



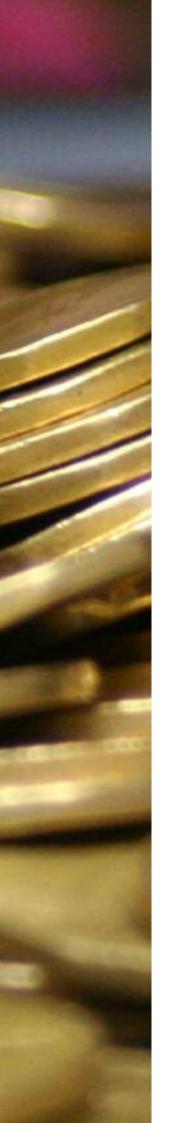
executive summary devon multi-agency safeguarding hub: value for money report

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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

Rationale

Why did the MASH come about, and what is it intended to achieve?

Based on the findings of the Laming and Munro reviews, the MASH will:

- improve information sharing between agencies so that full and accurate information is used to inform safeguarding decisions
- help identify good and bad safeguarding practice which can be shared/addressed
- encourage all agencies to take ownership of safeguarding
- inform strategic commissioning in the longer term regarding the range of services and delivery models.

Resources/inputs

What resources are required to operate the MASH?

- One-off set-up costs including development /proof of concept, time spent developing protocols and IT systems, establishing team, office set-up
- Time spent by existing staff from other agencies (either co-located or 'virtual') and additional MASH staff (for example, business support)
- Dedicated office space and other running costs (for example, IT support)
- Additional time spent by staff at Tier 2 (and possibly Tier 3) services, resulting in increased staffing costs

Activities/outputs

How are these resources deployed, what activities do they deliver/facilitate?

- Managing 121a referrals
- Managing social care contact and referrals
- Collating information from different agencies
- Liaising with and making decisions on referral to Early Response Service and Early Years & Families services
- Providing feedback and advice on safeguarding concerns and best practice

Outcomes

What are the direct outcomes from these activities?

- Better communication and sharing of information between agencies
- Better decisions (more children and young people at risk are identified and referred, more children and young people at less severe risk are referred to/access alternative support)
- More timely decisions
- Improved staff morale: more effective working relationships, less wastage in the system, staff feel like they are contributing to success
- Increase in demand for Tier 2 (and initially Tier 3) services due to additional needs being identified. As the impact of Tier 2 activity emerges, Tier 3 activity should then reduce

Impact

What are the ultimate impacts?

- More effective safeguarding – fewer children are harmed
- More timely and effective early intervention for lower-level need, so that parents/carers are better supported
- Better staff retention

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 avaiable 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 guestions 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.



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