



MULTI-AGENCY NEGLECT STRATEGY

Introduction

'The possibility that in a very small minority of cases neglect will be fatal, or cause grave harm, should be part of a practitioner's mindset. This is not to be alarmist, nor to suggest predicting or presuming that where neglect is found the child is at risk of death. Rather, practitioners, managers, policy makers and decision makers should be discouraged from minimizing or downgrading the harm that can come from neglect and discouraged from allowing neglect cases to drift.' (Neglect and Serious Case Reviews; Brandon et al 2013)

Brandon continues:

'The key aim for the practitioner working with neglect is to ensure a healthy living environment and healthy relationships for children. Prevention and early access to help and support for children and their families are crucial, but so too is later stage help for older children who live with the consequences of longstanding neglect.'

The appalling effects of chronic neglect are well-documented. Practitioners and academics are agreed that the cumulative nature of neglect can have a disastrous impact on all aspects of children's health and development. It impacts on children's learning, self-esteem, ability to form attachments and social skills in such a way that the effects can last into adulthood. Brandon therefore states that neglect 'needs to be treated with as much urgency as other categories of maltreatment.'

Department for Education statistics show that neglect was the most common reason attributed to children becoming the subject of a child protection plan, accounting for 41% of cases (Characteristics of children in need in England: year ending March 2012, Department for Education, 2012). A major prevalence study of child abuse and neglect, published by the NSPCC in 2011, found neglect to be the most prevalent type of maltreatment in the family for all age groups. (Child abuse and neglect in the UK today, NSPCC, 2011, quoted from 'In the child's time: professional responses to neglect. Ofsted, 2014).

Neglect is overwhelmingly the most common category for children on Child Protection Plans in Norfolk, with 69.45% of cases having this as the identified main area of significant harm (end April 2014).

In Norfolk there have been several multi-agency reviews in recent years where neglect has been a major theme. Despite this, cases of chronic neglect, where there has not been appropriate or timely intervention, are still being identified. One Serious Case Review in relation to such a case has just been completed. This strategy reflects, and aims to address, the issues it raises. A further two Serious Case Reviews regarding neglect have recently been commissioned.

In 2013 Ofsted said of Norfolk: 'The issue of neglect is acknowledged by partners interviewed to be a prevalent issue in the county, with partner agencies stressing the importance of appropriate shared responses, but there is as yet no overarching strategy in place to ensure that all agencies' front line services recognise and respond consistently to the issue.'

Brandon's study shows that '—we cannot be sure that the most serious cases of neglect are formally recognised and that these children will always have a plan for their protection'. It is therefore vital that practitioners in universal services, and at every level of intervention, have a confident, compassionate and consistent approach to dealing with neglect.

A strategy for managing cases of neglect, at all levels, and across all agencies, has been recognised as one of the Norfolk Safeguarding Children Board's top priorities.

Purpose and scope

The purpose of the strategy is to establish key strategic aims, objectives and priorities for Norfolk's approach to neglect. The impact of the strategy must be at the operational level if change is to be achieved.

More research needs to be done on developing a profile of neglect in Norfolk, but this must not delay urgent steps being taken to ensure that agencies work together more effectively to identify neglect and to work with families once neglect has been identified.

The strategy outlines the key principles within which all work around neglect will be undertaken. It identifies the over-arching strategic aim, the three core objectives, and the priority areas of work which will deliver those objectives in order to improve Norfolk's response to cases of neglect. The timeline for the work streams is included in Appendix 1.

The strategy has been developed under the auspices of the Norfolk Safeguarding Children Board. It is therefore a clear expectation that all agencies will promote the strategic objectives; reflect them in their internal policies, procedures and delivery plans; and ensure that work at the operational level is consistent with the principles, aims and objectives of the strategy.

This will be achieved by agencies:

- contributing to the development of the profile of neglect across Norfolk;
- ensuring that their staff are trained appropriately at all levels;
- making sure that internal communications promote the strategy;
- supporting the communication strategy of the NSCB;
- contributing to the development of expert knowledge, with consultants who can champion specialist work in the arena of neglect;
- contributing to the evaluation of the work streams in Appendix 1 and to the evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategy;
- promoting a positive culture of learning and challenge in this area of work.

Tackling neglect is everyone's business. It is not limited to statutory agencies and universal services. All those who have contact with children and families have their role to play in the recognition of potential neglect. They may be involved in the voluntary or community sector, or they may be front line district council workers. The aim of those in strategic positions must be to support all volunteers and workers to be as well-equipped as possible to meet their safeguarding responsibilities.

It is also essential for those in strategic roles to make sure that strategies link together and complement each other. This is at all levels and stages of intervention. For example, the Parenting Strategy will be important in providing early help to parents. However, given the frequency with which domestic abuse, mental ill health, alcohol and substance misuse, are features of households where children are neglected, it is vital that this is reflected in strategic developments in these areas. Regarding adolescent neglect, any developments in the provision of child and adolescent mental health services must take the therapeutic needs of these young people into consideration. While these are some key links, they are only examples and there will be many more.

The neglect strategy needs to link with the other two top NSCB priorities which are sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation. Sexual abuse of children may take place in the context of neglect; and children and young people who have been neglected will be vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

Strategic Aim

In Norfolk we aim to ensure that there is early recognition of neglect. We will work with families in a positive and empowering way, keeping a clear focus on the impact of neglect on the child.

From early support to statutory intervention, there will be appropriate, consistent and timely responses across all agencies working together. The strategy should inspire all those working with children and their families to achieve this: thereby contributing to improved long-term outcomes for children.

Definition

The statutory guidance states that:

'Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in a serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance misuse. Once the child is born neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment)
- protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger
- ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care givers)
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment
- it may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.'

(Working together to safeguard children – a guide to interagency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. March 2013).

Key Principles

These principles underpin the strategic aim and are vital to the delivery of the strategic objectives.

1. The over-riding priority is a shared understanding of the impact of neglect upon children's safety, health and development; including, crucially, the impact of emotional neglect. Without this shared understanding, it will not be possible to respond in an appropriate and timely way.
2. Early indicators of neglect and causal factors must be recognised if early assessment and intervention is to be achieved.
3. Early assessment and intervention will be promoted and supported where sufficient progress is seen to be possible within the child's timescale.
4. Where there is insufficient progress, intervention on a statutory basis will take place appropriately and without delay.
5. Collaboration between agencies is vital at all stages and levels of intervention; and there must be joint and shared assessments.
6. Children and their families should be able to expect consistency from the practitioners they work with and in the support they are offered.

7. Agencies need to ensure that practitioners are trained to be aware of, identify, assess and deal with neglect for children who may be particularly vulnerable, e.g. as a result of disability.
8. All assessment and intervention undertaken will be based on research evidence.
9. Historical information will always be taken into consideration. Professionals need to be curious and inquisitive about circumstances and events. They need to challenge each other, as well as the families themselves, about the improvements made and their sustainability.
10. The work which underpins the strategy will be informed by service users.
11. Neglect must be understood within a context which may include other forms of abuse. The strategy must therefore link with other relevant strategies and work streams.

Core Objectives

1. *To improve awareness and understanding of neglect across all agencies so that early identification is achieved and there is effective working between services working with children and with adults.*
2. *To improve the recognition, assessment and support of children and young people and their families where neglect has been identified but before statutory intervention is required.*
3. *To improve the assessment and intervention with children and young people once statutory intervention has become necessary.*

Priority areas of work

Developing a Profile of Neglect in Norfolk

The NSCB, in collaboration with all agencies, will collate a baseline profile of neglect in Norfolk, utilising a variety of evidence from local and national sources. This will inform training, assessment, monitoring and evaluation.

Multi-Agency Practice Guidance

The NSCB Guidance 'Managing Cases of Neglect' will be revised and updated.

The guidance will include indicators and identification of neglect, assessment and effective interventions. It will emphasise the importance of joint assessment with agreed assessment tools and the value of multi-agency plans – at all levels of intervention – which are regularly reviewed.

Assessment Tools

The Graded Care Profile (GCP) will be adopted as the multi-agency assessment tool in cases of neglect managed under sections 17 and 47 of the Children Act 1989.

Consideration also needs to be given regarding its use at earlier stages of involvement e.g. by Health Visitors and Children's Centres; this would assist in:

- prioritising cases for more intensive work;
- quantifying issues such as poor/slow growth, developmental delay, concerns re parenting, repeated accidents;
- informing referrals to/consultations with other professionals, e.g. paediatricians, CAMHS, Children's Services.

In addition to the GCP, it will be important to ensure that training and guidance is available in relation to the capacity of parents to change. The GCP can be used alongside other general and specialist assessment tools.

Neglect Identification Tool

A simple tool will be developed to help professionals identify neglect.

Training

The NSCB, in collaboration with training providers expert in the subject area, will continue to provide multi-agency training on recognising neglect and understanding the impact of neglect on children and young people.

The NSCB will also develop a new specialist level of multi-agency training in respect of neglect. This will focus on working with families where there is neglect, including assessing parental capacity for change, avoiding drift, understanding the challenges and impact of this work on practitioners, etc.

Additional single-agency and multi-agency training will be designed in relation to the Graded Care Profile. This will be at three levels:

- A 'Neglect Awareness Raising' briefing session will be devised for all agencies to deliver in-house. This will include awareness of the GCP.
- Multi-agency 'Awareness Plus' workshops re the GCP will be provided for those professionals who need to be aware of the principles and terminology so that they contribute to assessments.
- 1 day multi-agency training for those who will be leading assessments using the GCP.

Champions and expert consultation

A group of professionals who have expertise in the area of neglect and/or the use of the GCP and other recognised assessment tools will be established. These professionals will provide consultation and will be a source of expert advice for those working with cases of neglect.

Early Help

Given the findings from local and national Serious Case Reviews, it is essential to address the issue of identification of neglect at the early stages of intervention. It is suggested that this should be a work stream in its own right.

npLaw, the Courts and Cafcass

If positive long-term outcomes for children suffering the consequences of neglect are to be achieved, and drift for them is to be avoided, work is required with npLaw, the courts and Cafcass. This work needs to encompass both the threshold for care proceedings where the issue is neglect, and the evidence required to remove children from their families within care proceedings due to the impact of neglect.

Governance

Governance will be provided by the NSCB through the Child Protection sub-group. Progress will be monitored against the Strategy's Core Objectives. The sub-group will ensure that the identified work streams deliver according to the timescales set out in Appendix 1. It will also ensure that the strategy links with other key strategic objectives and developments: e.g. with adult services. Also, that all work streams are underpinned by the principles of user participation and equality and diversity. The sub-group will also ensure that there are creative communication strategies.

Evaluation

The NSCB will develop a monitoring and development framework for the strategy and there will be a specific work stream to address this. The strategy should be reviewed annually for the first three years.

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