

# **MASH**

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is the Durham MASH?**

The MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) in Durham is a new service going live on 2 March 2015. It is designed to be a central point for the screening, gathering, sharing and analysing of information about children in County Durham who may be at risk of harm or who may need support services.

### **Who Works in the MASH?**

The Service is made up of a range of professionals from different agencies who are all co located in Durham. They include colleagues from police including a detective sergeant and detective constable and several support staff; health colleagues including a senior safeguarding nurse; four social workers from children's social care; and Harbour (voluntary sector domestic abuse service). Other organisations will join the co located team in the coming months.

All professionals will continue to be employed by their own agency.

Virtual links exist with other key agencies who will be asked to provide information where necessary.

### **Why Create A MASH?**

- To improve the quality of information sharing between agencies who know and work with children when they are referred into children's social care
- To ensure that information can be shared quickly and easily so that timely decisions can be made
- To ensure that risk and vulnerability issues are quickly identified so that the right support is offered to the child and family
- To improve the ability of agencies to see patterns of risk and harm for children over time and across services with a view to reducing child neglect
- To improve consistency of response for children and families in Durham
- To ensure that children and families receive help early and stop issues from escalating
- To reduce the numbers of children who are re referred into children's services as the right support is offered at the right time

## **What does the MASH do?**

The MASH will screen and share information relating to referrals that are made about children where there are concerns for their welfare or their safety.

The MASH is designed to ensure that all of the available information from key agencies about a child and their family is shared in a timely way at this critical decision making point.

All agencies have access to their own IT systems within the MASH and so can quickly and easily share information that they hold about children and their families. Any new multi agency information will then be stored centrally on the social services information database and be added to the original referral information.

The MASH will analyse the information and form a more accurate opinion about the level of risk that the child is experiencing based on fuller information gathering than is possible under current processes.

The MASH will make a decision about the most appropriate service or team to meet the needs of the child and their family and send the referral to them.

The receiving team will receive a set of summary reports and analysis from all key agencies who know the child and family with an overall level of need rating for the child. Clear recommendations for further action will be included.

## **What are the benefits of a MASH?**

Agencies can ensure that all available information is coordinated and shared at the point of referral in order to assist in making the right decision about which service is best placed to support the child.

The MASH can access and share information more quickly and so decisions can be made more quickly meaning the child and family will receive help in a timely way. Previously, this process relied on social workers ringing individual agencies and awaiting their responses.

The MASH can help to inform professionals about how quickly they need to respond to a child who may be at risk of harm.

Children and their families will receive help as soon as they need it as professionals will be able to identify potential risk and vulnerability earlier and prevent situations escalating.

Additional capacity has been created in the MASH team which will enable community based professionals working directly with children and families to have more capacity to carry out their work

There will be closer partnership working and less duplication of effort.

There should be less re referrals as children and families should be directed to the right source of help and support in the first instance.

### **How do the Central Referral unit (CRU), First Contact and the MASH work together?**

The **Central Referral Unit (CRU)** is a police led unit which is co located with the MASH. The CRU deal with all police information relating to vulnerable adults and children within County Durham. They are the central point for screening all police concern forms and deciding what should happen next. Some of the information that comes into the CRU will become a referral into First Contact because it relates to concerns for a child. Police colleagues in the CRU also support the MASH. The CRU and the MASH all operate out of the same building and work very closely together.

**The First Contact Service** is led by the Local Authority and is the single point of contact for all professionals and members of the public who want to make a referral about a child they are worried about or who they feel needs some support. Staff within First Contact will triage all referrals and determine which ones need to go into the MASH process. There will be some requests that come to First Contact for early help and support for children that won't need to go through a MASH process and can be signposted to other services such as One Point.

### **How do I make a referral if I am concerned about a child?**

The procedure for making referrals if you have a concern about a child can be found on the LSCB website [www.durham-lscb.org.uk](http://www.durham-lscb.org.uk)

The process for making referrals has not changed. You will still either ring First Contact on 03000 26 79 79 or email them on [firstcontact-gcsx@durham.gcsx.gov.uk](mailto:firstcontact-gcsx@durham.gcsx.gov.uk).

Professionals can use the single assessment tool (part 1)/referral form which is available on the LSCB website ([www.durham-lscb.org.uk](http://www.durham-lscb.org.uk)) as a way of making referrals into First Contact if they find that easier.

### **What information should I include when I am making a referral?**

It is very important that when you make a referral to First Contact you include all of the information that you have about that child and their family. The Early Help Assessment Form is useful as it helps to guide you through the kind of information that you will be asked for. Where there are gaps in information it will often be necessary to contact you as the referrer to clarify information and this can lead to delay in identifying support for the child.

The 0-19 Levels of Need document within the Single Assessment Procedure on the LSCB website ([www.durham-lscb.org.uk](http://www.durham-lscb.org.uk)) is a useful guide when making a referral as it is designed to assist professionals in thinking about the kinds of issues that the child and their family may be facing. This is the tool that staff within First Contact will use when screening referral information.

Unless there is an immediate risk to the child, then as professionals you are expected to have discussed your concerns with the family and told them that you are going to make a referral before you do so.

Professionals are expected to have completed the risk matrix for children and young people where there is concern about child sexual exploitation. This can be found on the LSCB website ([www.durham-lscb.org.uk](http://www.durham-lscb.org.uk)).

### **What will happen once I have made a referral?**

The information that you provide will be screened using the 0-19 levels of need document.

If the referral is unclear you may be contacted for further information.

If the child has level 2 needs, the information will be shared with the One Point duty officer and will be considered for allocation to a lead professional at the relevant weekly allocation meeting.

If the child is deemed to have level 3 or level 4 needs then the information will go to the MASH for further information sharing and risk assessment.

All agencies will collate the information they have. The social worker will ring other agencies who may not be co located in the MASH but who may have important information about the child and family.

The information will then be put together and a final decision will be reached by all the professionals in the MASH about which service can best meet the needs of the child. This might be an Assessment and Intervention Social Work team; a Pathfinder team; a One Point hub or another agency who could act as a lead professional.

### **How quickly will a decision be made?**

The MASH will make some decisions in no more than four hours where there are serious concerns for the safety of a child.

All other decisions will be made within one working day following receipt of the referral.

### **How will I know the Outcome?**

Professionals will receive a letter which will explain which team their referral has been sent to. It will provide the phone number of the team so that you can contact

them directly to find out what will happen next. The letter will be sent from First Contact within one working day of the referral being made.

### **What do I do if I don't agree with the decision of the MASH?**

If you do not agree with the outcome of your referral then you should contact either your agency representative in the MASH if you have one or the Team Manager in First Contact on 03000 267979 to discuss this.

Each agency will continue to have a safeguarding lead. Their role and function will remain unchanged. You can discuss issues of concern relating to safeguarding referrals with them.

If you remain dissatisfied with the decision within the MASH then you should follow the professional challenge process within the LSCB procedures.

### **Do staff in the MASH visit families?**

No – staff working in the MASH are office based and have the job of screening and analysing information. They ensure that referrals and all associated information about children is passed on to the relevant team as soon as possible.

### **If I just want some advice about a concern I have for a child where can I call?**

You can call First Contact and talk to a member of staff about your concerns and using the 0-19 levels of need document as a guide they will assist you to consider the kind of support that the child may need. They will discuss with you whether you can provide that support or whether another agency may be better placed to offer the help needed.

Professionals can continue to contact their designated lead for safeguarding as they do currently. This process has not changed.

### **What hours is the MASH operational?**

Staff within the MASH work between 8.30am – 5.00pm Monday – Thursday, and 8.30am – 4.30pm on Fridays.

Out of office hours the Emergency Duty Team operates an emergency social work service which is co located with the MASH and will pass relevant information to colleagues in day time services.