

 the low tax borough	<b>London Borough of Hammersmith &amp; Fulham</b>  <b>CABINET</b>  <b>2 SEPTEMBER 2013</b>
<b>TRI BOROUGH MULTI AGENCY SAFEGUARDING HUB (MASH)</b>	
<b>Report of the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services : Councillor Helen Binmore</b>	
<b>Open Report</b>	
<b>Classification:</b> For decision  <b>Key Decision:</b> Yes	
<b>Wards Affected:</b> ALL	
<b>Accountable Executive Director:</b> Tri-borough Executive Director of Children’s Services - Andrew Christie	
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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. A tri borough multi agency information hub (MASH) is being developed to improve access to information for Social Care referrals by pooling information held by each agency involved with a family. This will increase the effectiveness of our child protection work and in the long run reduce amount of work undertaken to follow up referrals. Until the reduction in work comes through, an invest to save start up funding is needed. This report seek authorisation for that funding of £330k over two years.

## 2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That approval be given to an invest to save funding of £330k from the Efficiency Projects Reserve as set out in paragraphs 10.6 and 10.10 of the report.

### **3. REASONS FOR DECISION**

- 3.1. Developing MASH will improve the quality of information and therefore decision making on child protection cases.
- 3.2. A Cabinet decision is required for funding over £100k.

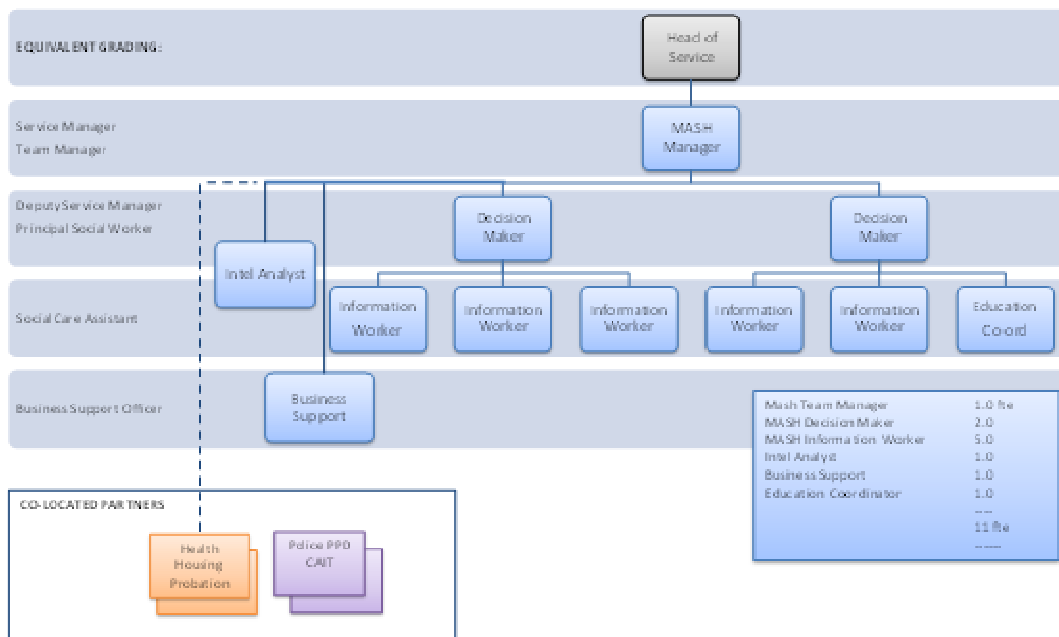
### **4. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 This report seeks a funding agreement to enable LBHF to implement and participate in the Tri-Borough Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) due to start in mid July 2013. An invest to save initiative is needed to fund the initial MASH costs up front until the anticipated resulting reduction in demand allows for a reduction in staffing costs which will be used to fund the ongoing LBHF contribution.
- 4.2 MASH should lead to a long term reduction in demand by sifting out lower risk cases and directing resources onto the high risk cases. It should enable lower numbers of assessments to be completed by social workers and thereby a reduction in staffing in due course.
- 4.3 MASH will improve the quality of assessments and enable better protection of children. Effective child protection work depends on gaining the most accurate picture possible of the risks children face. When children are being abused, parents often seek to hide the truth from the agencies they are in touch with; each agency often only sees a small part of the whole picture of children's experiences and so piecing what is known together from each agency improves the likelihood of effective protection.
- 4.4 Despite professionals' best efforts, information sharing is always a theme within any serious case review or other multi agency review of cases where children have suffered serious harm or death. The MASH provides the opportunity for agencies to reduce risk to children by providing all professionals with more information on which to make better decisions.
- 4.5 More recently the high profile sexual exploitation cases in Rochdale and Oxford show that the protection of children exposed to these risks requires small pieces of information held by different agencies to be brought together if the serious risk from sexual exploitation are to be recognised and the appropriate action taken.
- 4.6 Information sharing between agencies is based on consent unless child protection concerns are clear. A recent judicial review ruling against Haringey reinforced the importance of consent unless clear child protection concerns are apparent. This results in concerns being missed when consent is not given and information cannot be obtained and pooled.
- 4.7 MASH solves this problem by allowing for the sharing of information by creating a sealed and confidential environment. This allows for the sharing of information without consent and ensures that as full a picture of the

family can be built. This unique environment provides professionals with far more information than has been revealed previously and is legally compliant.

## **5. PROPOSAL AND ISSUES**

- 5.1 In the proposed Tri Borough model, all requests for a service, advice or information will continue to be made via each borough's existing front door arrangements. Staff at the front door will be responsible for deciding whether there is a potential safeguarding concern, by applying an agreed Tri-borough threshold, and if so it will be passed onto the Tri-borough MASH Team.
- 5.2 Where initial contact with the child or young person has been via the Police, the Public Protection Desk co-located with the MASH Team will apply the same threshold as the boroughs to screen for safeguarding concerns.
- 5.3 Every referral to the MASH will undergo an initial risk assessment where it is graded based on the known presenting issues:
  - Red - immediate and serious safeguarding concerns
  - Amber - significant concerns, no immediate urgent action required
  - Green - concerns about a child's well-being, may be considered as a child in need
- 5.4 Where risk is assessed to be at the highest level (Red) the borough Child Protection team will be notified immediately and child protection enquiries initiated in parallel with the MASH process.
- 5.5 Partners in Police Health, Education, Probation, Housing and Youth Offending will then be requested to provide the information they hold about the child and their wider family circumstances, with an agreement to respond with defined timescales based on level of risk:
  - Red – within 2 hours
  - Amber – with 24 hours
  - Green – within 3 days
- 5.6 The MASH Team and partner agencies will work collaboratively to analyse and interpret the information available. When all the information has been gathered a MASH 'Decision Maker' at management level will make a final assessment of the level of safeguarding risk. This decision along with a summary of the information on which the assessment is based is passed back to borough Social Workers where it will be used to inform the planning and provision of services.
- 5.7 Any referrals deemed not to present a safeguarding risk at initial screening remain in the borough where an early intervention/help services may be provided if appropriate or the referrer is informed that no further action will be taken.



## 6. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

6.1 For local authorities MASH has the potential to unblock long-standing issues with access to information and to improve the quality of the services they provide. It also has the potential to help refocus effort where it can be most effective by:

- Freeing up resource at the front door by significantly reducing the currently substantial number of Police generated referrals (aka 'Merlins') to social care that are unlikely to meet the threshold for service provision
- Reducing over time the number of inappropriate (and Social Worker resource intensive) statutory assessments carried out where the child and family may benefit more from a less formal early help service
- Managing the demand for higher cost interventions by identifying and responding to need earlier and preventing the escalation of risk
- Referring children to the right service the first time around based on a better understanding of their needs

6.2 For partners in other agencies and departments the hub model can provide a clear focal point for collaboration that helps them make the most efficient use of their resources. This is especially true where they themselves are already configured on a tri-borough basis (e.g. Community Health). There has been good involvement from partners in the work of the project to date and in-principle agreement to provide an appropriate level of input to a Tri-borough MASH.

6.3 For children and young people a MASH approach should mean that they are less likely to slip through the net due to an incomplete picture of their circumstances and the risks these may present. Conversely for families where it is judged that risk can be managed and mitigated through early help/intervention services it avoids drawing them unnecessarily into a statutory safeguarding process.

6.4 Summary of the benefits of MASH are:

- Vulnerable children get a better service and are better protected
- All agencies are in a better position to safeguard the vulnerable
- Allocating the right agency first time reduces demand for others
- Repeat incidents are identified and a problem solving approach is initiated
- Early identification leads to early help
- Preventing continued victimisation of the vulnerable
- Professionals have a central point for advice and are better protected by having access to a better picture

## **7. CONSULTATION**

7.1. Consultation has taken place with the key agencies during the development of this project: they are the Police, Health, Education, Probation, Youth Offending, Housing and the LSCB.

## **8. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

8.1. The MASH information hub is an improved mechanism for undertaking tasks what we already perform: collecting information to form an assessment to guide the appropriate response; it will not have a differential effect on one or more protected group.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS.**

9.1. The law relating to information sharing consists of three key provisions:

- The Human Rights Act 1998 which recognises a right to respect private and family life. Therefore sharing confidential information may be a breach of an individual's Article 8 right.
- The common law duty of confidentiality which imposes a duty not to pass on confidential information to a third party.
- The Data Protection Act 1998 which restricts the processing of personal data.

- 9.2. The sharing of information without consent within MASH engages these provisions and so failure to comply with the law has the potential to result in a referral to the Information Commissioner who has the power to impose a Monetary Penalty Notice of up to £500,000
- 9.3. However qualifications exist within each provision which will allow information sharing to be lawfully justified and safeguarding children will normally fit within one of these qualifications. Under Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 key people and bodies have the duty to make arrangements which ensure their functions are discharged with regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. This extends to the member agencies of the LSCB and the services they commission. Information sharing is fundamental for complying with this statutory regulation. There is also guidance given in Working Together to Safeguard Children (2013) which seeks to emphasise that effective safeguarding systems are those where all professionals share appropriate information in a timely way
- 9.4. Implications verified/completed by: Jade Monroe , Senior Solicitor, 0208 753 2695

## **10. FINANCIAL AND RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 The estimated total cost of Tri-Borough MASH staffing is between £483k and £500k depending on the final proportion of qualified and non qualified staff. The contribution from each local authority will be based on usage. The estimated cost for LBHF is approximately £220k per year.
- 10.2 Funding of MASH from within existing Hammersmith and Fulham Children's Services resources has been fully explored with the conclusion that this is not feasible at this stage. Any redirection of funding to MASH would come on top of the existing MTFS savings which have already come out of staffing for 13/14. The MTFS staffing reductions are as follows:
- |                                   |      |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| Contact and assessment:           | 100k |
| Family Support & Child Protection | 100k |
| Localities                        | 500k |
- 10.3 This MTFS reduction has led to the Contact and Assessment Service (CAS) implementing a reduction from four to three teams. This means that teams are on duty every three weeks rather than four and so have less time to follow up their assessment work.
- 10.4 In addition, in a separate development, a single front door that joins up CAS duty with Localities duty is being created. This gives universal services a single place for referrals for Early Help or Child protection. Although there is no change in total staffing resources or the level of demand, this change requires careful management to ensure that referrals

are managed safely.

- 10.5 So there are risks is stretching the CAS recourses too thinly having already moved from 4 teams to 3 and implementing the Single Front Door and MASH in a short period.
- 10.6 It is therefore proposed that we seek an invest to save input of £220k for year 1 and £110 in year 2. In addition, it is proposed that the local CAS staffing budget will pick up 50% of the MASH costs for year 2 and 100% in year 3.
- 10.7 Experience from other Local Authorities where MASH has been implemented shows that a 20% reduction in assessments should be generated; fewer assessments in the CAS service means that a proportionate reduction in staffing could be made.
- 10.8 Finance have reviewed the proposed structure and confirmed that the costs of £220k will cover the initial set up and year one running costs of the service
- 10.9 The costs show that it is reasonable to expect that the MASH service can be funded by year three from reductions in the Contact and Assessment Service assuming that the initiative is effective in reducing assessments by 20%. Should this not be the case the department will have to amend the MASH structure in order for it to funded from available resources.
- 10.10 The invest to save funding will be made available via the Efficiency Projects Reserve.
- 10.11 Implications verified by : Dave McNamara, Director of Finance and Resources. Tel 020 7361 2296

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000**  
**LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Description of Background Papers</b>	<b>Name/Ext of holder of file/copy</b>	<b>Department/ Location</b>
	None		