

July 2017

Dear professionals

## **MKSB policies, pathways and procedures – early help and the use of the Levels of Need framework**

I am writing to you as the Independent Chair of the new Milton Keynes Safeguarding Board following a discussion about the way referrals are currently being made to the MASH.

We are currently looking at the process of how we, on a multi-agency basis, support families and intervene early to prevent things getting worse (otherwise known as early help – early in the life of a problem). We are also looking at how we work together to provide that support, especially at level 2 in the Milton Keynes Levels of Need. This work will take some time, and should lead to changes to early help systems, processes and pathways in the medium term.

In the short term however the MASH is often not being given essential information from referrers about what has already happened in terms of single or multi-agency early help and support to children and young people and their families before a referral is made.

At the back of the Multi-Agency Referral Form is a section which is currently called a CAF form (Common Assessment Framework). Our procedures currently ask for the CAF to be completed as part of any MARF referral but this has not been happening. I am writing to ask professionals to do their best to ensure that, wherever possible they complete that form using what you know about the whole family context and needs, setting out what interventions are already in place or have been used previously and including any early help already in place/previously provided by your agency and/or others with the MASH.

Sharing this information is very important as it helps to provide a better “context” for the referral and gives the MASH team the background picture and family story which in turn facilitates more informed and appropriate MASH multi-agency decision making about the most appropriate form of intervention in a timely way.

Where the multi-agency referral form is sent in from an agency that has had longer term involvement with the family, we will expect that agency to provide the necessary background information. If the information is not provided (when submitted by a professional who would be expected to know this) unless there is an immediate and significant risk of serious harm, it will be returned to the referrer for completion before any action is taken.

Similarly the referral may, if incomplete, be considered to require early help and sent out from MASH back to you asking you to undertake work which you know has already happened and not had the impact or achieved the outcomes wanted.

You may want to also consider submitting any assessments or reports on the outcomes of any work you have done already with the MARF and CAF to better inform the MASH team about what you feel life is like for that child or children on a daily basis. Doing this would also help you decide whether you do actually need to make a referral or whether, given what you know, you could, together with colleagues from other agencies put together a plan with the child and their own family to provide more intensive early support and help instead.

We appreciate that not everyone making a referral will know what early help has been provided, or by whom. However, thinking about why you think a referral is needed is always a good discipline, and ensuring you have discussed it with a safeguarding advisor, designated professional, or manager first is essential. Remember, the first principle should always be the least intrusive response to concerns possible to secure the outcomes needed.

Please do bear with the MASH team if they are persistently asking for this information from you. The MASH team is very busy, and not everything they are dealing with requires statutory CFP or FAST input or statutory interventions. It is very important to do your best to provide the information so that all of us can target all of our limited resources to be most effective in ensuring children and families are well served.

If you remain unhappy about the MASH decision there is a simple escalation process (as attached) which you can use.

Yours sincerely



Jane Held  
Independent Chair  
Milton Keynes Safeguarding Board

## **Escalation process**

It is normal for different professionals to have different perspectives about what a child and family need, and why. The legal duty about whether to make inquiries or undertake assessments, or to take immediate protective action rests with the local authority social work service. This is always based on the available information and the exercise of professional judgements about the best action to take. However, they like everyone else want to get it right and are open to challenge.

What is important is professionals discuss thoroughly their different perspectives, in a respectful but professionally confident way, and advocate from their perspective for the child at the centre of concerns. This sometimes mean disagreement between professionals about how best to proceed. Usually disagreements can be resolved through good conversations, mutual respect, and a willingness to work together to find a solution.

Whilst often a conversation about the reasons for any disagreement will help resolve what happens next, sometimes it is important to challenge each other about it. This may happen immediately or you may decide to discuss it further after you have reflected on the situation. If you decide that you disagree with the MASH team decision, and you are clear about the reasons why you disagree, discuss with your manager or safeguarding lead what you are concerned about and why and ask them to consider escalating it by speaking to a MASH manager.

If they cannot agree either, (this should be very rare if everyone is working hard to focus on the child and family's needs and put them first), it should be escalated further, and it is then necessary to involve middle managers from both organisations to discuss the situation, and try to agree on the best thing to do in order to make a decision.

If at the end of the day, and after following this process through you are still concerned you can through your organisation, raise it with the Head of Service or the Senior Leadership Team in Children's Services.