

devon multi-agency safeguarding hub: value for money report

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Introduction

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

The MASH is midway through a phased roll-out, and as such it is too early to make a definitive assessment as to whether it offers good value for money. Whilst some of its costs and benefits are immediate, others will take time to emerge as the system beds in and the intended benefits of safeguarding children are realised. However,

it is possible at this stage both to provide a framework within which VfM can be monitored and assessed and to recommend the necessary measures for achieving this. The report 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 improvements.

It should be noted that for some of these measures it has been possible to gather baseline data, whereas for others further work would be required which it was not possible to complete within the constraints of the present assignment.

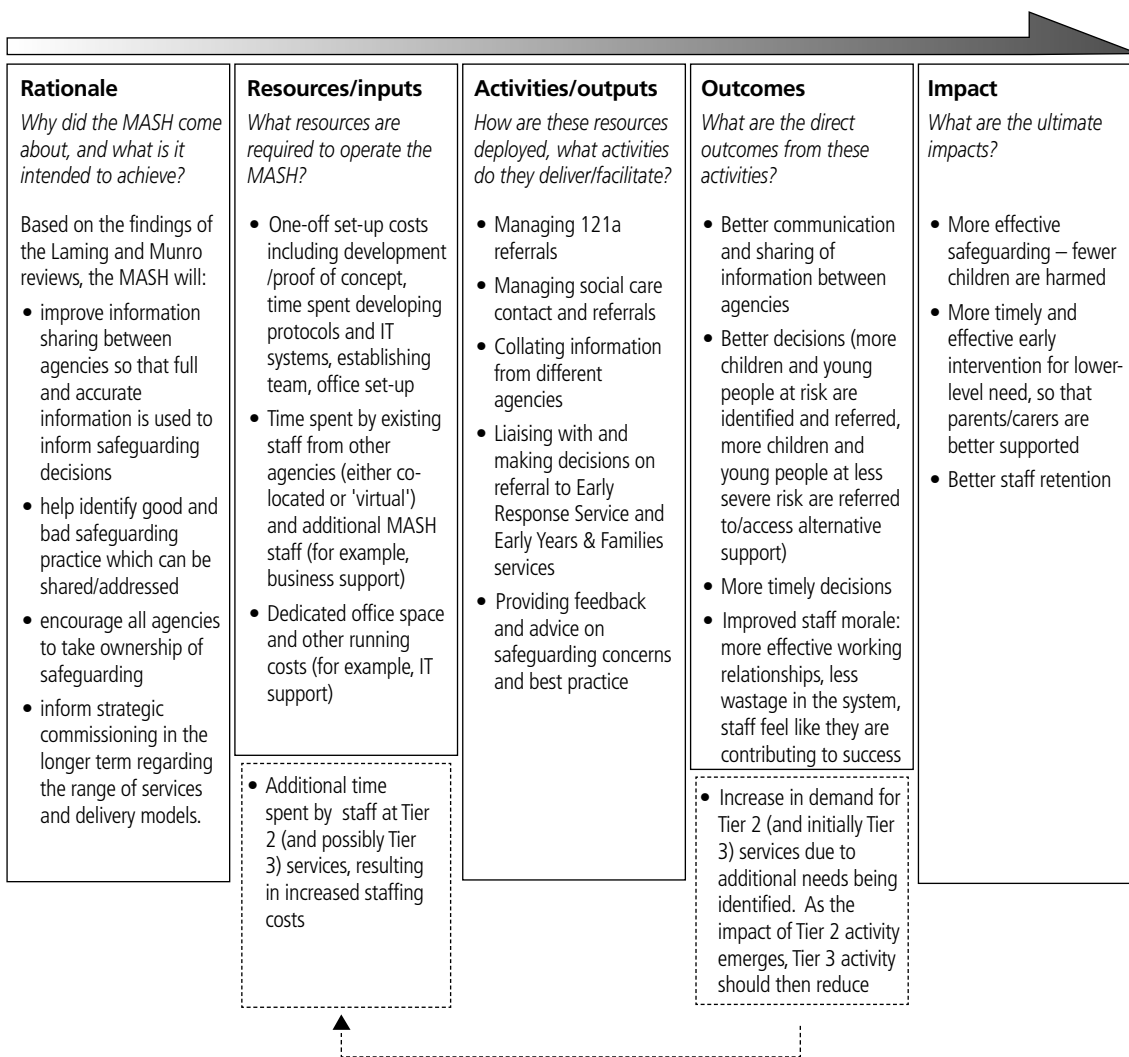
1 Value for money framework

The definition of what constitutes value varies depending on the perspectives of the different stakeholders affected by an intervention. For example, value may mean immediate financial savings from a more efficient process or it could mean system-wide financial and social benefits from an overall reduction in need. 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 for providing such a framework, and 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 the Devon MASH strategic and operational staff. This is shown in Figure 1.1. It incorporates a description of the rationale for change, the inputs and resources required, the activities and outputs delivered, the immediate outcomes,

and their intended impact. 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), it is impossible to implement or evaluate in isolation any change 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 certainly 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. Indeed, we have sought to capture a key element of this non-linearity in the logic model by explicitly including resource implications for Tier 2 and Tier 3 services, as will be further explored.

Figure 1.1: The MASH logic model



2 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, so its ultimate impact on children will certainly not yet be evident, and many of the operational and system metrics will also not yet have been affected.
- Many of the metrics relate to process outcomes, not to the ultimate impact on children and young people.

Whilst these represent a means to an end, they are not an end in themselves.

- For many of the metrics, data pre-dating the implementation of the MASH does not exist (such as detailed data on the processing of contacts and referrals to social services).
- Where longer-term data does exist, this often covers metrics that will be affected by other external factors (for example, economic conditions and high profile child protection incidents such as that of Baby P).

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

Where possible, these metrics should be reported separately for the northern, eastern and southern areas. Given a more detailed examination of the data, it may be possible to use the phased roll-out of the MASH to provide more robust evidence of its impact. However, the high degree of variability from month to month in referrals and child protection incidents, and the relatively short gap between each start-up in each area, means that this would be difficult.

2.1 Resources – inputs – activities – outputs

Table 2.1 considers metrics relating to the costs and operation of the MASH, captured in the resources/inputs and activities/outputs columns in the logic model (Figure 1.1). These encompass economy and efficiency – minimising costs and maximising the outputs delivered.

2.2 Outcomes

The metrics are then considered relating to the immediate outcomes of the MASH and its effect on the wider children’s services system. These are captured in the fourth column of the logic model (Figure 1.1), and encompass the effectiveness of the MASH: the extent to which it delivers the outcomes intended. We consider two groups of metrics: firstly, outcomes relating to better decision making and, secondly, a number of additional outcomes.

Table 2. 1 Economy and efficiency metrics

Metric	Definition	Baseline value and source	Possible sources for future data collection
1.1 (a) Staff numbers (total)	MASH staff headcount (FTE), including ‘virtual’ staff based in other agencies	22 (estimate based on case-study interviews)	Detailed audit of MASH operations
(b) Staff numbers (incremental)	As (a) but only include new roles created directly as a result of the MASH, or in order to cover time spent on the MASH (through staff reorganisation)	12 (estimate based on case-study interviews)	
1.2 (a) Staff costs (total)	Salary and on-costs for staff covered by 1.1a	-	Grade and pay rates from participating agencies
(b) Staff costs (incremental)	Salary and on-costs for staff covered by 1.1b	-	
1.3 Overheads	Additional costs of running the MASH, including facilities, operational and capital costs, training, and wider organisational support including HR, IT and senior management	-	Detailed audit of MASH operations
1.4 Set-up costs	One-off costs incurred in order to establish the MASH, including time spent on strategic level discussion, conceptual development, and establishing a team and operating protocols	-	Could be documented and quantified within broad parameters
1.5 (a) Cases per FTE (all cases)	Three-month moving average 121a and referral numbers divided by numbers of FTEs (provides crude measure of process efficiency)	Estimate 16.0 for March 2011 (1.1a and MASH data)	-
(b) Cases per FTE (MASHed cases only)	As 1.5a, but for ‘MASHed’ cases only	Estimate 15.3 for March 2011 (1.1a and MASH data)	
1.6 Cost per referral	Overall MASH unit costs, either calculated ‘top down’ based on total MASH running costs or ‘bottom up’ based on time spent per case	-	Use 1.2a and 1.3 in conjunction with MASH referral numbers (top down) or collect more detailed activity data (bottom up)

Better decision making

In order to assess whether better decisions are being made, it is necessary to consider the role of the MASH in the system of assessing and addressing need. A *good* decision will result in referral to the appropriate agency during the first contact with the child or family, thus maximising the chances of a positive impact being made on the life of the child, and minimising costs incurred through re-referral or inappropriate intervention. A *bad* decision will result in time and money being wasted due to unnecessary or inappropriate assessment or intervention or, worse, a child in need of support not receiving it.

Figure 2.1 provides an overview of the Tier 2 and Tier 3 referrals system within which the MASH operates. Each path from one agency or stage in the process has been

numbered to enable metrics to be clearly defined (for example, P1). These metrics are described in Table 2.2. In the definitions column, an indication is also given as to whether each metric would be expected to be high or low.

It should be noted that none of these metrics should be treated in isolation: each one contributes to building a bigger picture of the role and impact of the MASH. For example, even a good referral decision can result in re-referral, either because inappropriate support is subsequently provided by the referred agency or because even appropriate support sometimes fails to prevent escalation of need. Furthermore, sometimes a case that is *MASHed* will result in no further action (NFA). Again, this does not necessarily mean the decision to investigate further was wrong.

Figure 2.1: The MASH within the wider system of Tier 2 and Tier 3 referral

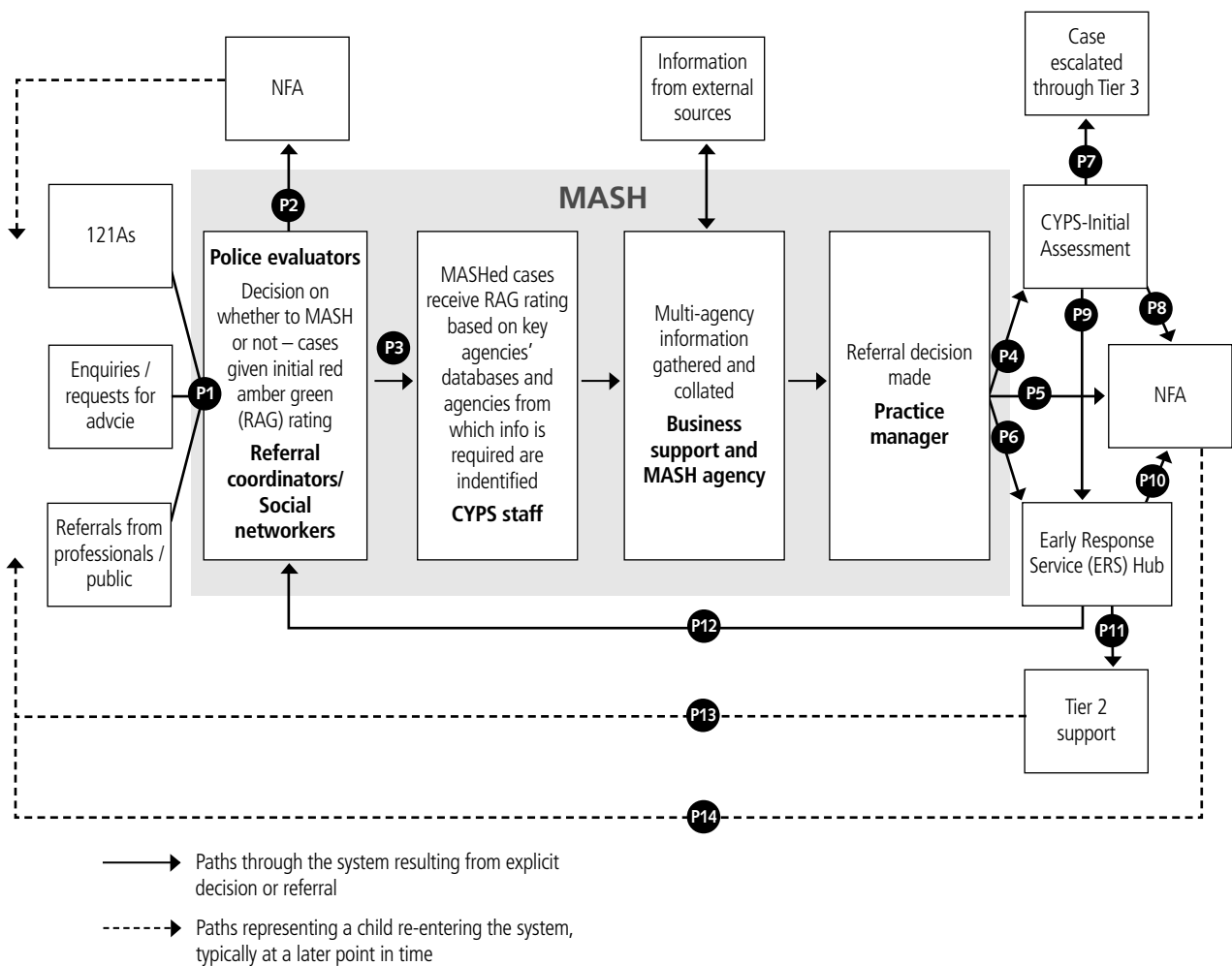


Table 2. 2 Outcome metrics – better decision making

Metric	Definition	Baseline value and source	Possible sources for future data collection
2.1	<p>Appropriateness of MASH-Tier 3 referrals</p> <p>(a) P7/P4 (% of referrals for Initial Assessment (IA) which are progressed) <i>High</i></p> <p>(b) P8/P4 (% of referrals for IA de-escalated to Tier 2) <i>Low</i></p> <p>(c) P9/P4 (% of referrals for IA resulting in NFA) <i>Low</i></p>	–	CYPS data
2.2	<p>Appropriateness of ‘MASHed’ cases</p> <p>P5/P3 (% of MASHed cases resulting in an NFA MASH outcome) <i>Low</i></p>	27% (MASH data)	–
2.3	<p>Appropriateness of MASH-Tier 2 referrals</p> <p>(a) P11/P6 (% of referrals from the MASH to Tier 2 where support is subsequently provided) <i>High</i></p> <p>(b) P10/P6 (% of referrals from the MASH to Tier 2 which result in NFA) <i>Low</i></p> <p>(c) P12/P6 (% of referrals from the MASH to Tier 2 which are immediately re-escalated) <i>Low</i></p>	–	Data already collated by the Eastern ERS hub, and could also be collated by Northern & Southern hubs
2.4	<p>Re-referral to the MASH</p> <p>(a) P2/P1 (% of MASH cases which in the past 12 months have been previously filtered at the pre-RAG stage) <i>Low</i></p> <p>(b) P13/P1 (% of MASH cases in the past 12 months previously referred by the MASH to Tier 2) <i>Low</i></p> <p>(c) P14/P1 (% of MASH cases in the past 12 months previously resulting in a RAG and then NFA) <i>Low</i></p> <p>(d) P12/P1 (% of MASH cases which have been re-referred from ERS) <i>Low</i></p>	–	Currently being investigated by MASH/CYPS staff
2.5	<p>Tier 3 re-referrals</p> <p>% of referrals to Tier 3 occurring within 12 months of a previous referral <i>Low</i></p>	29% (CYPS data Apr-Dec 2010)	–
2.6	<p>Effect on decision making</p> <p>% of MASH cases where a different decision has been made as a result of multi-agency information <i>High</i></p>	–	A way to enable staff to record this is currently being investigated by MASH/CYPS staff
2.7	<p>Decisions are made quickly</p> <p>% of cases achieving their RAG designation</p>	R: 26%, A: 43%, G: 46% (MASH data, year to date, 18/02/11)	–

Other outcomes

Table 2.3 describes a number of additional metrics relating to other outcomes resulting from the MASH.

2.3 Impact

Finally, in Table 2.4 the ultimate impacts of the MASH on children and children's services are considered, as captured by the final column in the logic model (Figure 1.1).

Table 2.3 Outcome metrics – other

Metric	Definition	Baseline value and source	Possible sources for future data collection
3.1 Improved working environment	Staff report increased job satisfaction/reduced stress	-	Could be monitored through regular cross-agency staff survey
3.2 Agencies provide timely information	% enquiries to agencies completed on time	80% (MASH data, year to date, 18/02/11)	-
3.3 Effect on Tier 2 and 3 workload	(a) Number of referrals made by the MASH to ERS	(MASH data, Jan '11) 199	-
	(b) Number of referrals made by the MASH to ERS resulting in intervention	(MASH data, Jan '11)	-
	(c) Number of referrals made by the MASH to CYPS	-	Data already collated by the Eastern ERS hub, and could also be collated by Northern and Southern hubs
	(d) Number of referrals made by the MASH to CYPS resulting in Tier 3 intervention	- 148	CYPS
3.4 Tier 3 efficiency	Tier 3 work able to progress more rapidly and consumes less time	-	Could be monitored through regular cross-agency staff survey
3.5 Supporting safeguarding	Referring agencies report feeling more confident and better supported in safeguarding	-	Could be monitored through regular cross-agency staff survey

Table 2.4 Impact metrics

Metric	Definition	Baseline value and source	Possible sources for future data collection
4.1 Level of Child Protection concern	Monthly total 'Non-Crime Child Protection Incidents'	321 (Devon Police, Feb '11)	-
4.2 Child abuse convictions	Number of child abuse convictions	-	Devon Police data
4.3 Hospital admissions	Numbers of child hospital admissions due to unintentional and deliberate injury	-	Public Health Outcomes Framework
4.4 Children and families' experiences	Children and families (particularly those for whom Tier 2 support is provided) report positive experiences	-	Research instrument could be developed to capture information
4.5 Staff absence and retention	(a) Level of sickness absence	-	HR records
	(b) % staff turnover rates amongst MASH and Tier 2/3 staff	-	

3 Conclusion

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 (for the MASH and Tier 2 & 3 services)?
- To what extent has workload (and hence cost) increased due to 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.

Key, therefore, to any assessment of the net financial impact of the MASH is an understanding of the costs associated with a serious safeguarding incident. Clearly, first and foremost the costs should be expressed in human terms – and avoiding these is worth investing in. However, there are also financial costs associated with a child and their family’s increased contact with children’s services, health, the police and criminal justice systems. Avoiding such incidents will, therefore, result in savings for these services. These will offset and may outweigh the investment made in better assessment of risk and intervention for children. We, therefore, recommend that work is undertaken to further understand these *costs avoided*, either by reviewing the existing research literature or through new research undertaken internally in Devon.

Should this work be taken further, the next steps would be to develop and begin to monitor the metrics 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.

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].

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Safeguarding children and young people is a central concern for a range of agencies, in particular CYPS, the police and the health service.

The Local Government Group (LG Group), on behalf of Devon County Council, commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to carry out a case study and value for money (VfM) study of Devon's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

This report examines the VfM of the MASH and the metrics that could be used for assessing its impact over the medium and longer term. It covers:

- a logic model describing the MASH
- metrics relating to resourcing and operation of the MASH
- recommendations on suitable data sources.

It should be read in conjunction with the accompanying *Case-Study Report* (Golden, et al., 2011).