

Process: The audit reviewed 10 strategy meeting records held during June – August 2023, across all teams in Children’s Services. One strategy meeting was observed by the independent scrutineer, and data reporting on the timeliness of strategy meetings was reviewed.

Highlight results: Strategy meetings are largely being held on time, information sharing was good, however, not all agencies were involved in information sharing and decision making and the quality of records in 6 out of 10 cases audited lacked clarity.

Recommendation 1:

The partnership needs to ensure that it enables all relevant agencies to attend strategies and that ‘health’ as a statutory partner are invited on all occasions.

Our response (08.01.24)

The issue was due to health colleagues not being included in the invitations. This was immediately rectified with a process put in place to enable health to be involved in every meeting regardless of where the child is in the system. MASH Nurses now coordinate the health attendance and will be at the meeting if other health colleagues e.g., HV / SN cannot attend.

This is reported to be working well and a dip sample audit undertaken on 08.01.24 of 16 strategy meetings completed in the previous month found health were invited to 14 cases and attended all of these. Police and Children’s Services were at every meeting, and all those who were invited, attended. Details of the new process will be reiterated, and a multi-agency audit will be included as part of the 2024/25 audit cycle to ensure improved compliance in relation to appropriate attendance, but also the quality and timeliness of the Strategy Meeting.

Recommendation 2:

Agencies should ensure that there is clarity about when joint and when single agency visits to children are undertaken, promoting practice where the child is at the centre of the investigation, and which minimises the child having to tell their story repeated times.

Our response (01.12.23)

It was recognised that an issue occurred in this specific case, and this is not expected practice. Procedures have been reviewed and practice guidance is clear regarding the correct process. In line with the above we will undertake a dip sample to provide assurance.

Recommendation 3:

Further consistency to promote the quality and timeliness of record keeping is required including clear processes for all agencies to receive records of the discussions, the analysis of risk and the actions all agencies have agreed to take.

Our response (01.12.23)

We have implemented a new Strategy meeting form on Liquid Logic. This went live early September 2023 to assist in information sharing and clear agreed actions and timescales. Timeliness of strategy meetings is reported on each month, within 3 working days of the meeting taking place, and at the end of October this was above 90%. Regular monthly meetings continue to take place with Police colleagues around the timeliness of strategy meetings. Further work is required around the sharing of minutes with key partner agencies post the meeting. This is an ongoing piece of work.

Recommendation 4:

Whilst the use of strategy meetings can play an important part in contextual safeguarding, the partnership may at an appropriate point in time, wish to consider their effectiveness in the context of its overall approach to safeguarding children missing and vulnerable to exploitation.

Our response (01.12.23)

Work is required to understand the outcome and the purpose of missing strategy meetings. We need to understand if this is the most appropriate statutory process and their effectiveness.

Recommendation 5:

All agencies should ensure that that their systems flag actions identified for them at other safeguarding forums such as the MARAC and that they are considered and acted upon in a timely way.

Our response (01.12.23)

Work has commenced on this and within Children's Services all MARAC meetings and actions and minutes are now added to the child's file as standard practice. Work to ensure this is happening across the partnership needs to take place and this will include a briefing slide deck sent out around the role and function of MARAC and agency responsibilities including recording of actions.