

## Behavioural Insights - project pivot plan July 2020

### Original goals and project suspension

In the spring of 2020, Social Engine, working with WCC colleagues, had completed the work to research and design an intervention intended to influence the behaviour of Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) within schools, with the ultimate aim of reducing non-urgent contact with the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Data analysis had allowed us to identify that DSLs accounted for 25 per cent of contacts to the helpline, with significant numbers of those subsequently assessed as being better suited to early help.

Working with WCC children's services teams, headteachers and DSLs themselves we had developed an intervention to be delivered via a randomised controlled trial (RCT) during the first half of 2020. This approach would have seen schools allocated to either a control or intervention group, with DSLs at the latter receiving tailored information about how and when to contact the MASH. Our aim was to run the trial over 3-4 months, analysing any changes to call volumes. At the point we were aiming to launch the trial the pandemic and resulting lock down meant that a pause was vital.

This short paper provides an overview of the current situation and the plans to reactivate the project, responding to new challenges and opportunities which have arisen during the pandemic.

### Where are we now?

The COVID-19 pandemic, and with it the closure of schools for the majority of children, has led to a significant reduction in safeguarding referrals made by DSLs into the MASH. Where DSLs have made contact with children's services during the 'pandemic months', there is some evidence to suggest that these have been regarding some of the most serious or complex cases and that the rates of non-urgent referrals have reduced.

Further, some changes in internal structure and staffing within WCC have also had a bearing on the project. In particular, management responsibility for the MASH and Early Help have been separated and the responsibility for DSL training has moved out of school support and in to EH.

Additional work has been planned to boost early help, including increasing the capacity of youth services and community-based activities, the addition of extra resources in parent trainers and two new headteacher coaches. These elements contribute to a shifting landscape and should provide a more comprehensive suite of support and resources for families needing support as well as the DSLs when seeking assistance for children in their schools.

During the earlier scoping phase of this work we identified the importance of DSL training as a key influence on safeguarding leads' behaviour and that there were

significant opportunities to positively influence behaviour through the training. However, at that time the responsibility for training sat outside the project team and consequently it was not deemed within scope for the project. With the responsibility for training now being brought in to EH, that situation has now changed and there is an opportunity to use the DSL training to intervene.

What we hope to achieve

Our goal for this pivot project reflects the ambitions for the project from its inception – to reduce the number of non-urgent contacts made by DSLs to the MASH. By so doing, we hope to support DSLs to have greater confidence about how, when and where requests for support need to be made.

What is our approach?

The start of the new academic year brings with it the need for schools to update their safeguarding approaches. To assist with this, WCC provides an annual update on changes to Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) – the statutory requirements set by Department for Education. Social Engine will work with WCC colleagues to review this communication and to ensure that behavioural insights inform the messaging contained.

There exists the opportunity to help shape safeguarding training and core materials. This includes introductory and refresher safeguarding training for DSLs. Social Engine will work with WCC colleagues to review the content and to ensure that behavioural insights inform the content and messaging.

We shall draw upon our research from the earliest phase combined with principles from behaviour change theory to assist in shaping these approaches.

What is the behaviour we want to change?

The earliest research indicated that there are a number of reasons why DSLs contact the MASH. Factors include: lack of confidence – wanting to gain advice on the seriousness of a given situation, wanting to ‘log’ an issue, following up on a previous referral and concern that failure to report might reflect badly if the situation escalates.

With this backdrop, we wish to develop an intervention that will support and guide DSLs to make more appropriate decisions about how and when to contact the MASH.

What is our intervention?

Our initial evidence and insight gathering identified the importance of training and guidance as an influence on the behaviour of safeguarding leads, our intervention will focus on the content and messaging of formal information provided to DSLs. In particular safeguarding training for DSLs – which comprises both an introductory course and a refresher course – that WCC deliver to a high number of schools across the County every year.

Our intervention draws on the hypothesis to have emerged from our evidence and insight gathering: that school professionals mainly call MASH for consultation and advice. By reviewing and redesigning the training materials together with WCC colleagues, we will ensure the content makes more salient the appropriate way to access advice and consultation without regard to the MASH helpline. As part of the remobilisation of the project we shall consider whether additional communication channels (such as website and response correspondence) might usefully be included in the intervention.

How will we measure?

The plan to shift the focus of our intervention from all DSLs across the County, to just those accessing safeguarding training necessarily reduces our sample size. The consequences of this shift means the power size of our sample is significantly reduced and means either extending the length of our trial (to increase the sample size to a sufficient size) or adopting a different method of evaluation.

Part of the immediate next steps will be to redo our statistical power calculations to determine how long the trial would need to be extended by in order to run a viable trial. We will also analyse recent (post-Lockdown) data to determine how the challenge the project seeks to address has changed in the intervening period. Following this we will develop a new evaluation plan (and potentially a new trial design).

Our initial discussions suggest that adopting a quasi-experimental method might be appropriate, with a natural comparison group provided by DLSs that do not undertake the safeguarding training. However further exploration of the feasibility of this approach needs to be conducted prior to the intervention being delivered.

#### Timeline

Activity	Timescale 2020
Intervention development	1 August -14 August
Intervention launch	1 September
Intervention period	1 September – 1 January (tbc – subject to decisions on intervention duration)*
	2021
Evaluation period	8 January – 1 February (tbc)
Reporting	21 February (tbc)

\*The length of the intervention period will be informed by statistical power calculations. Evaluation and reporting activities will commence upon completion of the intervention period.