

Report of the Head of Children's Social Care

DEVELOPMENT OF AN EFFECTIVE 'FRONT DOOR' TO CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The purpose of this paper is to;

- Brief members early on proposals to develop a more effective 'front door' to Children's Social care.

Members are asked to consider the report and identify any additional issues that should be considered prior to developing these options further for full consultation.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The service review of Devon County Council's Children's Social Care, undertaken in May 2017, tested progress on the improvement journey since the most recent Ofsted inspection in 2015.
- 1.2 The review identified the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) as one of the top ten areas for improvement highlighting: staff capacity and resilience within the MASH, volume and quality of referrals and contacts and the impact this has on how initial contacts are dealt with in the MASH, Initial Response Teams and Early Help. Reducing contacts that do not lead to a social care intervention would help improve consistency, timeliness and quality of decision making at this early point in the child/families journey while better integration with early help offers would improve access to support at the most appropriate time and improve outcomes for children and families.
- 1.3 Analysis of all contacts into MASH and their outcomes, for the period April 2016 to March 2017, confirms that just over a third (35%) meet the threshold of statutory safeguarding services and result in a social care assessment. Many of these contacts involved concerns about a child where additional support may be beneficial or where effective signposting to appropriate services was appropriate.
- 1.4 Improving access to Early Help and reducing contacts with the MASH, that do not need a safeguarding or statutory service, would provide a more effective and less costly service, improve outcomes for children, young people and their families and help improve efficiency and effectiveness of the MASH in responding to those most in need of statutory services.
- 1.5 Early Help is not a stand-alone service. Early Help means taking action to support a child, young person or their family early in the life of a problem, as soon as it emerges. It can be required at any stage in a child's life from pre-birth to adulthood, and applies to a problem or need that the family cannot deal with on their own. It applies to all children and young people and any kind of need.

- 1.6 This proposal sets out options to redesign some of the structure, procedures and practice across Children's Social Care Services, in partnership with our health, police, education and voluntary partners, with an emphasis on further improving early interventions for children and young people to alleviate their difficulties, to prevent escalation to child protection and prevent children and young people on the edge of care escalating to statutory services.
- 1.7 Developing Early Help creates an opportunity for innovative thinking and helps strengthen multi-agency working and co-production at the earliest opportunity in a child's journey, specifically improving joint working and decision-making to bring about the best possible outcomes for them before situations escalate.
- 1.8 The proposal is an opportunity to improve communication across partners and for services to identify families at an earlier point and to better target support. This includes recommendations for the structural changes required to implement a new model which creates an effective "front door" to services for children, young people and their families that is embedded in localities.

2. Objectives

- 2.1 The overall aim of this programme is to develop a robust and consistent approach to integrated Early Help and assessment at "the front door" with a clearly defined purpose and well understood thresholds for accessing these services across all partner agencies. The key objectives are to;
 - establish a single access route to children's services to improve and simplify the experience for families and professionals, avoiding duplication and a "piecemeal" approach to referral;
 - develop an integrated, locality based model to improve joint planning and decision making and to strengthen service coordination;
 - establish clear pathways with shared definitions and understanding of roles and eligibility criteria for accessing services;
 - reduce the volume of contacts referred for a social care assessment that result in a step down to early help or no further action;
 - improve the timeliness and effectiveness of responses when processing information through co-location and integration of multi-agency services;
 - provide consistent advice and support to practitioners to improve understanding of and access to the available or appropriate local services;
 - develop systems and processes for the recording and sharing of multi-agency information at the point of initial assessment that allows for clear identification and analysis of key issues and risks;
 - re-configure the workforce where necessary to ensure that the right skill mix is available at the most appropriate point of the child's journey, improve team integration, co-production and achieve a sustainable and balanced workload.
- 2.2 The benefits for families and professionals contacting the service would be to:
 - enable a timely response at the first point of contact;

- ensure callers only have to tell their story only once, improving efficiency and the customer experience.
- enable more effective signposting to preventative / Early Help services;
- streamline processes and reduce hand offs between initial contact and outcome;

3. Proposal

3.1 The proposed model is to develop four “Integrated Children & Families Hubs” – one in each of the four locality areas: North, Mid and East; Exeter and South. Each ‘Hub’ would have a number of partners co-located or virtually co-located and covering the following service areas;

- Children and Families Locality Advice and Support Service
- Children’s Social Care Services
- Early Help
- Health (Public Health Nursing)
- Education (SEND 0-25 and EET)
- Business Support Functions

3.3 Most of these services already exist within a locality model; this proposal brings them together into locality teams as a single point of access to children’s social care. Options will be explored for physical co location supported by virtual options where this is not practicable.

3.4 The only new team under this proposal would be the Children and Families Locality Advice and Support Service. The service will be developed with existing resources from Childrens Social Care and Early Help. This service would:

- be the first point of contact for members of the public; professionals and universal services who have concerns about a child and are considering making a referral to targeted/statutory services;
- provide advice and guidance to professionals and universal services; including schools, health services and voluntary and community groups to enable them to support vulnerable children, young people and families within their community;
- share with and request information from the MASH who will gather multi-agency information to identify risk of harm;
- co-ordinate strategy discussions and make a decision about the outcome of the referral in consultation with the worker who referred the case;
- develop a good working knowledge of support services in the area and identification of appropriate resources;
- enable closer links between locality Early Help and Childrens Social Care services;
- be able to identify emerging needs and safeguarding concerns within the locality to inform locality planning.

3.5 A central MASH would continue with a clear focus on undertaking multi-agency information gathering and sharing where a referral to Children’s Social Care or Early Help needs to be determined and would continue to be the first point of contact where there is an immediate risk of harm to a child.

- 3.6 The proposal will also include the implementation of 'intelligent' call handling to filter initial telephony contact to the right service.
- 3.7 A proposed model for the Locality Integrated Children & Families Hubs is included at Appendix 2.

4. Next steps

- 4.1 The work has been initiated in DCC to develop proposals to take to partners in the autumn. Clearly this kind of initiative has to be co-produced with partners and with service user. This will commence in October.
- 4.2 The work is being carried out alongside, and with reference to other existing work including a remodelling of the Children's Social Care service, a modernisation programme for DCC's Disabled Children's Service, the recommissioning of children's Centres and the SEND Improvement programme.

4 Conclusion

- 5.1 Scrutiny Members are asked to consider the proposals and provide feedback to be considered as part of the development of the model to take to partners in the autumn.

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Children Services and Schools: Councillor James McInnes

Chief Officer for Childrens Services: Jo Olsson

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

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Appendix 1: MASH – Average Weekly contacts and outcomes

April 16 – March 17

	Inbox	Calls	Child & Siblings			MASH OUTCOME					
			Enquiry Submission	Enquiry Accepted	Not Accepted	Initial Assessment	Direct to Referral	Other CSW	Early Help	NFA / Info Only	None / Rejected
Monday	109	54	55	49	5	10	8	1	12	11	8
Tuesday	103	51	53	49	3	10	8	1	12	11	8
Wednesday	103	51	51	43	8	8	7	1	11	9	7
Thursday	106	53	57	46	11	9	8	1	12	10	7
Friday	102	51	50	41	9	8	7	1	10	9	7
Weekly Average	523	261	266	229	37	45	37	3	57	50	37
Monthly Average	2266	1131	1151	991	161	194	162	13	248	215	159
						20%	16%	1%	25%	22%	16%

Appendix 2: Proposed Locality model

