

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding)	Date of Meeting:	Tuesday 20 December 2022
Subject:	Referrals and Thresholds		
Report of:	Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education	Wards Affected:	(All Wards);
Portfolio:	Children's Social Care Education		
Is this a Key Decision:	No	Included in Forward Plan:	No
Exempt / Confidential Report:	No		

Summary:

A report to set out the current process around referrals into Sefton's Integrated Front Door

Recommendation(s):

(1) That the report be noted.

Reasons for the Recommendation(s):

Request been received from Members of Committee for information.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected: (including any Risk Implications)
None

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs

There are no additional revenue costs arising from this report.

(B) Capital Costs

There are no additional capital costs rising from this report

Implications of the Proposals:

Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets): N/A	
Legal Implications: N/A	
Equality Implications: There are no equality implications	
Climate Emergency Implications: The recommendations within this report will	
Have a positive impact	no
Have a neutral impact	yes
Have a negative impact	no
The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors	yes
There are no climate emergency implications associated with this report	

Contribution to the Council's Core Purpose:

Protect the most vulnerable: The report outlines processes associated with vulnerable children
Facilitate confident and resilient communities: N/A
Commission, broker and provide core services: N/A
Place – leadership and influencer: N/A
Drivers of change and reform: N/A
Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity: N/A
Greater income for social investment: N/A
Cleaner Greener N/A

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services (FD.7062/22) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD.5262/22) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

(B) External Consultations

N/A

Contact Officer:	Risthardh Hare
Telephone Number:	0789 494 3536
Email Address:	Risthardh.hare@sefton.gov.uk

Appendices:

The new to Launch Local Threshold of Need

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection

1. Introduction/Background

- 1.1 This report sets out the current process within Sefton Children Services regarding contacts concerning children. The current approach is managed by Sefton's Integrated Front Door.
- 1.2 The Integrate Front Door (IFD) has been developed as a single gateway or front door for all incoming contacts into children's services and early help services in Sefton Council.
- 1.3 The purpose of the IFD is to ensure that all contacts are dealt with in a timely and consistent manner so that children and their families receive high quality information and, where necessary, support and protection from children's services and other agencies or professionals. The IFD provides a range of services and information to support professionals and local service users including telephone discussions and consultations to the professionals. This is for the purpose of discussing threshold application and children's details must not be provided, unless during scenario conversation safeguarding concerns are identified.
- 1.4 To facilitate appropriate information sharing, the IFD acts as a central information hub to coordinate information from different sources where children are identified as in need of support and protection or where children have additional needs. Effective information sharing, with the appropriate consent from children and families, between agencies and professionals is critical in making sure that there is a timely and appropriate response to children's needs.
- 1.5 The IFD is overseen by a service manager and led by experienced social work team managers supported by experienced social workers and a team of contact and research officers. The team is co-located with professionals from

other agencies, including the Police, Health Services, Early Help Service, and Duty and Assessment Service. Some partner agencies located elsewhere contribute to MASH remotely by sharing information securely such as the Probation Service, Housing, Education, Youth Offending Team, and SWACA.

- 1.6 The IFD Service has access to the electronic recording and case management systems used across Sefton council including those used by social workers and the Early Help service (LCS & EHM). Professionals from other agencies working alongside the IFD also bring access to case management databases in the Police and Health Services. This ensures multi-agency collaboration in order to maximise effective and timely decision making.

Key functions of the IFD

2.1 The integrated Front Door is the front door to accessing children's services. The key function of the IFD is to identify and help children with additional needs and children who are in need of help and protection and to provide a timely and appropriate response. This is achieved by:

- assessing the information provided by the referrer to evaluate the level of need or risk to the child and the child's family to ensure the child and the family receive the right support and services in a timely manner
- working in partnership with agencies and professionals to provide coordinated response to referrers and to provide appropriate information, advice and signposting to other support and services
- applying agreed thresholds for access to services in line with the Sefton Safeguarding Children Partnership and the Pan Merseyside Child Protection Procedures, deciding on the most appropriate support and services for the child in a timely way
- ensuring that appropriate cases are considered through the Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) process.

3 Contacting Children's Services:

- 3.1 The IFD receives contacts through a variety of methods - MARF form, telephone, presentation in person, and letter. These contacts are made by professionals, members of the public and service users.
- 3.2 A contact is the initial request for a service, advice or information. The IFD processes all these initial contacts. Contacts from professionals should wherever possible be made using the MARF form and where possible should be supported by an Early Help assessment. However, where there are immediate child protection concerns, referrals must be made by telephone and followed up in writing within 24 hours using the MARF form. If the referrer is unsure of the action to take where they have concerns, they should contact the IFD for a professional consultation.
- 3.3 All contacts in relation to children living within the Sefton Council area are screened for safeguarding concerns and recorded on LCS. LCS is the electronic recording system for Children's Social Care Services. The IFD Contact Officers handling the contact is expected to consult with the social worker or their assistant team manager or team manager to ascertain if the recording is relevant to be uploaded to the child's electronic file. Should it be

identified that any children referred to Children's Services do not live in the Sefton Council area, then this information would be passed through to the relevant local authority.

4. IFD process

Anyone can contact the IFD if they are seeking additional support for a family or child, or they think that the local authority can assist or support them.

Anyone can contact the IFD if they are worried about a child or have safeguarding concerns for a child.

When someone contacts the IFD with concerns that a child has additional needs or requires support and/or protection:

- the IFD checks the home address to ensure child lives within Sefton
- the IFD checks available electronic recording systems and databases to see if child is known to any services provided by Sefton Children Social Care
- the Duty Social Worker flags any contacts to the IFD manager where there are child protection issues. The IFD manager will then take the appropriate steps to ensure the concerns are responded to in a timely manner
- if the case is open to early help, then a child contact is created and reviewed by the MASH manager
- If the case is open to a social care, the contact report or referral will be sent to the allocated social workers and their line manager
- the Duty Social Worker will flag to the MASH management team any contacts that relate to cases closed in less than three months previously
- the IFD will update the case file if new information is obtained via the contact such as telephone number or family member detail and relationships, etc
- the Contact Officer will upload all documents received on the contact form as an attachment
- the Contact Officer will take responsibility for recording all episodes of children who go missing on LCS as contacts. EDT undertake this when out of office hours.
- where multiple contacts are received in relation to the same incident from different professionals or agencies, these will be recorded as one contact; the contact should be progressed within appropriate timescales to ensure no delay is incurred whilst awaiting information from other sources
- A MASH manager is responsible for screening all the incoming contacts and recording management oversight with a rationale for their decision. Contacts are progressed within one working day

5. Child contact outcomes

5.1 There are a number of outcomes for any contact that is made to Sefton's IFD . These decisions are made by applying the *Sefton Safeguarding Children Partnership Level of Need Guidance*. *The threshold has recently been updated through a partnership forum and is due for launch in the next week. This threshold has been added as an appendix to this report*

Complex or acute safeguarding concerns

The MASH manager to immediately alert the duty assessment team manager

Children are experiencing significant harm that requires statutory interventions, such as child protection planning or legal intervention. These children may also need to be accommodated by the local authority either on a voluntary basis or by way of a court order.

High or complex safeguarding concerns

Children have high-level additional unmet needs or with complex needs that are likely to require longer term interventions from statutory and/or specialist services. This includes a Child in Need . These are children who require support from children's social care and are at risk of moving to a higher level of risk if they do not receive early intervention.

Referral to Early Help:

Children and families who have low-level additional needs that are likely to be short-term and that may be known but are not being met. These children will be supported through multi-agency Team Around the Family interventions coordinated by a Lead Professional from the partnership.

Provision of information and advice

No additional needs - only requiring universal service support

These are children whose developmental needs can be met by universal services. These are cases where there is no need for the local authority to intervene, or to provide information and advice, at the time that the contact was received and on the basis of the information provided by the referrer.

6. Sefton MASH process

This section provides an overview of the key working practices in the MASH.

The Sefton MASH core operating times are 9.00am to 5.30pm Monday to Thursday and 9.00am to 4.00pm on Friday. The MASH

Initial screening and decision making

Contacts can be referred into the MASH process:

- if they have met the threshold for a strategy discussion (the sharing of information through the MASH process will allow the most up-to-date and relevant information to be shared to make robust safeguarding decisions for the children concerned.)
- if the IFD Manager requires more information to make informed decisions about the level of risk for a child
- if the contact is anonymous and more information would be beneficial to the decision-making process
- at the discretion of manager

A range of factors will be considered by the social worker applying the rating on a case-by-case basis and decisions will be based on a professional social work judgement and in accordance with the Level of Need Guidance.

Cases where the child has been identified as suffering or being at risk of suffering significant harm or impairment, or where it is not clear and more information is required to accurately assess risk, will be rated as 'Red' and will be progressed for full high-level information sharing and screening. These cases will require a response in up to two hours.

If the safeguarding needs of the child are immediate, then agencies will not be required to complete a MASH enquiry. Professionals will be asked to verbally present information within the strategy meeting. This information will be recorded in the strategy discussion document. The Social Worker must have a discussion with the MASH manager as soon as significant harm concerns are reached.

There are some cases that involve children who have complex and significant needs which are likely to need a statutory assessment, but do not meet the significant harm threshold for further investigation under child protection procedures (S.47 of the Children Act 1989). These cases are deemed to be child in need (S.17 of the Children Act 1989) and the MASH manager will decide about whether a MASH enquiry is needed. If a MASH enquiry is instigated, it will be rated as 'Amber' and a response will be expected within four hours.

Where the cases are low level of concerns, but the manager's decision is that information sharing through MASH is needed, these cases will be rated green, and a response will be expected within 4 hours.

Children whose parents living arrangements cross local authority borders and/or referrals for non-Sefton residents will be dealt with in line with the local Sefton Safeguarding Children Partnership Policy.

Parental consent

Recent GDPR legislation has made clear the law and policy regarding gaining parental consent. Within Sefton IFD all professionals need to gain consent from parents or those who have parental responsibility, when they wish to:

- seek information from professionals in other services and share information with them. This also applies to the consultation service.
- refer to another agency for assessment and provision of services

If the referral is considered a child protection issue seeking consent may not be appropriate. In most cases it is Best Practice to seek consent, however, in some cases it is not. Consent should not be sought if doing so would:

- place a person (the individual, family member, worker or a third party) at increased risk of significant harm (if a child) or serious harm (if an adult)
- prejudice the prevention, detection, or prosecution of a serious crime - this is likely to cover most criminal offences relating to children
- lead to an unjustified delay in making enquiries about allegations of significant harm (to a child) or serious harm (to an adult)

Seeking information from professionals in other services and sharing information with them.

All professionals must obtain parental consent when they wish to seek information or share information with other agencies (unless the exceptions outlined above apply). This consent must be re-sought for each episode of work that a professional undertakes with a family, for example: if a case is closed and re-opened, consent must be re-sought when the case is re-opened.

Professionals must make clear to parents' which organisations they wish to seek information from and who they wish to share information about the family with. If anyone in the family home is aged 16 or over, their individual consent should be sought to seek or share information about them, with other agencies.

MASH Enquiries Timescale

As a standard, MASH team members will be required to gather information on each child, once the RAG-rating is applied. Once a MASH partner is alerted to a new MASH enquiry, dependant on the 'Red, Amber, Green' rating. They will have a specific period of time in which to gather information from their respective agency's information systems.

RAG rating	Timescale
Red	Within 2 hours
Amber	Within 4 hours
Green	Within 4 hours

Any relevant and necessary information on the child, other children, or adults within the child's residence or who have significant contact should be entered onto the MASH System. Each agency should consider the presenting concern and historical involvement. The context and analysis of the information should be considered along with each child's age, gender, ethnicity, religion, and culture. Each agency's MASH representative should gather proportionate and relevant information and express their professional opinion on their findings.

MASH partner agency case discussion

It is important that in the spirit of true multi-agency and integrated partnership working in a co-located environment that the MASH team and therefore the discussions are focused on needs and outcomes for children. MASH discussions and the shared information should give the context and analysis with clear rationale for the decisions made in respect of children.

Each agency and individual worker should have 'a voice' in each meeting i.e., MASH Case Discussions, Early Help Case Discussion Meeting, Strategy Meetings etc, in an environment of openness, honesty, and transparency. They should offer professional opinions, professional challenge and be part of joint decision making in respect of children. The chair (Integrated Front Door Manager) is expected to foster and facilitate this structure and integrated approach.

The case requiring discussion should include those finely balanced thresholds for Safeguarding or Child in Need where sharing information and professional discussion will help inform decision making.

The purpose of the case discussion is to:

- agree an analysis of the needs of the child and the parenting capacity to respond appropriately to those needs within their family context

- identify what intervention will be required to secure the wellbeing of the child or young person
- agree a realistic plan of action i.e., which services will be more appropriate to meet the child's needs best

Cases that are likely to be discussed or require further discussion with partner agencies include those where there is no immediate need for formal child protection responses and the case involves a level of complexity that leads the screening IFD worker representative to conclude that there is no obvious course of action and that further multi-agency discussion is required to inform further decision making.

Where the decision cannot reach consensus regarding the appropriate action to be taken the chair, having considered the views of all present, will make the final decision. Should agencies disagree with the outcome then this should be escalated to the Service Manager.

Review of MASH enquiry

Following the review of all relevant partner information, the MASH RAG-rating will be reviewed, and the final RAG-rating will then be confirmed or updated on the MASH Enquiry episode on LCS by a Integrated Front Door manager.

Deciding on what response is required

Dependant on the reviewed RAG-rating, the case will be progressed:

RAG rating	Timescale	
Red	Within two hours	Safeguarding/Child Protection (S.47) – Requiring Multi-agency strategy discussion or meeting
Amber	Within four hours	Complex S.17 and cases likely to require C & F assessment
Green	Within four hours	Low level child in need cases where further information is required to assist the decision-making process.

7. Summary

The Sefton IFD is a well resource multi-agency team which manages all initial contact into Sefton Children Services. Its aim is to collate all necessary information from partners, family and other sources in order to make a safe and appropriate decision on levels of support.

Due to the potential risks associated with safeguarding there are a number of checks and balances which take place to ensure timely and safe decisions are being made.

The Sefton IFD is on a continuous journey of improvement which is supported by a multi-partnership operation and governance board. As a focal point for any OFSTED inspection senior leaders will continue to monitor progress and make necessary improvements as and when required.

