



Norfolk Safeguarding
Children Board

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Room 60, County Hall, Martineau Lane
NORWICH NR1 2DH
Tel (01603) 223409

email: david.ashcroft@norfolk.gov.uk

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NSCB: Supporting Children's Services Improvement

Dear Board members and partners,

Changes to Threshold guidance, the MASH consultation line and CP conferences

As you are aware, Children's Services are picking up the pace of improvement with the support of the NSCB. In recent weeks, NSCB Leadership Group has agreed to add supplementary guidance to the Threshold Guide and I have also been working with Matt Dunkley and his senior leadership team to understand and support changes being made in the MASH and Independent Services.

Threshold Guide Descriptors

Following feedback from Ofsted and our improvement partners from Essex, it has been agreed that the Threshold Guide that was produced in 2016 requires supplementary guidance. As a result, Children's Services have been working with partners to produce some descriptors which will clarify the thresholds for intervention at every stage of a child's journey. I am pleased to enclose the final draft agreed at Leadership Group on 3 July.

This is intended to help address the issue that too many referrals come to MASH that do not require statutory intervention, and that a high proportion of enquiries and assessments result in no further action. This is hampering our capacity to provide the best response to those children and young people who **do** need it.

We recognise that producing this supplementary guidance is not enough in itself as we do not want to stop at just agreeing new definitions. While the descriptors provide further clarity, the real challenge is to use them consistently and support the wider children's workforce in understanding and applying thresholds. The original document sets out our expectations for having conversations and taking responsibility for our concerns and referrals, and we are now planning more work around shifting the culture and

supporting the application of the guidance in practice. As part of this we will be looking to our Local Safeguarding Children Groups to run workshops in each locality area in the autumn with the support of the NSCB Business Unit and MASH colleagues.

We are also aware that the format of the supplementary guidance as a set of specific descriptors may seem inconsistent with our original Guide and its emphasis on conversations. We have taken the decision to cascade the descriptors as soon as possible to ensure that children are getting the right services at the right time for the right duration. However, we do not want practitioners to be confused about the guidance, i.e. using one document in preference of the other - as they need to be read in conjunction. We need confident conversations about a concern, supported by the descriptors to help reach a clear understanding of the level of need and who needs to take action. To support consistency in message and approach, we have commissioned the illustrator who supported the production of the original Threshold Guide, and asked her to format the supplementary guidance to tie the information together. This work is taking place over the summer and we are intending to produce hard copies of the supplementary guidance in September in time for the new school term.

In the meantime, the MASH will be using the descriptors with referrers and we have asked them to continue modelling the approach set out in the original Guide and support referrers to contain their anxiety as we agree the level of support for each child and family.

Getting thresholds right is crucial to meeting children's needs and effective safeguarding through partnership working. Leadership Group will issue further communications about this in the near future.

MASH consultation line

You will remember that the use of consultation lines was a feature in the recent Serious Case Review, Case S, published in January 2017. The consultation line is a service provided by children's social care that sits within the MASH. The Children's Services MASH Manager has reviewed the use of the consultation line and as of **Monday 10 July** professional consultation will take place through the one MASH number to ensure that this is very much day to day business. There will no longer be an option for an anonymous consultation. If a child is discussed with the MASH then there will be a record of what was advised on a child's file and the rationale for this. The MASH Manager has been doing some work on a refresh of the MASH functions and ensuring that this is delivered to all internal and external partner agencies so we all have clarity on roles/expectations

The Children's Services MASH Manager wishes to work with all partner agencies to improve working relationships and ensure that we all work together in a productive supportive and positive way to Safeguard the children we are all responsible for.

Children's Services would also like to assure all agencies that the systems in the MASH are gradually being changed and that some restructuring is taking place. This began in late May and reports from the Customer Service Centre as of early June advise that 99% of calls are now being answered within the MASH. The changes to the consultation line will not affect this improved timely response.

Changes to CP conferences

Following feedback from Ofsted we are making changes to the format of Child Protection Conferences and the way Child Protection Plans are written with the purpose of more clearly evidencing identified risk for children.

The outcome of these changes will be that risks will be clearly understood by all directly involved in the child's life. Identification and onward management of the detailed plan of action to reduce these risks will become the responsibility of family members and the multi-agency group involved with the child. The change in format will also enable the Independent Chair to better monitor progress and outcomes for the child from the ongoing safety planning.

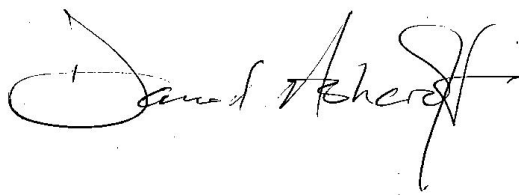
I enclose a Communications Sheet from the Independent Services providing further information.

These changes will be in effect from **Monday 10 July**.

Next Steps

I would be grateful if all partners could cascade the information in this letter to staff at all levels within their agencies. We will be posting information on the NSCB website and tweeting about changes, but effective communication requires partners' active involvement in disseminating important messages.

Many thanks for your continued support in partnership working.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Ashcroft', with a stylized flourish at the end.

David Ashcroft
Independent Chair, Norfolk SCB

Enclosures:

- Threshold Supplementary Guidance: descriptors
- Communications from Independent Services