (referrals) come through to the Front Door.

## 6. Timescales associated with the decision and next steps

- 6.1 The Front Door have been through a significant amount of development over the last eighteen months and will continue to further strengthen as part of its development including learning from the one area noted in the Ofsted Report.
- 6.2 The next nine months will see the introduction of a Portal to support web based referring to the Front Door, which will improve both information security and to support an improvement in the quality of information completed when safeguarding concerns are raised by professionals.

## 7.0 Background Papers

None

## 8.0 Appendix

### 8.1 [Spectrum of Support](#)

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

- Members of the Children & Youth People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.