

▶ How to build a MASH
using information sharing
as your building blocks



(Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub)

Introduction for building enthusiasts

In May 2014, several partner agencies across Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES) started to have conversations about how they could improve their information sharing processes to help vulnerable people and ensure that local information sharing arrangements supported the management of risks to them.

Since this time, the Centre of Excellence for Information Sharing (the Centre) have been working with B&NES to assist them on this journey and in particular, to understand the cultural barriers they faced.

To help other areas who may face similar challenges, this instruction manual has been designed by the Centre and B&NES. It has been done in a 'do-it-yourself' instruction kit style, in order to make the building blocks required more manageable. This instruction guide may not be the solution for every area looking to build a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), but it is an indication of the approach B&NES took and the challenges they overcame for others to learn from.

Laying the foundations: what is a MASH?

A MASH is a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub staffed by professionals from services that handle concerns about both children and adults at risk. In starting out on their journey, B&NES established that there is no 'one model' for a MASH. They can vary from a large team of staff from a range of different agencies, or it can consist of two or three members of staff. They can also examine concerns regarding children, adults or both. A MASH process acts as a first and single point of contact for new safeguarding concerns or it can be a back office function to assist in gathering information about concerns that do not at first appear to meet the threshold for safeguarding.

The B&NES MASH manages information gathering on concerns about children and adults. The MASH receives requests for information directly from the adult and children's duty teams on initial contact, the MASH then gathers the information, makes a decision regarding whether the threshold for safeguarding is met, and passes the outcomes back to the relevant duty team. The B&NES MASH includes representatives from the Police, B&NES Council children and adult services, Sirona care and health* children's and adult services, the Mental Health Trust, and has a dedicated administrative support, all of whom have access to their relevant IT systems.

As a result of the improved sharing of information between agencies, better decisions can be made about what action to take and support can be targeted on the most urgent cases with better co-ordination between agencies. This helps to protect the most vulnerable children and adults from harm, neglect and abuse.

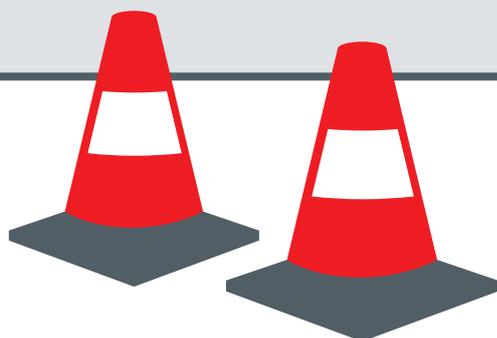
* Please note at the time of writing Sirona care and health were the provider but this changed to Virgin Care prior to publication.

From the ground up: the aim of building a MASH

The overarching aim of a MASH is to improve the sharing of intelligence and information by creating a hub that works in a dynamic way; working quickly and effectively to manage the risks to vulnerable children and adults. As the Centre's previous work with MASH's had concluded, "borderline cases require information to be shared between multiple agencies in order to develop a rich picture of the circumstances around an individual which enables a more comprehensive assessment of risk to be carried out."¹

A MASH focuses on:

- ▶ concerns which describe a safeguarding issue, but does not provide sufficient information to enable a decision on whether the threshold for safeguarding is met;
- ▶ ensuring that information sharing in safeguarding is at the heart of good decision making;
- ▶ ensuring that there is a clear legal framework and that it is understood and adhered to;
- ▶ ensuring sharing of information is relevant, necessary and proportionate;
- ▶ creating a more formal record of the information shared; and
- ▶ Improving joined-up decision making and faster decision-making, this could be via co-location.



¹ The Centre (2015) Information sharing: Understanding its role in the development of Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASHs).

Why did B&NES build a MASH?

Following conversations between partners in B&NES to improve their information sharing processes, discussions concluded that there were many areas of their safeguarding and early help practice that were working well: for instance, when families and children were already known to statutory services, information was shared in a timely and appropriate way, and adult safeguarding processes in particular were very strong. The Council's Connecting Families team were held up as a model example of good partnership working that enabled agencies to work together and intervene early to support vulnerable families and children.

To ensure that information was being shared across all services, B&NES commissioned a report in June 2014. The Klee report² highlighted that a Serious Case Review (SCR) had shown that information sharing was poor in some instances, particularly where agencies did not communicate between themselves early enough to help children and adults with low-to-medium risk needs.

In response, the partners suggested setting up a MASH. These multi-agency arrangements have been implemented effectively elsewhere, so partners were keen to learn from the evidence that such arrangements helped to improve outcomes for vulnerable people (both children and adults). At the same time, they accepted that there was no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to improving local information sharing.

The three boards providing governance for these early discussions were the Local Safeguarding Adults Board (LSAB), the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB), and the Responsible Authorities Group (the local community safety partnership). All three boards supported the creation of the MASH and provided resources and funding to support it.

It's important to note that the MASH B&NES built is a safeguarding model, but can also be used as a preventative early help model as it can assist in identifying concerns that need a response, albeit not necessarily a safeguarding one.

The aims of the B&NES MASH are to:

- ▶ improve consistency in a shared process across an area;
- ▶ reduce disagreement about thresholds;
- ▶ improve: communication, decision making, and quality of information;
- ▶ co-locate staff from the core partner agencies in one room (possibly at a Police Centre as this had been identified as an available site) rather than implementing virtual information sharing arrangements, and
- ▶ Improve the service to families, children and adults at risk.

² Independent review of MASH models undertaken by Deborah Klee on behalf of LSAB and LSCB to assist in decisions about the appropriate focus and structure of a B&NES MASH. (June 2014)

Main construction team

It was important to the success of the B&NES MASH that an enthusiastic set of builders were pulled together for this project.

In September 2015 two officers with safeguarding experience were recruited on a part-time basis to project manage the development of the proposals. One officer worked in the Children's Social Care and the other in the Adults' Safeguarding Team. This helped facilitate conversations about integrating both these services in the MASH.

This work was overseen by a strong architectural team in the divisional director for Children and Young People Services and the head of Adult's and Children's Safeguarding. This leadership was essential to ensure that the critical path analysis for the MASH was adhered to and that any hold ups were verified and worked through by the project team.



Building this particular MASH*

B&NES MASH has one unique design feature, which is that the MASH team are co-located at Keynsham Police Station and consist of representatives from a number of key agencies involved in safeguarding arrangements; all of whom have access to their own agency databases.

When a case is referred to the MASH, each agency representative is tasked with checking their own database (or where appropriate, connecting with other professionals who are aligned to their area of expertise) within a 24-hour period. Information from each agency database is collated into a single template and following discussion of the information by the team a decision is reached about what actions should result from the referral.

*Other models are available in other areas.

Keeping your MASH secure: installing the locks

The security of information shared with the B&NES MASH model is administered by B&NES IT department and the system administrators for Liquid Logic. Information is shared through the Liquid Logic early help module which is a case management system that went live for B&NES Council Children's Social Care in 2015. The information sharing for adults took place in a slightly different way, however the same process was followed and it went live in 2016.

The email addresses of partner agencies are added by a system administrator from B&NES Council.

This two factor authentication is to ensure that the professional portal is secure and users are the owner of the email account. Only people with the MASH profile in the early help database can access the MASH assessment i.e. the MASH team. Providing this level of security builds understanding and trust within a partnership to appropriately share information.

The governance which acts as the legal framework for the MASH was underpinned by the 2013 partnership information sharing agreement which was reviewed and updated in 2016 with a specific MASH emphasis.

This kit includes:

Information sharing thematic building blocks for building the B&NES MASH model.

Having worked with a number of councils and public sector partners who are developing MASH's, the Centre has uncovered a number of themed cultural barriers which tend to arise in their construction. The Centre have grouped these themes to make them easier to identify and on the following pages have highlighted the themes which B&NES identified and overcame in their building project.

If organisations and partnerships are able to acknowledge, discuss and work through these cultural barriers whilst aligning their processes with a robust governance understanding, in context with what they are aiming to achieve, it is possible to transform public services.

The Centre's themes are:



Vision Leadership Governance

B&NES created momentum for developing a MASH through a shared vision, informed leadership and a strong information governance approach. This enabled an information sharing process and a culture of change to develop.



Professional development

Developing the professional capability of practitioners and management teams in B&NES was paramount, as it created an understanding of sharing information in the MASH and put the focus on to vulnerable children and adults.



Targeting services Assessing impact

Defining thresholds and developing information sharing possibilities within B&NES enabled improved targeting of services.



Communication Engagement Common purpose

B&NES considered how to use their communication to create transparency and support services to create a shared way of working with a clear set of aims and objectives to build a collaborative approach.



Making informed decisions Managing risk

Creating a shared ownership of risk for the partnership ensured collective responsibility to make informed information sharing decisions was at the heart of B&NES thinking.



Service design

Using information sharing as a proactive process and using the collective knowledge and technical opportunities within Liquid Logic and a professional portal inspired the development of an innovative service design.



Political positioning

By working with the two safeguarding boards and the Responsible Authorities Group, B&NES ensured that sufficient political understanding and resources were available to give the MASH the best opportunity to work.



Organisational culture Partnership working Trust

B&NES have used information sharing as a conduit to partnership working, creating a proactive culture. They continue to build trust as they move the MASH forward with a clear set of aims and objectives.

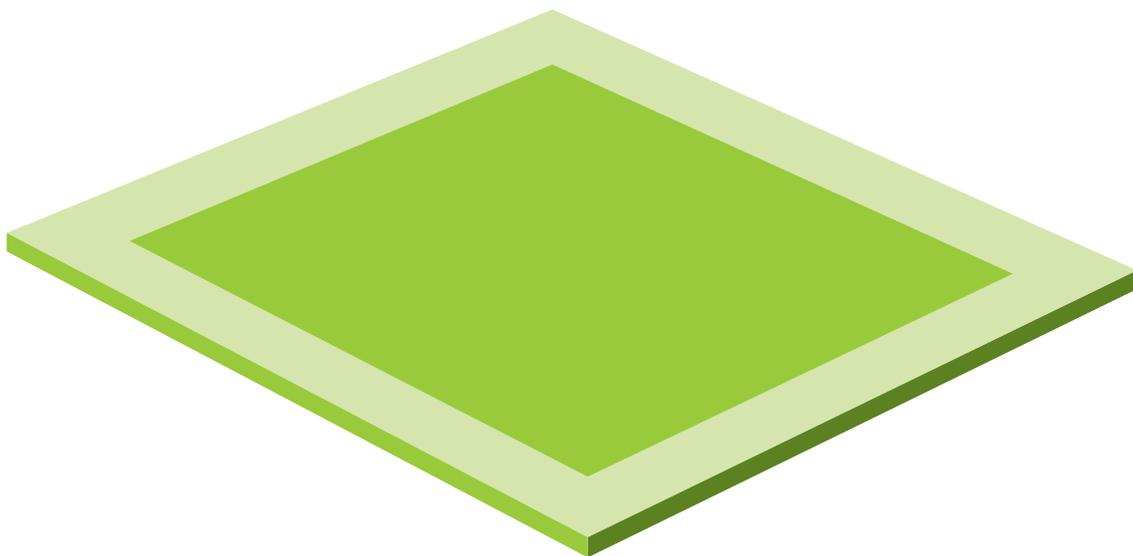
Building instructions

1. Set out your base

Vision

Leadership

Political positioning



Ensure the evidence base for your MASH is set out on a robust, visible platform. To do this, take time to start conversations with a wide range of agencies about the evidence for changing current practice, and encourage them to articulate how they can contribute to a shared vision and purpose of sharing information to provide better early support and protection for vulnerable people.

- ▶ **B&NES established firm foundations for their MASH once they started to have conversations about how they could improve their information sharing processes to help vulnerable people better. A report commissioned at that time by B&NES mentioned a SCR which showed that information sharing was poor in some instances, particularly where agencies did not communicate between themselves early enough to help families and children with low-to-medium risk needs.**
- ▶ **The Centre supported the partners in B&NES to articulate the cultural and organisational information sharing issues they faced in their information sharing report.**

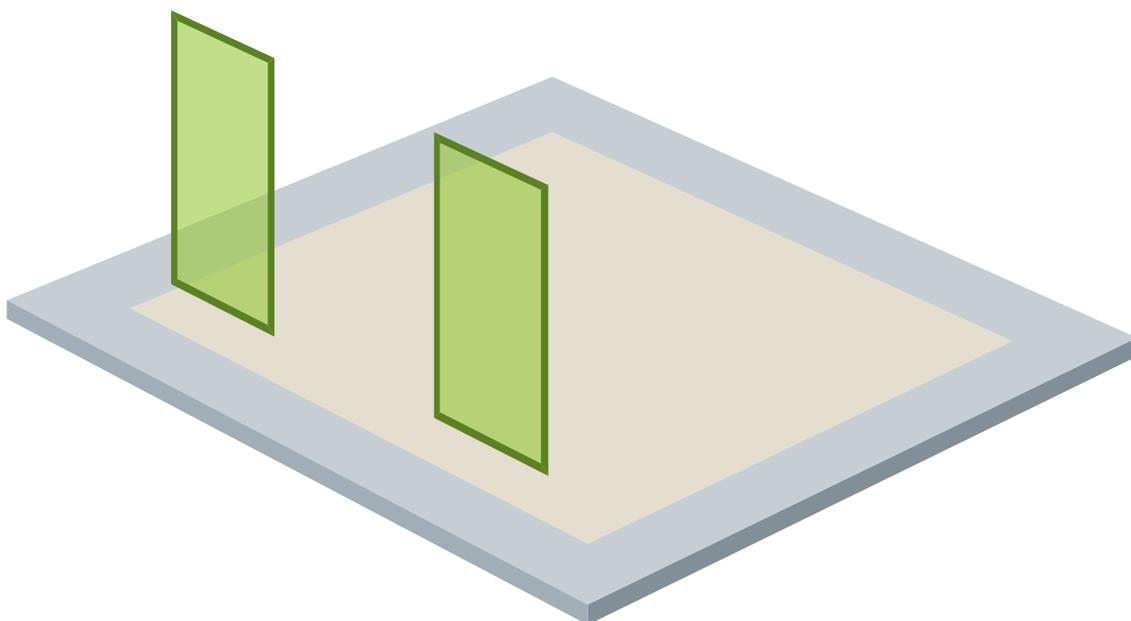
2. Install floor to ceiling windows

Engagement

Common purpose

Governance

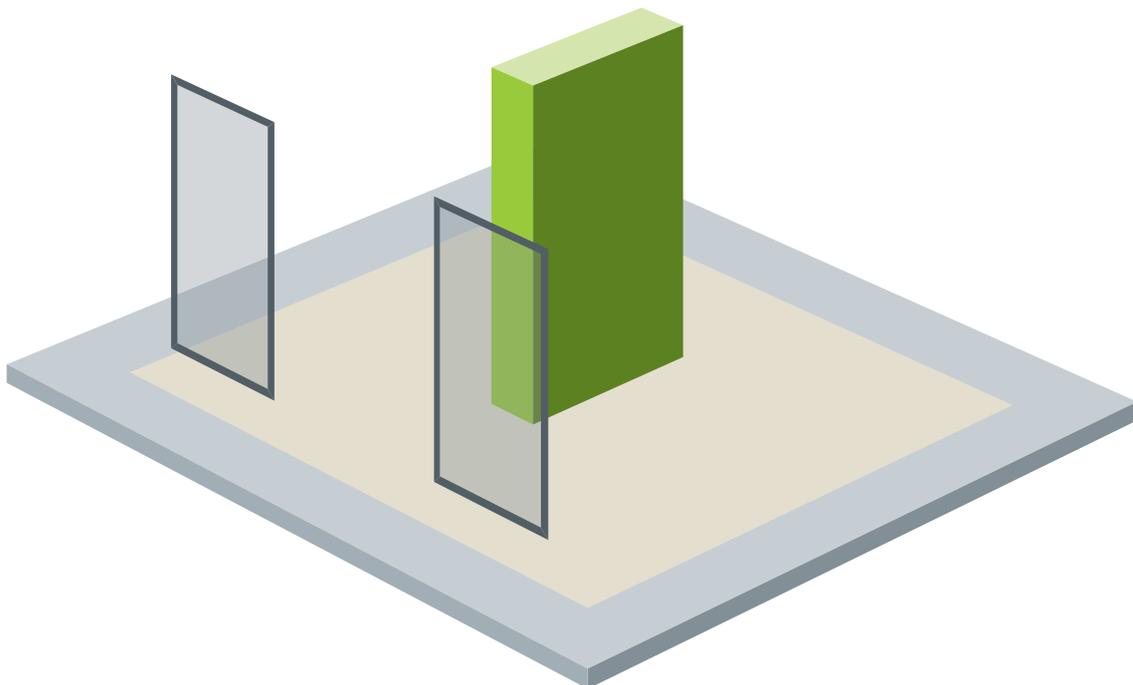
Partnership working



Your MASH implementation plans need to be fully visible and have the appropriate governance structures in place. The relevant LSB in your area should be involved and consulted from the start, and if you are considering integrating Adults and Children's Services in your MASH, you will need to check that these windows are interlinked so that views from one board are reflected towards the other.

- ▶ B&NES involved three boards (both Adult's and Children's Local Safeguarding Boards alongside their local community safety partnership) in the oversight of their MASH plans. They set up a MASH board attended by key partners, who agreed to follow recommendations set out in the information sharing report they had commissioned, and at the same time sought advice from the regional programme board set up by Avon and Somerset Police Constabulary.
- ▶ The Centre attended MASH board meetings regularly in the early days, acting as a critical friend to board members and helping them to consider the cultural and operational concerns around building a MASH.

3. Fix the central pillar to your base



The central pillar of your MASH is strong, visible, local leadership. Without this pillar, your supporting walls will be unable to provide a strong enough roof for the children, families and adults you are supporting. These leaders are required to send a consistent message and champion the vision and purpose of the MASH, leveraging every possible avenue to communicate this vision to agencies, bring new partners on board and keep up momentum on the project.

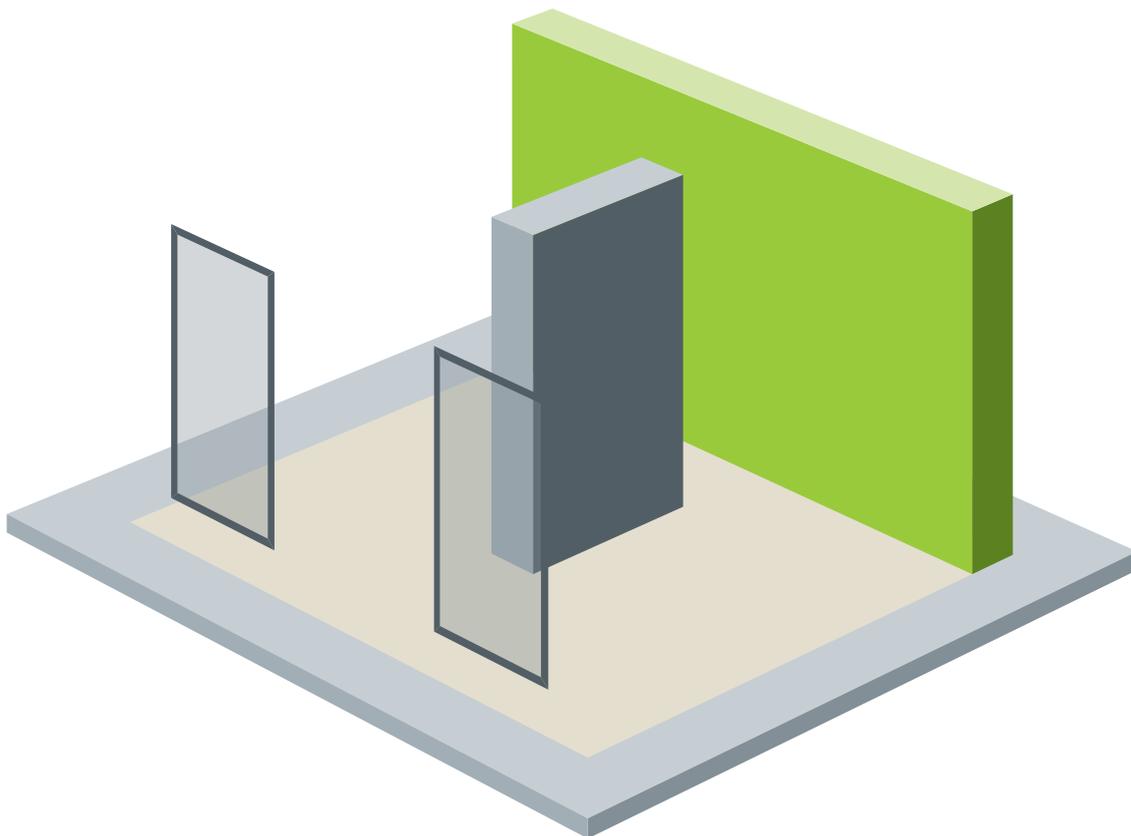
- ▶ **B&NES found that joint leadership from the head of Adult's and Children's Safeguarding and the divisional director of Specialist Services for Children and Young People challenged board members to focus on the shared outcomes for vulnerable people which they could contribute to through information sharing. By appointing joint project managers from both Adult's and Children's Services, these leaders encouraged strong partnership working between these services to build an integrated MASH.**
- ▶ **The Centre met regularly with these key players to act as a sounding board and prompt thinking about how to drive the project forwards.**

4. Attach the back wall to the base

Partnership working

Trust

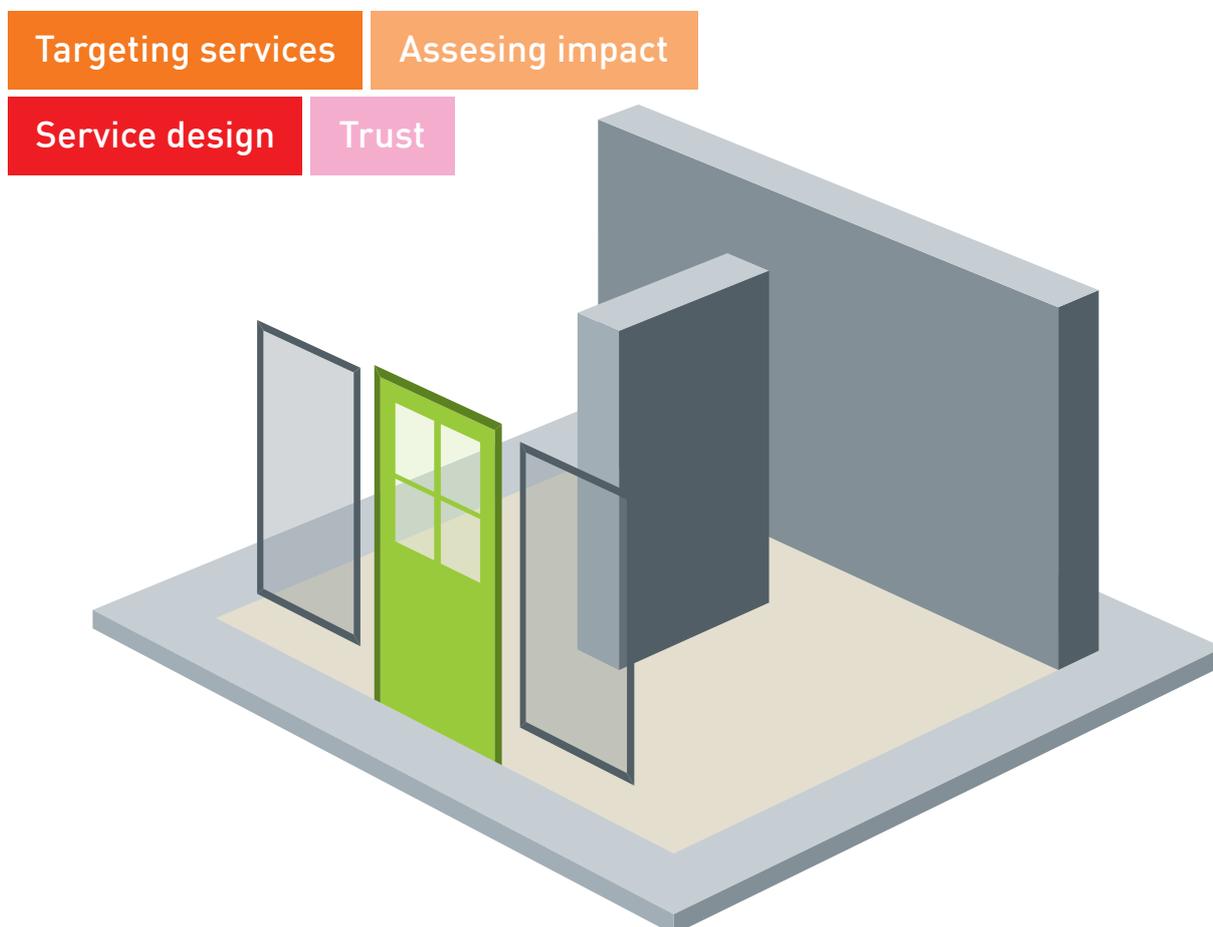
Service design



Collaboration is a vital building block in the successful development of your MASH. Honest and healthy debate is the backbone to a confident and appropriate information sharing approach. This means that you will need to bring your partners together regularly at operational groups and stakeholder events, or ensure your plans are on their team's agenda. This ensures buy-in and instils an ethos of co-production throughout your MASH journey. Your information governance team should be included in discussions early on in the process to ensure Information Sharing Agreements (ISAs) are up to date and fit for purpose.

- ▶ **B&NES hosted a workshop for a wider group of stakeholders to introduce a draft model for their proposed information sharing arrangements and give them an opportunity to test this model against a realistic scenario, drawn from both their services.**
- ▶ **The Centre encouraged the project managers and invited a representative from a neighbouring authority to explain how they had tackled similar challenges to implement their arrangements.**

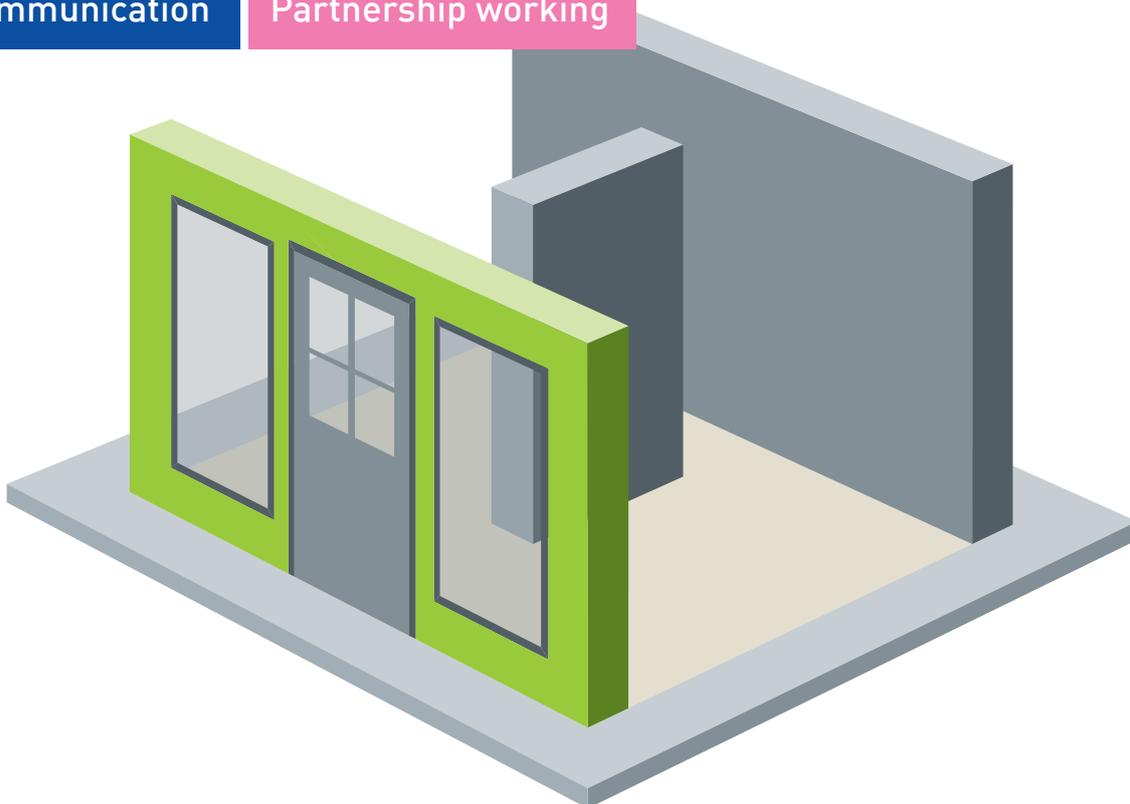
5. Carefully slot your front door between the widows



In any solid MASH construction, the placing of the front door is a critical step. There will undoubtedly be significant challenges to agreeing a common definition of the thresholds for referral to the MASH, with arguments for placing it lower or higher on the 'continuum of need' - depending on the scope of the support envisaged and the resources available to the MASH respectively. Good governance (step 2) will help partners to decide the eventual function of the front door, but it is worth remembering that the supporting walls (step 7) also place limits on where decisions are made.

- ▶ **B&NES's partners took time to establish the thresholds for referral to their MASH, and how agencies would interact with the assessment process – this included discussions about the difference between how decisions are made to triage concerns via the current assessment process and the proposed model.**
- ▶ **The Centre accompanied partners on a visit to Somerset's MASH, and reported its findings to B&NES' MASH Project board, which assisted them in thinking about where decisions about referral and assessment could be most effectively made within their model.**

6. Attach the front wall to the base



If you're considering building an early help MASH model, it is important to gauge partners' appetite for risk and foster collective agreement on how they will obtain consent to share the information of families whose cases they handle.

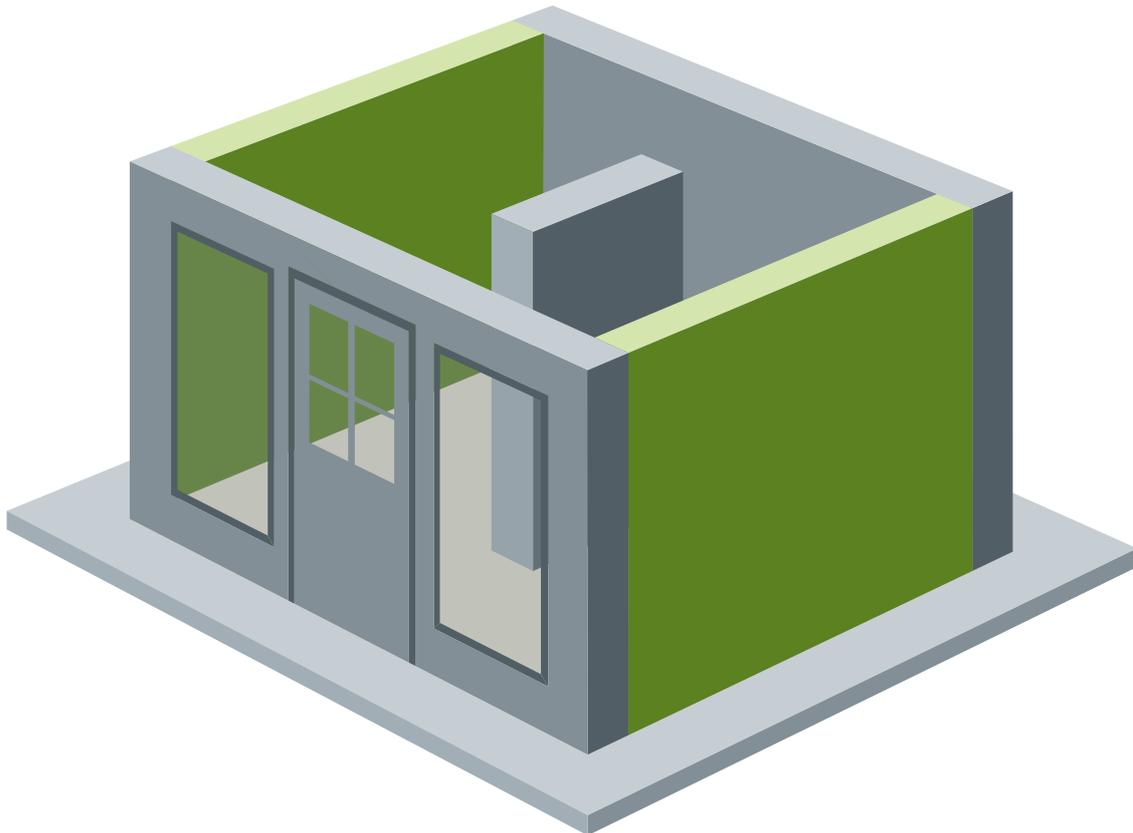
- ▶ **For B&NES staff the important thing was not to get too worried about quantifying the benefits of a MASH, but to ensure that their arrangements helped them manage the risks to vulnerable people appropriately. They responded to partners' concerns that sharing would not be appropriate because of a lack of understanding of the risk of harm to vulnerable people by setting up an Information Sharing and Governance working group, which established that a clearer picture of vulnerability could be assessed by sharing information through the MASH.**
- ▶ **The Centre provided a briefing on different MASH models to the board, and a presentation to partners which helped them to make collective decisions about assessment and management of risk.**

7. Attach the supporting walls to the base, linking the back and front structures of the MASH

Leadership

Service design

Partnership working



At a time of diminishing budgets, getting buy-in from partner agencies will mean difficult decisions about what resources are available to manage the levels of risk anticipated. When building your MASH, be sure to find space to discuss logistical considerations during the project, including how many staff would be seconded to the MASH, the most suitable site and cost of leasing desk-space.

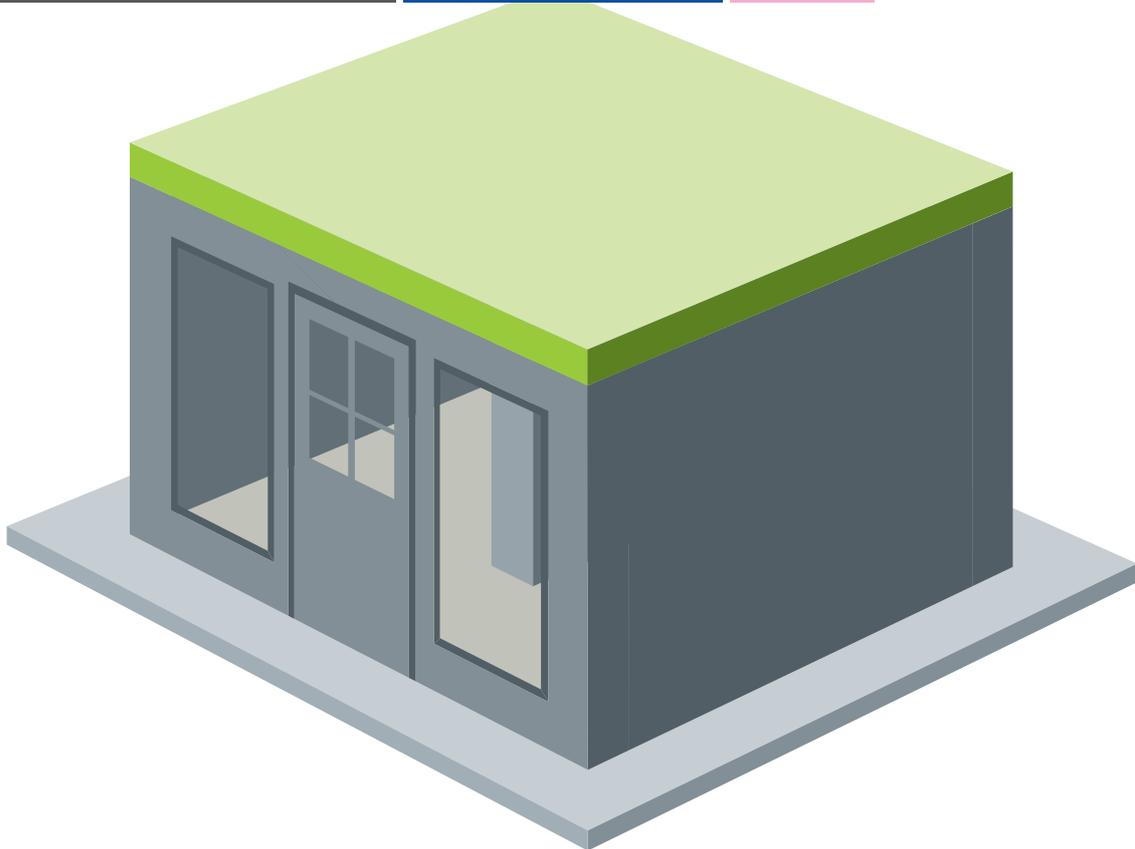
- ▶ **Under pressure to keep its plans cost-neutral, B&NES set up an IT and accommodation working group to determine the best value option for locating its MASH, considering suggestions to base it in either the Civic Centre or Police Centre in Keynsham.**
- ▶ **The Centre helped move these discussions along by encouraging partners to think of alternative solutions, and think about how either site would best support integration of the Adults and Children's services.**

8. Gently lower the roof onto the supporting walls and central pillar, and press into place

Professional development

Communication

Trust



Careful planning at the design stage has meant you have a solid structure for your MASH, and with all partners involved in its construction, you're ready to implement the model. The last step is as important as the rest though: a solid roof of on-going professional development for staff seconded to the MASH. There also needs to be agreement on how this staff development filters back to their home agencies.

- ▶ B&NES ensured staff training and development needs were considered throughout the project, and the workforce working group identified the need to discuss with each individual service the importance of enabling practitioners to attend on-going learning opportunities.
- ▶ The Centre shared learning about how other services were developing their staff members' professional capability to share information, and arranged a visit by a Cabinet Office senior civil servant to encourage links to be made between these areas of activity. A learning package has also been developed to support understanding of the B&NES MASH for new starters and for partnership agencies.

Congratulations – you have built a fully operational MASH.

Launching the MASH

In September 2016 the B&NES MASH held a launch event which gave secondary agencies a chance to look at the process and gather further understanding of what the MASH would and wouldn't do. The event was also a useful opportunity to get the views of those stakeholders across the partnership who were now coming back after the construction process.

The Responsibilities Authorities Group, Local Safeguarding Adults Board and the Local Safeguarding Children's Board had collaborated on this project for over two years in order that all partners could be satisfied that the focus was appropriate, resources were proportionate and that issues of confidentiality and information sharing had been fully and satisfactorily addressed.

The B&NES MASH has a joint focus on vulnerable children and adults at risk of harm.

The partners involved in the development of the B&NES MASH model were:

- ▶ **Avon and Somerset Constabulary**
- ▶ **Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust (AWP)**
- ▶ **Avon Probation Service**
- ▶ **Bath and North East Somerset Council**
- ▶ **Child and Adult Mental Health Service (CAMHS)**
- ▶ **NHS Banes Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)**
- ▶ **Royal United Hospital (RUH)**
- ▶ **Sirona care and health***

* Please note at the time of writing Sirona care and health were the provider but this changed to Virgin Care prior to publication.

Architectural changes to your MASH model so it is fit for your location

B&NES have ensured that their model is fit for purpose by constructing to the needs of their locality. Listed below are the considerations of what the B&NES MASH will and won't do.

The B&NES MASH will;

- ▶ Operate within normal office hours.
- ▶ Consider cases where safeguarding concerns are felt to be present but additional clarification is required before a more informed decision is taken.
- ▶ Focus on cases where there are concerns, but the extent and seriousness of them require additional, and timely clarification in order to make a more informed decision about the level of safeguarding concern.

The B&NES MASH will not;

- ▶ Work with cases where there are clear and agreed safeguarding concerns. It is felt that current safeguarding arrangements for these types of concerns work well.
- ▶ Change the existing referral routes into both Adult Services or Children's Services where safeguarding concerns may be present.
- ▶ Take referrals directly from agencies. All concerns must continue to go through existing routes. (Both the ASIST team [for adults] and the duty team [for children] will continue to be the appropriate "front door" for all agencies wishing to refer concerns; it will be the decision of the Duty and ASIST teams to decide on sending the referral to the MASH for additional information).



Keeping up with repairs

As with all new ventures both the LSAB and LSCB boards involved in the construction of B&NES MASH will need to keep a close monitoring role on the progress and effectiveness of the MASH arrangements. This will ensure that practitioner and partner agency feedback is used to influence any operational adjustments that are required. The processes and systems will require review and revision at regular points and continuing discussion of cases/thresholds with team members should be actively encouraged and promoted.



The most important construction tools

Take time to enable conversations to develop

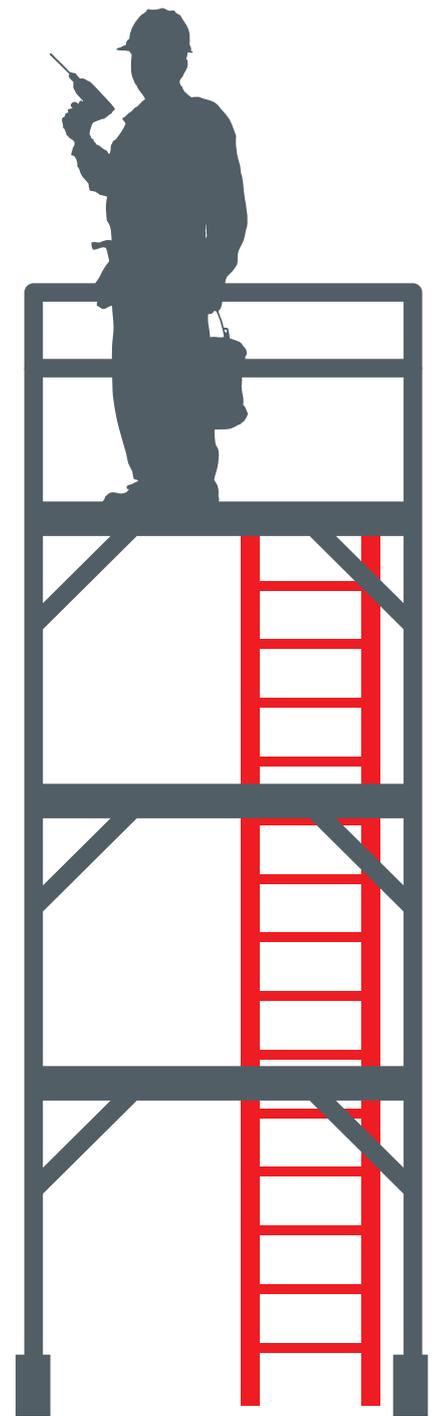
Places can go further and faster on their information sharing journey by taking the time to build important relationships with partners. B&NES discovered that it needed to deliver two different stakeholder engagement workshops to encourage healthy debate about its purpose and structure, before agreeing a timeline for implementation.

Show strong leadership to give confidence in the proposals

Agreement on multi-agency information sharing arrangements depends on strong local leadership throughout the early stages of discussion. B&NES realised that it needed visible leadership from the council and its partners to give agencies the confidence that its plans would be able to take root, and communicated this clearly at the second workshop.

Take steps to consider all partner concerns seriously and find collaborative solutions

MASH models are more likely to succeed where partner agencies work collaboratively to overcome important information sharing challenges from the start. B&NES found that through intensive engagement with stakeholders about the safeguarding concerns raised in its SCR's, they needed to set up working groups to find collective agreement on difficult issues such as thresholds of risk for referral, and where decisions are made about cases.



When launching your MASH ensure that all partners are invited to discuss and question your process

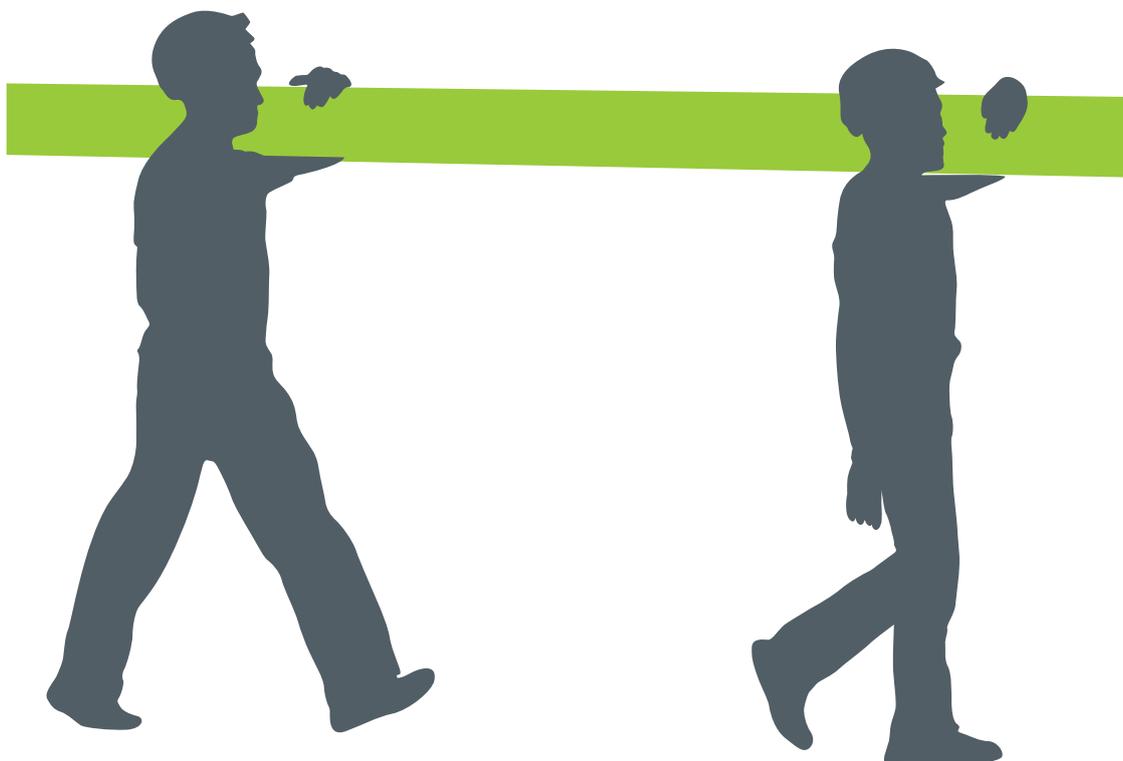
No matter what consultation has taken place there will always be nervousness around new ways of working. Allow time for discussion, learning and explanation to take place. Ensuring that all secondary partners are with you on the journey will create further buy-in and trust. It is also important to ensure that once established there is a mechanism in place to enable feedback on its processes and effectiveness and to identify ways in which it can improve.

The Centre of Excellence for Information Sharing and Bath & North East Somerset Council began this information sharing journey in 2014. The construction of the B&NES MASH has been an informative learning process for both organisations and shows the time, effort and patience that true transformation can take.

The building blocks discussed will vary from location to location but they have proved that the thinking and learning around the cultural aspects of information sharing are as vital as the physical systems and processes.

The Centre would like to thank B&NES for the access, discovery and learning that we have been able to share with other organisations around this work.

To read more about our work with MASH's, please visit: www.informationsharing.org.uk/safeguarding



We have a range of tools and case studies that we update regularly on our website. Sign up for updates on the site or connect with us to keep updated.

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