

Hartlepool & Stockton-on-Tees LSCB's Neglect Strategy



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INTRODUCTION

Improving the early identification of and response to neglect is a key priority for both Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees Local Safeguarding Children Boards and was clearly identified in both LSCB Business Plans. It was prioritised due to the recognition of its prevalence in Child Protection Plans and the requirement for all agencies to identify children and young people at the earliest point whose needs may be neglected by their parents / carers.

By better recognition and action, appropriate services should be targeted to address this and in turn have a significant impact.

Whilst the worst case scenario is the death of a child, neglect causes great distress to children and leads to poor health, educational and social outcomes in the short and long-term. Consequences can include an array of physical, health and mental health problems, difficulties in forming attachment and relationships, lower educational achievements, an increased risk of substance misuse, higher risk of experiencing abuse as well as difficulties in assuming parenting responsibilities later on in life. The degree to which children are affected during their childhood and later in adulthood is dependent upon the type, severity and frequency of the maltreatment and on what support mechanisms, resilience strategies and protective factors were available to the family.

Over many years research and practice has increased professional awareness and knowledge in relation to the impact neglect has upon a child. This however has not eradicated the need for vigilance in this area of work, which is somehow considered lower priority than non-accidental injury and other forms of child abuse. Time and time again the importance of listening to the child has been highlighted as being essential. The importance of quality case records, chronological histories and comprehensive multi agency assessments are essential basic requirements in dealing with cases of neglect. Professionals must focus on outcomes for the child whilst also taking into account other issues around poverty, race, culture and disability. The earlier this can start the better.

Professionals must be aware of the danger of drift, the rule of optimism and perceived compliance when working with families who may be entering the world of neglect and when acute neglect is evident.

In such cases professionals (and the danger and limitations around contracts of expectations) can become over optimistic around improvements which may only be temporary. Information must be shared to allow the full picture to emerge and to identify good parenting and where help is needed. It is very rare for a single agency to have the complete picture.

This strategy, agreed by both LSCBs provides the shared commitment to re-focus efforts to better identify children experiencing neglect and to more effectively join up the support that can be offered to families, where neglect can have been an inter-generational factor.

DEFINITION OF NEGLECT

The term neglect can potentially be interpreted differently by people. It is therefore important that there is an agreed understanding of the definition.

Neglect is referenced in Working Together 2015 as being:

“The persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and / or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a 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); or
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.”

As well as the statutory definition it is important to have regard to the specific needs of children that are often subsumed under the term of ‘failure to meet basic needs’

These include:

- Failure to access appropriate medical care or treatment
- Nutritional neglect
- Emotional neglect
- Educational neglect
- Physical neglect
- Lack of supervision and guidance

These provide practitioners scope for support and early help before thresholds for statutory interventions are met.

It is important to remember that neglect can occur in families that are materially advantaged and are meeting the child's physical needs but where the child has no meaning to the family. Some parents lack empathy and emotional warmth and the child can be controlled by excessive rules and high expectations which contribute to emotional neglect.

Neglect differs from other forms of abuse because it is:

- Frequently passive
- Not always intentional
- More likely to be a chronic condition rather than crisis lead and therefore impacts on how we respond as agencies
- Combined often with other forms of maltreatment
- Often a revolving door syndrome where families require long term support
- Often not clear-cut and may lack agreement between professionals on the threshold for intervention

The way in which we understand and demine neglect can determine how we respond to it.

ROLE OF EARLY HELP IN IDENTIFYING NEGLECT

As previously stated, the impact of neglect of children is often accumulative, advancing gradually and imperceptibly and therefore there is a risk that agencies do not intervene early enough to prevent harm. It is important that all agencies (Health, Schools / Education, Police, Probation, Housing, Voluntary and Community Organisations), identify emerging problems and potential unmet needs and seek to address them as early as possible. The need for practitioners to be alert to the danger of drift and ‘start again’ syndrome cannot be over emphasised.

Working Together (2015) requires local agencies to have in place effective assessments of needs of children who may benefit from early help services. In Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees, agencies must effectively utilise the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to assess unmet needs and co-ordinate appropriate support. The delivery of an effective Early Help offer is not the responsibility of a single agency - it requires a ‘Whole-Family’ approach owned by all stakeholders working with children, young people and their families.

In order to address the high levels of neglect identified in both Boroughs it is important that all agencies effectively use the CAF to assess and plan services for children and their families.

It is also important that a coordinated Early Help offer, across agencies is clearly communicated. Also as outlined in the Early Help and Prevention Strategy for Stockton-on-Tees, need is identified and support offered across the continuum of need. This will help ensure support is offered at the earliest possible opportunity, helping to prevent escalation of need. The Early Help and Prevention Strategy identifies the need for Early Help services to be commissioned and provided in-line with an understanding of the levels of need across the population of the Borough. To do this, the Strategy highlights the importance of basing such decisions on the analysis and use of data and information, to identify patterns, trends and areas / populations with the greatest need. Learning from identification and management of neglect cases to-date, also forms an important part of this picture.

Likewise, it is important that there is continued longer term co-ordinated support, post involvement of Children's Social Care and other statutory agencies in order to enable parents to sustain the change in the care given to their children.

PURPOSE OF THE NEGLECT STRATEGY

This document sets out the LSCBs strategic objectives in their approach to tackling neglect. It also identifies key principles under which work around neglect should be undertaken, identifies priority areas of work in order to improve the multi agency response to neglect. It provides an opportunity to draw together strategic through to operational management these inter connected activities.

The Neglect Strategy should be read alongside other key strategies, policies and procedures such as the Continuum of Need and Services, Early Help Strategy, Tees LSCBs Child Protection Procedures and the Graded Care Profile and Signs of Safety tools that are being introduced.

It is expected that emerging or refreshed, relevant agency policies and procedures will take into account the strategic priorities identified within this document. Agencies internal procedures or delivery plans in relation to neglect should work within the same strategic objectives and adhere to the definition and guiding principles contained within the strategy.

PRINCIPLES in TACKLING NEGLECT

The strategy relies on a set of key principles which provide a strategic framework. This includes:-

1. Ensuring a shared understanding of neglect. The safety, wellbeing and development of children and young people are the over-riding paramount priority.
2. Collaboration amongst agencies is vital to ensure effective identification, assessment and support. Therefore issues around sharing confidential information need to be adopted.
3. Children and their families have a right to expect consistency both in the practitioners' approach to them and the support offered.
4. Children with special needs and disabilities have equal rights to protection from neglect and agencies must ensure that practitioners are trained to recognise and tackle neglect for children who may have additional and complex needs.
5. Causal factors and early indicators of neglect must be recognised so that intervention can be made as early as possible. The Hartlepool & Stockton-on-Tees LSCBs Neglect Strategy will link with the Early Help and Troubled Families Strategies to ensure that there is a coordinated and consistent approach to the management of neglect in families within both boroughs
6. Early support should be of a kind and duration that improves and sustains children's safety for the future. It should also build strength and resilience within families and promote independence.
7. Learning from the experiences of families living with neglect as well as local and national serious case / learning reviews will be applied.
8. Early assessment and intervention will be promoted and supported in the first instance.

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9. All services must consider / research historical information to inform the present position and repeat at times of significant change as well as review at regular intervals with early completion of multi-agency chronologies to assess and monitor risk of harm to children and families.
 10. Evaluating vulnerability, need, risk of harm or suffering harm requires information sharing and consideration of a multi-faceted array of indicators and outcome areas. To effectively safeguard children and young people requires professionals to be curious and inquisitive about family circumstances and events and also requires different professionals to be challenging of each other about perceived changes and improvements made by families and in respect of its perceived sustainability.
 11. Work with children and young people will be measured by its impact on outcomes by the LSCB which should in the long term see a reduction in the number of cases reaching the threshold for statutory intervention. Suitable statutory action may need to be taken if insufficient progress is achieved, when other methods have been unsuccessful or the level of risk presented to the child becomes unacceptable.
 12. Neglect often co-exists with other forms of abuse or risk factors so this strategy must link with other work streams for example domestic abuse, substance misuse, adult mental ill health, child poverty and youth homelessness ensuring that children and families are able to benefit from all developments as appropriate to their needs. A '*Think Family*' approach to neglect must be implemented if effective outcomes are to be achieved.

RECOGNISING WHAT WORKS WELL

- Public health and prevention approaches: Approaches such as work undertaken by Health Visitors and Children's Centres tackling the factors known to be associated with neglect could help prevent neglect occurring in the first place.
- Raising public awareness across services and organisations, helps to identify neglect and the 'warning factors' associated with it, at an early stage.
- Targeted support for families: There are evaluations of early help initiatives which include a range of support services for children and families. This Neglect Strategy must be considered in conjunction with the Early Help and Prevention Strategies for LSCB area.
- Multi-faceted work by a highly skilled workforce: The establishment of effective working relationships with parents and children that are enduring and consistent is critical to successful engagement. This includes the ability to provide a supportive but challenging relationship on behalf of the child as well as the skills to maintain the focus on improving outcomes. Universal service staff and those on the cusp of informal and formal support systems have a vital role to play as mediators or ambassadors to encourage parents to accept targeted support if required.
- Service Design: Services which are non-stigmatizing and accessible which includes considering not only location, but approach to children and parents/carers in need of help. A safe, welcoming locally available service with some outreach is found by parents to be helpful ([Action on Neglect- Action for Children, 2014](#)).
- Working across services: Joined up local service delivery such as universal and targeted provision. Many practitioners have reported that joint working, for example, with a social worker and health visitor to be a useful way to approach complex concerns. It also enables the practitioners to work more collaboratively and share information about families.
- Interventions need to offer long term support: There is now significant evidence to suggest that many families will need focussed, long term services rather than episodic intervention. This is often the case with very vulnerable families or 'hard to reach' families.
- Seeing and speaking directly with children: There are many examples of Serious Case Reviews, both nationally and locally, of professionals not seeing and speaking with children to gain their views and experiences of home life. Direct work with children can enhance their resilience and protective capacity but this must not be used as a measure to replace adults' responsibility to provide overall care and protection to the child.

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- Recognising the family unit: An approach that considers the ‘whole family’, not only the individuals but the child and wider family within their own community. There is evidence from reviews on work with families that including the family in as partners is a key to planning to build capacity and resilience.
 - Long Term Impact: For some children experiencing significant harm requires intense intervention to arrest any harm that has been caused and remove risk. It includes complex case management on decisions about permanent separation from parents and families.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The strategic objectives shown below will be applied in order to increase the understanding and response to neglect in joint working arrangements to protect children and young people by partner agencies serving both Hartlepool and Stockton LSCBs.

Strategic Objective 1: Improving awareness and understanding of the impact of neglect.

Strategic Objective 2: Improved assessment of children and young people living in neglectful situations before statutory intervention is required by including the use of the Common Assessment Framework, Single Assessment Framework and other recognised assessment tools.

Strategic Objective 3: Develop and sustain an agreed multi-agency response to children and young people who are at risk as a result of neglect

Strategic Objective 4: Improve outcomes for children and young people who are affected by neglect through the conduct of audits, reviews and dissemination of their learning to promote continuous improvement in multi and single agency practice.

PERFORMANCE AND IMPROVEMENT

Performance and improvement in the area of neglect will be measured by a whole systems approach as it has already been identified that this is a complex area with many facets. Some measures will be linked to the Early Help and Prevention Strategies or the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (and the plans that sit underneath it) while some will be included and monitored as part of the Performance Data sets presented to LSCBs.

Easily identifiable indicators will be the:

1. Reduction in number of Children in Need and number of children on Child Protection Plans as a result of neglect.
2. Reduction in the number of families identified as “troubled families”
3. Increase in the number of CAFs completed by a range of partners where neglect is a concern

The Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees LSCBs Annual Reports will provide an account of how they improve and support the professional response to neglect in their Boroughs. This will also be demonstrated through performance data reports presented to the Boards.

NEGLECT STRATEGY DELIVERY PLAN

The delivery plan outlined below is intended to identify a number of practical tasks which will support the achievement of the strategic objectives (described above). It is important to recognise that each of these tasks is not intended to be a distinct piece of work, more an on-going process alongside individual agency's responses to neglect issues.

Ref	Activity	Responsibility of:
Strategic Objective 1 – Improve awareness and understanding of the impact of neglect.		
1a	Coordinate Launch of Neglect Strategy	LSCB Business Manager
1b	Report impact of strategy in Annual report to LSCB and Health and Well-being Board	LSCB Chair & Business Manager
1c	Ensure focus on neglect is maintained in LSCB Business Plan,	LSCB Chair
1d	Reissue Neglect Guidance for practitioners across the children's workforce in addition to further promotion of the requirement that each agency's thresholds for action will reflect the use of the relevant Continuum of Needs and Services for each Board.	LSCB Business Manager
1e	Effective working between services working with children and adults will be supported so that a whole family approach to neglect is taken.	All agencies
1f	Present reports to LSCB on outcomes of audits related to neglect	All agencies
1g	Work and support other relevant strategies: Early Help and Prevention, Domestic Abuse etc.	All agencies

Ref	Activity	Responsibility of:
Strategic Objective 2 – Improve assessment of children and young people living in neglectful situations before statutory intervention is required by including the use of the Common Assessment Framework, Single Assessment Framework and other recognised assessment tools.		
2a	Increase the use of CAF to support neglect	All agencies
2b	Roll out of the Graded Care Profile and Signs of Safety as assessment tools to be used by practitioners	NTHFT and Children's Social Care
2c	Assessments will focus upon historical information that will assist with identifying the cause and reason for neglect in its presenting features	All agencies

Ref	Activity	Responsibility of:
2d	Practitioners will be required to use assessment tools in a dynamic manner to ensure that progress can be measured over designated time frames for example by repeat assessment.	Practitioners Line Manager

Ref	Activity	Responsibility of:
Strategic Objective 3 – Develop and sustain an agreed multi-agency responses to children and young people who are at risk as a result of neglect		
3.a	Findings from local and national research on neglect will be gathered and shared with Board Members for them to disseminate within their agencies.	LSCB Business Manager
3.b	The Boards joint multi-agency training and development programme will promote evidence based practice and effective interventions that work for children and families where neglect is prevalent on a wide, multi- agency basis.	Chair Joint Training Group
3.c	Relevant developments in service provision will be clear and promoted to practitioners on a multi-agency basis.	Board Members
3.d	Practitioners will be supported in developing effective skills and tools to work with families experiencing neglect.	Practitioners Line Manager
3.e	Practitioners will be supported to challenge and resolve common problems when working with families experiencing neglect.	Practitioners Line Manager

Ref	Activity	Responsibility of:
Strategic Objective 4 – Improve outcomes for children and young people who are affected by neglect through the conduct of audits, reviews and dissemination of their learning to promote continuous improvement in multi and single agency practice.		
4.a	The Board will seek evidence that there are improvements to the lives of children and young people who are living in families where neglect is a factor through early recognition and appropriate response to their need by agencies. It will challenge relevant agencies to demonstrate that they are able to identify those children and young people who may be vulnerable to neglect and provide evidence of early intervention to reduce the risk of harm and effective interventions where harm has been identified.	LSCB Chair

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