

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs



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Introduction

This briefing is the first in a series of publications by the Centre of Excellence for Information Sharing which is designed to help local places understand more about current information sharing issues across a range of policy areas in the public sector. This paper focusses on the development of Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASHs).¹ It explores some of the common issues that local places have experienced in developing MASH models, and offers insights gained from the process. These insights are based on a mixture of published research and anecdotal evidence captured by the Centre during its engagement work.

► Highlights:

- **operational information sharing issues** experienced to establish **appropriate triggers / thresholds** in relation to these levels of risk;
- **strategic information sharing issues** experienced when developing a MASH; and
- the levels of risk involved in sharing information on **perpetrators of domestic violence**.

By sharing some of the initial learning from these places in this briefing, the Centre is not suggesting that one approach, or type of model, is more suited to a place that wants to improve multi-agency information sharing than another. Instead, this paper offers a brief picture of what is working in different areas and the challenges faced by putting those models in place.

Specific terms and acronyms are explained in the glossary.

¹ These arrangements are sometimes known as Multi-Agency Information / Intelligence Sharing Hubs (MAISH). To avoid confusion, this paper refers to all multi-agency information sharing arrangements as MASH models.

Background

The spotlight has been turned to every corner of child safeguarding practices in the wake of events in Rotherham, Rochdale and Oxford, and the case for developing multi-agency intelligence sharing capacity in local places has never been stronger. Local places are responding in different ways, developing sharing approaches that are appropriate to local requirements.

► The history of MASH models

The first MASHs were developed in 2011 in response to failures of agencies to work together to safeguard children and young people, as documented in numerous serious case reviews and highlighted in national reports on these failings such as the Munro Review of Child Protection. Many of these early models were based on an approach developed by the Devon Local Safeguarding Board, and rolled out across local places.

Recent research has shown that places which have put such arrangements in place are already starting to see positive results, as information sharing between partners leads to high quality and timely safeguarding responses.² Whilst the case is harder to establish in terms of 'cashable' savings to the safeguarding partnership, evidence shows that "serious risks may be assessed more accurately with the involvement of a MASH."³

A joint letter from four Government departments to all Local Authority Chief Executives and local safeguarding leads in March 2015 stated that their Secretaries of State were "clear on the need for genuinely integrated multi-agency approaches to underpin information sharing ... every agency should commit to this approach."⁴



² London Councils (December 2013) Assessing the Early Impact of Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) in London

³ Home Office (July 2014) Multi Agency Working and Information Sharing Project: Final Report

⁴ Letter to the Chief Executives and DCS of local authorities, Police and Crime Commissioners, LSCBs, HWBs and GPs (DH, HO, DCLG and MoJ 3 March 2015), Our joint commitment to share information effectively for the protection of children

► What constitutes a MASH?

There is no 'one size fits all' prescription for a MASH, just as there is not one uniform set of needs of vulnerable adults and children in a local place. In general, the following elements are seen as common to most models in development at the moment:

1. A core group of professionals work collaboratively within an integrated unit. (These are often co-located, although some places – especially those in rural areas – operate virtual, or part-virtual multi-agency arrangements.)
2. The core group tends to include Police and Children's Services safeguarding leads, alongside representatives from Probation and the Youth Offending Service, and in many cases Health / Mental Health practitioners. However, the exact constitution of the group depends upon a number of factors – in particular, the operational set-up of the MASH (see first section below).
3. The core group usually has access to many other services and agencies that might be able to paint a more detailed picture of that individual's criminal, social and family history. Sometimes specialist workers may be brought in to tackle an area of concern for a local place; working with victims or perpetrators of domestic abuse is a good example of this (see paragraph below).
4. Whilst intelligence gathering and information sharing are vital responsibilities of the MASH, the most effective models are those that are able to make timely and appropriate decisions about the information it is able to analyse. Joint risk assessments underpin the decision-making approach.
5. Whatever model is developed, all MASH models require good leadership and clear governance to create a shared operational culture and focus on outcomes.⁵

Whilst most early MASH models were set up to improve outcomes for children most in need, not all places have put multi-agency information sharing arrangements in place to manage high-end safeguarding risk, or to tackle child protection concerns. The Centre is working with places like Sandwell and Leicestershire that are increasingly turning to early help intelligence sharing models to manage cases lower down the continuum of risk.⁶

There is a growing interest in areas such as Bath and North East Somerset, for instance, in building a coherent business case for integrated working to prevent domestic abuse.⁷ A concerted shift from setting up arrangements concerned exclusively with children's safeguarding to ones that support vulnerable adults and tackle complex family problems has also been noted. Cheshire West and Cheshire, for instance, has implemented an early help project – 'Altogether Better' – with a specific focus on sharing through integration to address issues like parental neglect and domestic abuse earlier.⁸

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Examples given later in this briefing. See Sandwell Safeguarding Board (July 2014) Multi-Agency Thresholds Document and Leicestershire Together: Business Case for a MASH – Phase 2 (Version 1.0: 4 February 2014) for more information.

⁷ Examples given later in this briefing. See www.bathnes.gov.uk/services/your-council-and-democracy/local-research-and-statistics/wiki/domestic-abuse for more information.

⁸ Examples given later in this briefing. See Altogether Better West Cheshire – Early Help Business Plan (undated) for more information.

Findings from local places

A single point of access for referrals has helped partners to define thresholds and manage risk better.

A triage and assessment process has prevented cases escalating to the safeguarding level, and an integrated Early Support model has improved multi-agency responses to cases requiring multi-agency information sharing below the safeguarding level.

The way partners are informed about referral patterns and the benefits of multi-agency information sharing has been vital component in selling the partnership's vision to these agencies: A clear protocol about where case decisions are made has also reassured partners that the information they share will be acted upon in a fair and consistent manner in every case.

Joining-up domestic abuse case conferencing arrangements has helped coordinate action and avoid duplication of effort, and a clear and agreed information sharing protocol between these arrangements can ensure information about domestic abuse perpetrators is stored and shared safely.

Screening both children and adult cases of domestic abuse through the MASH has helped places identify the most effective way to deal with domestic abuse cases first time, and linking perpetrator to victim management processes has improved information sharing about domestic abuse cases.

Placing specialist domestic abuse workers at the heart of the MASH has helped information to be shared about perpetrators quickly, and identifying one professional from the MASH to lead on working with victims / perpetrators has helped to reduce violent offence rates.

▶ Section 1

Operational information sharing issues and establishing triggers / thresholds

1. A single point of access for referrals has helped partners to define thresholds and manage risk better, particularly in relation to sharing information effectively with domestic abuse cases.

A recent London Councils evaluation of MASHs reported that, even in cases where the MASH did not take on the referral, it was seen as positive that the case was now on the radar. In Lewisham it was

reported that the referrers received daily reports on Common Assessment Framework (CAF) forms that had gone through referral and assessment and had been evaluated as requiring 'no further action'. The referrer for these cases would then be contacted to inform them that the case had not met the threshold and support could be provided through the Team Around the Family (TAF).

- 2. Thresholds and trigger levels have been managed effectively when low level information is shared and triaged to enable the Early Support / Early Intervention teams to make informed decisions about approaches that can prevent cases escalating to the safeguarding level.**

Wiltshire's Triage function is located within the MASH, whereas Swindon's sits with partners in the Family Contact Point. Within the MASH itself, all strategy discussions take place against a common threshold, which allows a more joined-up service delivery, and better decision-making as a result of a consistent approach to sharing information. Surrey's future work in this area is to improve referral, information sharing and joint response to domestic abuse cases that delivers on the basis of a whole systems approach. The place also wants to take advantage of their Transforming Public Service Programme by integrating the Central Referral Unit / MASH working arrangements with the expanding Supporting Families work.

- 3. A strong focus on integrated early support has delivered a more co-ordinated response to cases requiring multi-agency information sharing below the level of acute and emergency thresholds for services.**

Cheshire West and Chester set up an Integrated Early Support service in October 2013 to bring together 20 different agencies and data systems into a single, coherent model which provides a single front door into services. Early Support workers are co-located in seven multi-agency locality teams using shared assessment and IT systems. They can offer a menu of evidence-based interventions across the spectrum of need; for more complex cases, a range of different professionals act as the lead worker and develop a clear and comprehensive plan that meets the need of that family's particular needs.

► Section 2

Strategic information sharing issues around developing MASHs

- 1. MAPPA and MARAC case conferencing arrangements could feed into the MASH model, possibly through co-location of the staff working with these arrangements, to coordinate action on domestic abuse cases and avoid duplication of effort. However, the safeguarding partnerships that have considered doing this have needed to make sure there is a clear understanding of the relationship between the MARAC and the MASH, and a clear information sharing protocol between the two arrangements to ensure information about domestic abuse perpetrators is stored and shared safely.**

In places that have adopted a safeguarding MASH, such as in Merton, evidence suggests that allowing the local MARAC to conduct their own risk assessment of the most serious cases helps to identify wider domestic abuse concerns. Furthermore, by having a representative from the MASH in the MARAC, the links between the two safeguarding models are strengthened. Merton found that one benefit of a separate MASH process is that it enabled a systematic method of deciding and recording in partnership what happens to each case (which is harder to accomplish through case conferencing). Future work for Hampshire includes embedding MARAC arrangements in the MASH, as well as incorporating domestic abuse into their referrals.

2. The way information is presented to partner organisations can be a vital component in 'selling' the model to partners. A well designed information sharing tool will help the partnership to be clear about the responsibilities the service places on these organisations.

Leicestershire's OneView system manually pulls information from a wider range of systems, making family data available to a wider range of agencies. A Family Summary Record is created from the various datasets with a visual genogram of the families' history of statutory intervention, which enables both partners and families to see the bigger picture from these individual interventions. To achieve this during a time of financial contraction requires those agencies to satisfy themselves that the risks of family-level information sharing have been identified, mitigated and the arrangements are legally compliant. Nottinghamshire helps the MASH team to manage cases and access information quickly by highlighting on display screens the RAG rating, who is involved and whether partners are replying within required timeframes.

3. Project Boards developing a MASH have learned the importance of understanding and explaining to partners the rewards that greater information sharing will bring, e.g. efficiencies, reduction in contact records into assessment services, reduction in repeat referrals etc., rather than simply focusing on countering the risks. It may help partners to buy into these rewards if they are regularly presented with information on the nature of cases and patterns of referrals received, and how these are dealt with.

A key learning point for Camden LSB is that without establishing and explaining to partners what rewards the MASH will bring, people will not engage with the vision. The Board is now recruiting a full time data analyst to carry out a mapping exercise to identify hotspots in Camden of missing children. Not only will this improve the way placements are coordinated, it will also allow evaluation of the improved information sharing the MASH delivers, and highlight areas for improvement.

4. Places have found that an important strategic step in developing an effective MASH is to be clear about where decisions are made in the intelligence gathered from partners, and the level of autonomy it wants to give the agencies providing this intelligence, to make their own decisions about how they act on it. This has served to reassure partners that the information they share will be acted upon in a fair and consistent manner in every case.

Where there is a disagreement over the RAG rating or a certain course of action to be taken by professionals within the Nottinghamshire MASH, the determining agency will be the Social Care Representative. If still unresolved, the Operational Manager within the MASH will have the final decision. All decisions about families' cases referred to Leicestershire's MASH at Tier 3 are made in multi-agency locality hubs, which are purposely separated from the operational area where the intelligence is gathered and compiled.



► Section 3

Information sharing about victims and perpetrators in a MASH

- 1. A specialist domestic abuse team integrated within the MASH can enhance information sharing about perpetrators of domestic abuse at the point of identification of need.**

Stockport's Domestic Abuse and Child Sexual Exploitation Team is located within the MASH to provide specialist social work for children and families where there is a high risk or complex issues around domestic abuse or child sexual exploitation. The team coordinator provides business support around data collection and the multi-agency sexual exploitation processes and meetings. The service benefits from close links secured by the other services co-located at the MASH as well as close links with the police domestic violence unit and child sexual exploitation team.

- 2. Places focusing on tackling domestic abuse and child sexual exploitation have often found that their arrangements are most effective when a team around the family (TAF) and a lead professional coordinates the multi-agency response. Better information sharing through this model has led to increased referrals to local domestic abuse perpetrator programmes, and can contribute to reductions in violent offences among domestic violence perpetrators.**

Cheshire West and Chester's Integrated Early Support model, for example, allows the service to respond to Police reports on domestic abuse incidents delivered, which do not meet the level 4 threshold for social care intervention. In some cases this leads to a referral to the domestic abuse perpetrator programme, delivered by the Cheshire Probation Trust. Although it is too early to evidence the success of this model (an independent evaluation is currently being commissioned), early monitoring data shows a 23% reduction in unnecessary referrals to Children's Social Care, and a 54% reduction in violent offences among domestic violence perpetrators.

- 3. Screening referrals to both children and adult safeguarding through the MASH can be key to dealing with domestic abuse cases most appropriately first time, which requires information about perpetrators to be shared systematically between both children and adult safeguarding teams.**

Sandwell's MASH model is focused on Early Help referrals. It incorporates the screening and sharing of domestic abuse notifications to identify the risks to children and adults. In terms of working with perpetrators, the MASH sits at Tier 3 (those charged or convicted of domestic abuse). Whilst a significant number of the 355 domestic abuse cases reported to the Police each month are categorised under the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence (DASH) risk assessment as high and medium risk cases, the majority of cases are assessed as standard risk.

- 4. Information sharing plays a key role in using the MASH model to link victim and perpetrator management.**

Hampshire has found that it can improve its information sharing with the voluntary and community sector agencies, by linking its victim and perpetrator management processes. To coordinate communication about domestic abuse cases it has created a third sector post based in the police hub as a touch-point for non-statutory service intervention. Bath and North East Somerset has also established a project board to look at integrating specialist domestic abuse workers in their intelligence sharing arrangements, such as Lighthouse's Victim and Witness Care programme or Southside's Independent Domestic Violence Advice Service.

Conclusion

This paper has provided examples about how sharing and layering information about children and adults, individuals and communities, victims and perpetrators creates a rich picture of the scale and scope of risk, where previously interdependent elements of the picture were unknown to agencies. Naturally, this enhanced view of the needs of vulnerable residents reduces the likelihood of a knee-jerk reaction from individual agencies. In some places, for example, it has led to the separation of the intelligence gathering activity from the decision making process around that intelligence, as exists in Leicestershire's locality hubs. In the process, MASHs have become a central management information resource that feed directly into Early Help, Health Service commissioning and integrated victims strategies. In short, they become a vital requirement for an intelligent local response to risk.

A number of different models for multi-agency information sharing have been examined in this paper, and several approaches have been highlighted that could be used in adopting or adapting these models. Not all of these approaches will be suitable for a particular area. For instance, it could be beneficial to join up adult and children safeguarding services in the MASH, but this may be harder to accomplish in places where the co-location of partners is not feasible. As responding to safeguarding concerns about adults is not dictated by the same statutory responsibilities that cover children, the partnership would need to consider the best way to manage the increased demand on the MASH from taking adult referrals.

There is a similar range of viewpoints around developing multi-agency arrangements to focus on a particular issue for a place, such as domestic abuse or child sexual exploitation. For instance, local evidence may indicate that the MASH should prioritise sharing intelligence about domestic abuse cases, but it may be harder to show that information sharing about these cases adds value to the police force's existing response to domestic crime. MASH managers may need to find ways to involve specialist workers, such as Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) in the decision making process about these sort of cases; equally, they may have concerns that by including more agencies at the edges of the core partnership, the decision making process is slowed down, reducing a timely response to risk.

Finally, we have seen that many areas are moving to assess and manage risk-downstream, re-focussing their attention on information sharing around tier 3 (early help) cases or even lower. At the same time, where a neighbouring MASH has decided to dedicate resources to responding to tier 4 (safeguarding) concerns, practitioners and managers question if there is enough consistency of approach in that region. Ultimately, informed, professional judgement must remain the final arbiter.

The future for multi-agency information sharing arrangements is far from clear: all we can say for certain at this stage is that, whatever the model local places choose to adopt, partners will need to continue to find ways of joining up their response mechanisms to improve outcomes for families and children. By focusing on outcomes, the sector can move from a prescription-based model of multi-agency information sharing to one that is supported by good practice; one that is informed by the evidence from a wide range of policy areas, including preventing domestic abuse, tackling child sexual exploitation and finding missing children. As more information is shared about these complex issues across the partnership, places are enabled to provide a more appropriate and timely response, and ultimately, ensure that many more vulnerable people are protected from harm.

Glossary

Child Protection (CP) – The process of protecting individual children identified as either suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of abuse or neglect. It involves measures and structures designed to prevent and respond to abuse and neglect.⁹

Common Assessment Framework (CAF) – A shared assessment process for gathering and recording information about a child for whom a practitioner has concerns in a standard format, identifying the needs of the child and how the needs can be met.¹⁰

Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence (DASH) – A risk identification, assessment and management model used by police forces and their partner agencies as a common method of identifying and assessing risk to those suffering or potentially suffering from domestic violence or other abuse crimes.¹¹

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) – The sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities.¹²

Local Safeguarding Boards (LSBs) – A locality-based system under which organisations with safeguarding responsibilities form a partnership that enables them to cooperate in order to safeguard and promote the welfare of vulnerable adults and/or children. The Children Act 2004 gave a statutory responsibility to each locality to establish a board that oversaw safeguarding for children and young people, known as Local Safeguarding Children's Boards (LSCBs). The final report of the Munro Review clarified the important role of these boards in holding partner agencies to account for safeguarding children and recognised that they are key mechanisms to improving multi-agency working.¹³

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASHs) – Describes a number of models of integrated working, many of which are considered in this paper, in order to share information about vulnerable adults and/or children, and to make timely decisions about their protection or support. Also known as Multi-Agency Information / Intelligence Sharing Hubs

(MAISH).

Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPAs) – The name given to arrangements in England and Wales for the 'responsible authorities' tasked with the management of registered sex offenders, violent and other types of sexual offenders, and offenders who pose a serious risk of harm to the public.¹⁴

Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) – A meeting where information is shared on the highest risk domestic abuse cases between representatives of local police, health, child protection, housing practitioners, Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) and other specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors. A victim/survivor should be referred to the relevant MARAC if they are an adult (16+) who resides in the borough and are at high risk of domestic violence from their adult (16+) partner, ex-partner or family member, regardless of gender or sexuality.¹⁵

Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) panel – A mechanism used by Local Safeguarding Boards (LSB's) and their partner agencies to improve outcomes for children and young people in cases of known or suspected child sexual exploitation.

Munro Review – A set of reports commissioned from Professor Eileen Munro by the Department for Education in 2010. The review sets out proposals for systemic social work reform to enable professionals to make the best judgements about how to help children and young people suffering from abuse or neglect.

Team Around the Family TAF – The coming together of a small team of people, including family and community members as well as practitioners, for a period of time to address family issues and support the family to achieve progress in relation to a change plan. The plan is coordinated by a 'lead professional' from within the team who has oversight of the whole family's issues. TAF arrangements are sometimes also known as or supported by Common Assessment Framework (CAF) arrangements.¹⁶

⁹ RCPCH (October 2014) definition

¹⁰ Coram Children's Legal Centre definition. See www.protectingchildren.org.uk/cp-system/child-in-need/caf for more information

¹¹ See www.dashriskchecklist.co.uk for more information.

¹² DCSF and Home Office (2009) Safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation: supplementary guidance to Working together to safeguard children

¹³ See www.safenetwork.org.uk for more information.

¹⁴ Wikipedia (November 2014) definition

¹⁵ Standing Together Against Domestic Violence definition

¹⁶ IPC (June 2016) Early Intervention & Prevention with Children and Families: Getting the Most from Team around The Family systems, p. 5

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