



executive summary

devon multi-agency safeguarding hub: value for money report

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Background

This report examines the Value for Money (VfM) of the Devon Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and the metrics that could be used for assessing its impact over the medium and longer term. It should be read in conjunction with the accompanying *Case-Study Report* (Golden, *et al.*, 2011).

As the MASH is midway through a phased roll-out, it is too early to make a definitive assessment as to whether it offers good VfM. Whilst some of its costs and benefits are immediate, others will take time to emerge as the system beds in and the intended benefits towards the safeguarding of children are realised. However, it is possible at this stage both to provide a framework within which VfM can be monitored and assessed going forwards and to recommend measures to achieve this. This provides a valuable narrative to promote a wider understanding of the MASH within Devon and further afield, and establishes an evidence base to inform further service improvement.

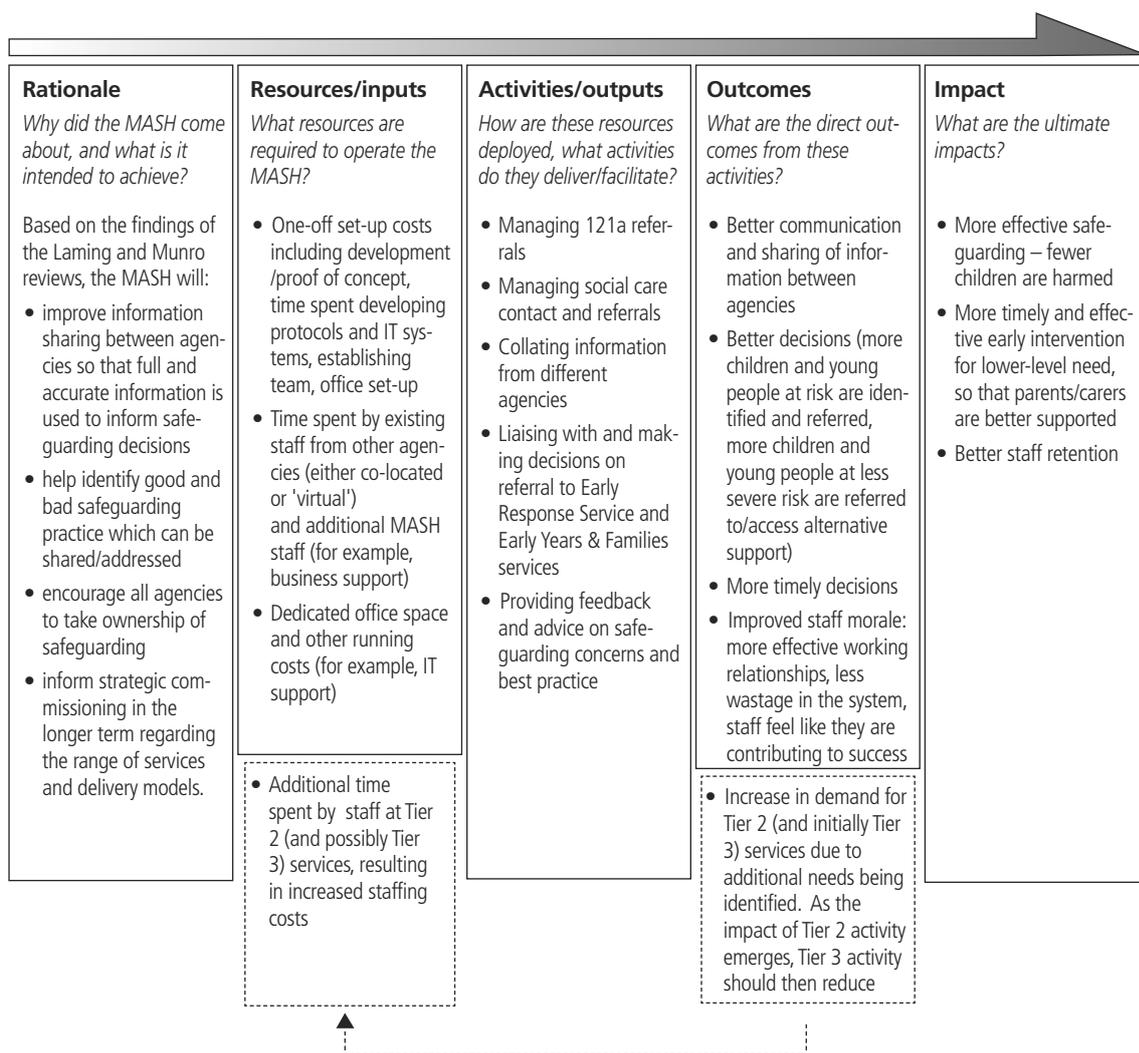
Key findings

The VfM framework

The definition of what constitutes ‘value’ can vary depending on the perspectives of the different stakeholders affected by an intervention. It is, therefore, important to create a framework in which value, and the ways in which an intervention creates it, can be understood and tested.

A logic model is a useful approach to providing such a framework: it describes an intervention and the mechanisms by which it is intended to deliver outcomes. We have developed a logic model for the MASH based on existing documents and discussions with Devon strategic and operational staff. This is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The MASH logic model



One potential criticism of the logic model approach is that it can give the impression of a simple linear chain of cause and effect. However, as emphasised by Munro (2010), in a complex environment such as Children’s Services it is necessary to take a system-wide view, where changes made to one part of the system have wider (positive or negative) consequences elsewhere. This has been acknowledged in the implementation of MASH, with the roll-out in each area being accompanied by complementary changes to how Tier 2 services are coordinated and delivered. It is also acknowledged in our recommendations for assessing its impact.

Metrics

Guided by the logic model, we have explored a range of metrics relating to the resourcing, operation and impact of the MASH. Before describing these, it is important to note a number of limitations.

- It is still early days for the MASH, and so many of the metrics will not yet have been affected.
- Metrics relating to process outcomes represent a means to an end, not an end in themselves.
- For many of the metrics, there is no available data from before the implementation of the MASH.
- Where longer-term data does exist, this will also be affected by other external factors.

Nevertheless, the metrics provide valuable insights into how the system is functioning. They will help the MASH to identify which parts of the system warrant further attention and provide the basis for comparisons over time or between settings.

Metrics relating to the costs and operation of the MASH are:

- staff numbers and costs
- other costs – overheads and setup costs
- cases per staff member and cost per referral.

Metrics relating to better decision making in the MASH are:

- appropriateness of 'MASHed' cases and of MASH-Tier 2 and 3 referrals
- re-referrals (to the MASH or Tier 3)
- effect on decision making and its speed.

Metrics relating other outcomes of the MASH are:

- improved working environment
- agencies provide timely information
- effect on Tier 2 and 3 workload and efficiency
- supporting safeguarding.

Metrics relating to the impact of the MASH are:

- level of child protection concern, child abuse convictions and hospital admissions
- children and families' experiences
- staff absence and retention.

Conclusion and next steps

As the MASH and its place in the wider system beds in, and enough time passes for its intended outcomes and impact to be realised, the key VfM questions are:

- To what extent has workload (and hence cost) reduced through better decisions and lower rates of re-referral?
- To what extent has workload (and hence cost) increased due the more intensive information gathering process of the MASH, and increased levels of support?
- To what extent has the MASH improved the lives of children and families, resulting in savings in human and financial terms?

The metrics recommended in this report will help to answer these questions. Whilst it is too early to quantify and compare these effects, it seems likely, based on this report and the accompanying *Case-Study Report*, that the combined effect of the MASH and resulting Tier 2 support will be an increase in costs to some degree. Developing a better understanding of the costs associated with a serious safeguarding incident (and, conversely, of the savings from avoiding such incidents) is, therefore, key to any assessment of the net financial impact of the MASH.

Should this work be taken further, the next steps would be to develop and begin to monitor the metrics we have described. This would allow an evidence base to be built around the impact and effectiveness of the MASH and wider safeguarding system, and provide valuable insights into their operations and how they may further be improved.

Related reading

The *Case-Study Report* can be found at www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LGMX01

References

Golden, S., Aston, H. and Durbin, B. (2011). *Devon Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub: Case-Study Report*. Slough: NFER.

Munro (2010). *The Munro Review of Child Protection, Part One: A Systems Analysis*. [online] Available: <http://www.education.gov.uk/munroreview/downloads/TheMunroReviewofChildProtection-Part%20one.pdf> [29 June 2011].

Further information

For more information about this report visit www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LGMX02/ or email Ben Durbin at b.durbin@nfer.ac.uk.



This project was funded by
the Local Government
Education and Children's
Services Research Programme



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