

Delegated Officer Report

Decision Maker:	Gerard Jones, Managing Director Children and Young People
Date of Decision:	20 May 2021
Subject:	Additional capacity to support targeted Early Help team in Children's MASH through period of change
Report Author:	Bruce Penhale, Assistant Director Early Help
Ward (s):	N/A

Reason for the decision:

The report seeks approval to extend additional temporary arrangements within the targeted early help team in the Children's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) through to 30 September 2021.

This is to provide additional capacity for the team during a period in which: there will continue to be significant change to systems and processes; it is anticipated that the numbers and complexity of referrals to children's services will remain high as a result of the immediate and longer term consequences of Covid-19; and a planned period of extended medical absence for a team member.

The additional capacity will prevent a dip in performance in the MASH which needs to triage large numbers of concerns about children's welfare within 24 hours of the information being received. Further information about the operation of MASH and rationale for the request is provided at Appendix 1.

Proposals are currently being developed for a future staffing structure in the Children's MASH, taking account of the impact of changes to systems and processes resulting from establishment of the integrated children's MASH, the pattern of demand for children's services as Covid-19 restrictions are coming to an end and the agreed budget envelope for Children's Services. If the implementation of the future structure is completed before 30 September these temporary changes will end from that point.

Summary:

The report relates to proposals to temporarily strengthen capacity in the targeted early help team

within the MASH between 1 April and 30 September 2021 by:

1. Extending an existing arrangement for a Grade 4 Customer Service Officer to receive an honorarium to act as a MASH Targeted Early Help Officer (increase from Grade 4 to Grade 5 at an additional cost of £1.2k from 1 April to 30 September 2021)
2. Backfilling this Grade 4 post from 1 July to 30 September 2021 at a cost of £7.2k (there is already approval for a Grade 4 post in the Team for 1 April – 30 June REC20-361);
3. Extending an existing arrangement for an experienced Children's Social Care MASH Customer Service Officer to receive an honorarium to supervise and develop the skills of other Customer Service Officers in the integrated children's services team (increase 2 scale points from Grade 4 to Grade 5 from 1 April to 30 September 2021 at an additional cost of £0.6k)
4. Extend from 1 July - 30 September an existing arrangement for an agency social worker to be part of the targeted early help team in the MASH providing additional capacity, and supporting development of the non-social work staff in the role. The additional cost of this is £17.5k. Funding for this role is already agreed from 1 April to 30 June (REC20-368).

Because these costs relate to development of the Early Help offer, they can be funded through the Reform Investment Fund. This is Troubled Families funding from government, which is held in a ring-fenced reserve for supporting this area of activity.

Proposals are currently being developed for a future staffing structure in the Children's MASH. The temporary measures in this report will be superseded by this, and will end early if the future structure can be implemented more quickly.

What are the alternative option(s) to be considered? Please give the reason(s) for recommendation(s):

Option A Do not create this additional temporary capacity

Option B create the additional temporary capacity

Option B is recommended. Without introducing the additional capacity during the period in which structures and systems are in transition, there is a risk that the quality of the service to children and families will be impaired, so that they do not receive the right support in a timely fashion and therefore risking an escalation of need.

Consultation: including any conflict of interest declared by relevant Cabinet Member consulted.

There has been consultation with managers within Early Help and Children's Social Care

Recommendation(s):

Option B Create the additional capacity

Implications:

What are the **financial** implications?

The total staffing costs for the proposals outlined in this report will be approximately £26,500.

Because these costs relate to development of the Early Help offer, they can be funded through the Reform Investment Fund. This is Troubled Families funding from government, which is held in a ring-fenced reserve for supporting this area of activity.

The anticipated closing balance of the RIF following on from in year drawdown and confirmed allocation for 2021-22 is anticipated to be £2,035k.

The proposed costs can be fully met from within this reserve.

Sadrul Alam, Finance Manager

What are the **legal** implications?

n/a

What are the **procurement** implications?

n/a

What are the **Human Resources** implications?

The proposed and preferred option of temporary arrangements will provide critical additional capacity around the development of early help in addition to supporting essential change in the operation of the children's front door in the MASH. Demand is currently an issue in addition to the current period of change the service finds itself in. The service have reviewed if the work can be undertaken differently or elsewhere, however, there is no viable alternative. There is a clear review happening which will give us a clearer picture of the future of this service and with it the staffing requirements. With Option B this will allow more flexibility to be applied if changes are needed.

The additional resource provided will support the changes evidenced within the service and fall within financial guidelines.

Pay & Reward have reviewed the information in regards additional payments and agree that the proposals comply with the current Council policies.

Claire Ingle- Senior Strategic HR lead

Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment attached or not required because (please give reason)

The proposals will not have an adverse impact on any section of the population, and will help prevent

<i>What are the property implications</i>	any adverse impact on vulnerable children and families during a period of service transition. n/a
Risks:	There are no corporate level risks associated with this post.
Co-operative agenda	Early help services provide support to families which builds their capacity to be in control of their own lives.

Has the relevant Legal Officer confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council's Constitution? n/a

Has the relevant Finance Officer confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council's budget? Yes



Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council? No

Reason(s) for exemption from publication:

List of Background Papers under Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972:

There are no background papers to this report

Report Author Sign-off:	
Bruce Penhale, Assistant Director Early Help	
Date: 19/5/21	

In consultation with Managing Director of Children & Young People			
Signed		Date:	25 May 2021
In consultation with the Director of Human Resources, (or representative)			
Signed		Date:	1 June 2021

Appendix 1

Background on Children's MASH and Early Help

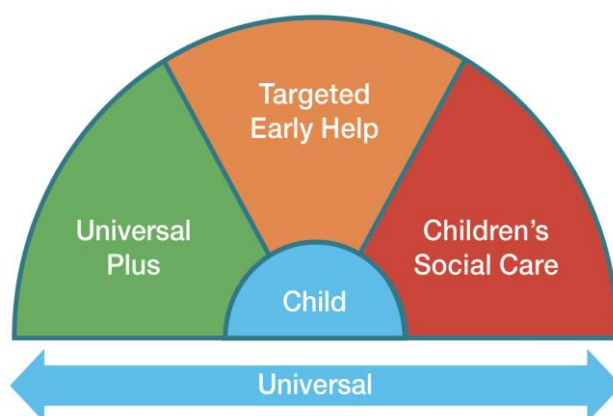
On 1 February 2021 the Children's Social Care and Early Help teams in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) were brought together as an integrated Children's services team. This team triages all contacts to children's services made through the MASH in order to direct these to the appropriate support. This ensures social care oversight of all children's services contacts to the MASH, and has reduced response times for families in accessing targeted early help support.

Alongside this, all Early Help casework has been moved into the Mosaic system used by social care, and there have been changes to the systems and processes used by early help in order to align with social care. This includes fuller recording of the rationale for decisions about support and decisions on the appropriate outcome of the contact being made within 24 hours. This addresses needs identified in the Ofsted focused visit in October 2020. Further change will be introduced from around 1 July 2021, with the introduction of a new children's services online referral portal which will interface directly with Mosaic rather than referrals being submitted through a separate system.

From 1 April, the delivery of targeted early help support has been organised around five district teams. These teams deliver support prior to any social care involvement, family support alongside social work and support for families "stepping down" from social care. This offers greater continuity of support for families, by reducing the need to transfer between workers as their needs escalate or are reduced.

MASH process

Concerns about the wellbeing of children are submitted to MASH either online, by e-mail or through telephone contacts (though all referrals by professionals need to be confirmed in writing). The Safeguarding Children Partnership has a continuum of need document which defines the appropriate level of support for children and families. This recognises that early help is everyone's business, and is delivered at all levels – in the community, by universal services (such as schools and health visitors), at "universal plus" level where two or more partners work together as a "team around the family" and at targeted early help level where the lead professional for the team around the family is a targeted early help worker.



Where a partner believes that needs have risen to a point that targeted early help or social care involvement is needed, a referral is made to MASH. All concerns to MASH are immediately reviewed and RAG rated by a social work manager. This ensures an immediate response to urgent safeguarding concerns. Based on this initial assessment, the concerns are then allocated either to a MASH social worker or a Targeted Early Help officer to undertake the triage process. This involves gathering information about the previous history of work undertaken by children's services with the child and family, information from health and police (where appropriate). The worker may also need to contact the referrer and the family to gather additional information. The worker summarises the history, provides an analysis of the concern and the work needed to address this,

and makes a recommendation about what support is required – social work assessment, support through a targeted early help team, signposting to universal plus services delivered by other organisations or provision of information and guidance only. The decision on all recommendations are signed off by a social work manager, and there is a timescale of 24 hours for this (though decisions on safeguarding concerns where there is a risk of significant harm are taken within 4 hours).

MASH is a pressured work environment, with the team having to deal with very large volumes of concerns to tight timescales. In March 2021, for example, Children’s MASH received 1,864 contacts with concerns about children. Of these:

- 22% resulted in a referral to Children’s Social Care assessment;
- 13% resulted in a referral for targeted Early Help Support;
- 2% referrals to other children’s services
- 63% resulted in information, advice and guidance. This includes cases where a referral might be needed to another service e.g. mental health, or where the support needed is at a lower level on the continuum of need and one or more partner organisations (e.g. a school or health visitor) can work with the family at “universal plus” level.

The district targeted early help teams include Partnership Officers who will work with other partners to strengthen delivery of earliest possible help by the partnership as a whole – with the intention of reducing the numbers of children and families whose needs escalate to the point where a MASH referral is required, as well as building their capacity to provide support at universal plus level reducing numbers of MASH contacts and the proportion of these which result in information, advice and guidance.

Pressures on the targeted Early Help team in the MASH

Prior to the establishment of the integrated Children’s Services team in the MASH, concerns where the referrer thought early help support was needed were managed through a different process to those where the referrer thought social care support was needed.

The new system ensures social work oversight of all concerns about children entering the MASH, applies a consistent process at all levels of need, and has significantly reduced the time between a concern entering MASH and allocation to a targeted early help worker. This has been achieved both through the change in MASH processes, and the move to district targeted early help teams.

However the change has introduced challenges for the Early Help MASH team:

- Moving to the use of the Mosaic system, while continuing to access legacy systems for information about previous history of early help involvement;
- Recording a greater level of analysis about the rationale for decisions with clear recommendations for the work required;
- In all cases, contacting parents, referrers and often other professionals to gather the necessary information required for the triage decision;
- Working with cases at a higher level of complexity which are on the cusp of whether the appropriate support is targeted early help or social care;
- Operating within the 24 hour timescale for decision making;
- Working against a backdrop of a significantly increased volume of demand for children’s services during the Covid19 outbreak. Over the last year there has been as much as a 100% increase in demand as compared with the comparable month pre-Covid19.