

Summary

A recent multi-agency case audit of MASH enquiries recommended that all practitioners should be mindful of the need to minimise delay in the progression of cases. It was noted that the majority of the cases audited progressed through the MASH process with minimal delay. However, for the cases that were delayed in the MASH there appeared to be difficulties in progressing some of the actions and getting updates on actions from contributing agencies. This was highlighted in the triennial analysis of serious case reviews in England as being one of the main systemic breakdowns in information sharing.¹

Key learning

The negative impact of delays in addressing child safeguarding issues is well documented.

In her review of the child protection system in England,² Munro recognises that delays in court processes are a major concern because of the harmful effect it has on children.

Ofsted³ also noted the harmful effects of drift and delay and possible causes such as:

- stop/start interventions;
- inconsistency in decisions on legal thresholds;
- quality of evidence and repeated assessments;
- legal proceedings;
- families who frequently move; and,
- frequent changes of social worker.

Messages from research⁴ also identify legal proceedings as a cause of delay for looked after children, noting the repeated and sequential approach to assessments. However, delays are apparent at all stages of the process for looked after children.

The Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre⁵ identified delays in plans for permanence brought about by reactive rather than proactive case management. There was an over-reliance on voluntary care and once

temporary solutions were found, cases were allowed to drift. The study also found that evidence on the impact of neglect and emotional abuse was difficult to collate and the principle that a child is best brought up by their own family led to lengthy and time-consuming deliberations to identify the very few children who would need statutory care.

The triennial analysis of serious case reviews¹ identified - minimising delay in assessments - as being an area for improvement. Causes of delay were seen as:

- delays in holding strategy discussions;
- confusion over the status of meetings;
- attendance at meetings;
- availability of information;
- lack of clear minutes; and,
- failure to disseminate minutes.

High and unmanageable workloads were also seen as a cause of delay, as well as a reduction in the number of administrative staff. They highlight the importance of managers recognising these pressures and ensuring staff can work effectively, so that delays do not build. Some systemic causes of delay are difficult to address but it is important that practitioners consider the negative impact of delay at all stages of the process.

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Or visit the [ISCP website](http://www.iscp.gg) for relevant local information and guidance: [ISCP.GG](http://www.iscp.gg).

¹ Sidebotham, P., Brandon, M., Bailey, S., Belderson, P., Dodsworth, J., Garstang, J., Harrison, E., Retzer, A. and Sorensen, P. (2016) *Pathways to harm, pathways to protection: a triennial analysis of serious case reviews 2011 to 2014: Final report* [pdf]. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/533826/Triennial_Analysis_of_SCRs_2011-2014_-_Pathways_to_harm_and_protection.pdf.

² Munro, E. (2011). *Munro review of child protection: a child-centred system* [pdf]. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175391/Munro-Review.pdf.

³ Ofsted (2014) *In the child's time: professional responses to neglect* [pdf]. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/419072/In_the_child_s_time_-_professional_responses_to_neglect.pdf.

⁴ Thomas, C. (2013). *Adoption for looked after children: messages from research*. London: BAAF.

⁵ Brown, R. and Ward, H. (2013). *Decision-making within a child's timeframe* (2nd ed.). London: Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre.