



city & hackney
safeguarding
children board

Multi-Agency Neglect Strategy

January 2016

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The impact of neglect on children and young people is enormous. Neglect causes great distress to children, leading to poor health, educational and social outcomes and is potentially fatal. Lives are affected and their ability to attend and attain at school is reduced. Their emotional health and wellbeing is often compromised and this impacts on their success in adulthood and their ability to parent in the future¹.
- 1.2 It can be difficult to define neglect and research shows that it often co-exists with other forms of abuse and adversity. It is also the most common reason for child protection plans in the UK. Neglect can also be a catalyst to future harm if not tackled effectively. Its relationship to other forms of child abuse is significant and for some, the impact of neglect upon their development can have serious consequences as they grow older, particularly in terms of their vulnerability to further abuse and exploitation.
- 1.3 Neglect is a key priority of the CHSCB, as identified in its [Business Plan 2015 – 2017](#). Its importance is reflected through the significant activity already undertaken in responding to this issue and the sharp focus applied by the CHSCB and partner agencies in ensuring coordinated, early and effective intervention is taking place in this area. Examples of local work undertaken by the partnership to tackle neglect include:
- Neglect being consistently prioritised into single and multi-agency training programmes available to all practitioners.
 - Partners in Hackney supporting the development of a training package on neglect in partnership with Social Care Institute of Excellence (SCIE)
 - Threshold tools in both the City of London and Hackney being revised and a strong drive across both areas to ensure professionals know what to do if they are worried about children.
 - The implementation of action plans and the delivery of learning events in both the City of London and Hackney following two case reviews involving neglect.
 - The CHSCB prioritising neglect and disseminating and embedding lessons from multi-agency case audits.
 - The CHSCB developing a multi-agency escalation policy.
 - Work across both areas focusing upon the importance of a Think Family approach.
 - The CHSCB regularly reinforcing the necessity of home visiting and the need for children and young people to be seen, heard and helped – reflected through Hackney’s Multi-Agency Team risk guidance (2014) and the First Access & Screening Team (FAST) “go look” visits, engaging other professionals to check on a child’s circumstances.
 - Increased alertness of practitioners in the City of London recognising that neglect is not isolated to low income families – “neglect by affluence”
 - Homerton University Hospital strengthening their policy when children miss medical appointments.
- 1.4 Building upon the work to date, this strategy presents a roadmap for the future towards which all local professionals can work. It focuses on the following priorities:
- **Knowing our Problem, Knowing our Response**
 - **Strong Leadership and Partnership**
 - **Effective Recognition, Assessment and Support**

¹ Taylor and Bridge 2005

2. Purpose of the strategy

- 2.1 The overarching aim of the Multi-Agency Neglect Strategy is to promote the welfare of children and young people and to improve their outcomes. The strategy itself outlines the vision and guiding principles of the CHSCB, with its narrative aiming to galvanise the focus of partners on realising the strategic vision of the CHSCB across the City of London and Hackney.
- 2.2 The strategy's accompanying action plans identify priority areas of work that take account of both local context and the findings from Ofsted's thematic inspections of neglect².
- 2.3 As detailed above, it is important to note that the multi-agency partnership is not starting from scratch in responding to this issue, with there being a substantial range of evidence demonstrating how neglect has been and continues to be successfully addressed by professionals across a range of agencies.

3. Vision for City and Hackney

- 3.1 **Committed and trained professionals from a range of agencies have a shared understanding about the complexity of neglect. Supported by robust management oversight and effective supervision, professionals recognise neglect early and effectively respond to help and protect children and young people.**
- 3.2 Neglect by its nature is complex and difficult to address. Because of this, it is absolutely vital that practitioners from all agencies get the basics right and get them right every time. The context of our local learning on cases of neglect reflects this importance and as such, the CHSCB vision for this strategy is aligned to reinforcing the importance of these fundamental tenets of practice:

Share Information

Assess and Analyse Risk

Focus on the Child (and Think Family)

Evidence decisions and use evidence to inform them and

Record their work accurately

If in doubt, professionals will “go look” and make sure that they, or another professional visits the child or young person at home

4. Principles

- 4.1 Children being neglected, or at risk of being neglected, need to be **seen, heard and helped**.
 - **Seen**; in the context of their lives at home, friendship circles, health, education and public spaces (including social media).
 - **Heard**; to effectively protect children and young people, professionals need to take time to hear what children are saying and put themselves in the child or young person's shoes and think about what their life might truly be like.

² In the child's time: professional responses to neglect (March 2014) Reference no: 140059
<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/childs-time-professional-responses-neglect>

- **Helped;** by remaining professionally curious and by implementing effective and imaginative solutions that help children and young people. Professionals should give parents and families clear information in relation to expectations and improvements.

5. What is Neglect?

- 5.1 Neglect is defined in [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015](#) as "the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical, emotional 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. When the child is born, neglect may involve the parents or carers failing to:
- Provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment);
 - Protect the 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.
- 5.2 Neglect is characterised by the absence of a relationship of care between the parent/carer and the child and the failure of the parent/carer to prioritise the needs of their child. It can occur at any stage of childhood, including the teenage years".
- 5.3 Neglect can be defined from the perspective of a child's right not to be subject to inhuman or degrading treatment, for example in the European Convention on Human Rights, Article 3 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Article 19.
- 5.4 **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.**
- 5.5 It is common for evidence of neglect to present through signs and symptoms which may be noticed by different agencies in relation to different children in the family at different points in time. Agencies need to feel confident in the recognising and the naming of neglect. 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. It is equally important that practitioners are alert to the danger of drift and 'start again' syndrome

6. Risk Factors

- 6.1 A number of factors increase the likelihood of neglect in some families. Vulnerable families may have a combination of the following risk factors:

Child risk factors	Parental risk factors	Wider Risk Factors
Disability Behavioural problems Chronic ill health	Poor Mental Health (especially maternal mental health difficulties) Substance Misuse Domestic Violence and Abuse Learning Difficulties Lack of experience of positive parenting in childhood	Poverty Unemployment Poor social support

- 6.2 Whilst poverty is a recognised feature, not all the above risk factors are exclusive to children and young people living in poor households. Professionals must remain alert to neglect by affluence.

7. Context is key – Neglect Profile Snapshot

- 7.1 The CHSCB is committed to ensuring the local contexts of the City of London and Hackney remain key to the understanding of the prevalence and types of neglect across both local areas.

- **1 in 10 children have experienced neglect**
Source: Radford, L. et al (2011) Child abuse and neglect in the UK today.
- **Over 24,300 children were identified as needing protection from neglect last year**
Source: Child protection plan statistics for England and child protection register statistics for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales (2015)
- **Neglect is a factor in 60% of serious case reviews and Domestic abuse, mental ill health and/or substance misuse were common in households where children were neglected**
Source: Brandon, M. et al. (2013) Neglect and serious case reviews: a report from the university of East Anglia commissioned by NSPCC.
- **Neglect is the most common reason for taking child protection action**
Source: NSPCC (2015) How safe are our children? 2015 Indicators 8 and 14

7.2 City of London

- 21% of City's children and young people live in low income families (2014/15)
- 14 of the 17 social work assessments undertaken in 2014/15 featured domestic violence.
- Whilst low numbers, at the end of 2015, (3) 60% of children and young people were on a Child Protection Plan for Neglect in the City.
- Local multi-agency audits identified cases of neglect involving affluent families. In the context of the City, it is particularly important that professionals don't assume neglect is only linked to poverty.

7.3 London Borough of Hackney

- 44% of children and families living in poverty (2014/15)
- In 2014/15, 296 statutory assessments undertaken by Hackney CYPS identified parental alcohol use as a factor.
- In 2014/15, 316 statutory assessments undertaken by Hackney CYPS identified parental drug use as a factor.
- In 2014/15, 695 statutory assessments undertaken by Hackney CYPS featured parental mental health as an issue
- At the end of 2015, 35.6% of children and young people were on a Child Protection Plan for Neglect in Hackney.
- Whilst a reduction from 46% in 2013/14, neglect remains a significant issue impacting upon the welfare of children and young people deemed most at risk.

8. Strategic Priorities

- 8.1 Given the interface of neglect with other harm and abuse, the CHSCB understands the need to place this strategy in the context of other plans that influence the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and that its implementation must involve continued engagement with relevant groups representing local communities across both areas.
- 8.2 This includes being explicit about the impact of neglect in creating the vulnerabilities that make children and young people more susceptible to exploitation, whether this be related to sexual exploitation, radicalisation or gang involvement.
- 8.3 It is essential that neglect continues to form part of ongoing dialogue and scrutiny at key strategic forums and that everyone is playing their part in dealing with this issue. It is also essential that the response to neglect is seen as one providing **early help to children and young people - early help in the sense that dealing with neglect swiftly and effectively prevents the life limiting consequences that result from growing up in such an environment.**
- 8.4 In its 2014 report into a number of thematic inspections (*In the Child's Time: Professional Responses to Neglect*), Ofsted identified that “the pervasive and long-term cumulative impact of neglect on the well-being of children of all ages is well documented”. Findings from both inspections and research highlight the following areas as being key components to a successful, multi-agency response to neglect.
 - **Early recognition**
 - **Robust management oversight and supervision**
 - **Specialist training**
 - **Acknowledgement of complexity**
 - **Effective and timely professional responses both for help and protection**
- 8.5 The following strategic priorities, informed by the above factors and local learning, provide the focus for further developing the local arrangements and responses to neglect. Individual action plans covering the City and Hackney have been developed against these areas.

Priority 1: Knowing our problem, knowing our response

To continue to improve our understanding about the quality of the response to neglect in the City of London and Hackney.

The focus of this strategic priority is to ensure that all professionals in the City and Hackney have an understanding of their local picture of neglect and, that there is a common understanding of neglect and the thresholds of intervention.

- Partners will have an overview of the prevalence and type of neglect affecting children and young people in their local area.
- Professionals who come into contact with children and young people will have relevant knowledge and a common understanding of neglect between and within agencies, as this is crucial to allow effective identification and a common language
- There will be an understanding of each agency's thresholds for action – which will allow effective and meaningful challenge (and escalation as appropriate) concerning cases of neglect.

Priority 2: Strong Leadership and Partnership

To secure collective commitment to addressing neglect across all partner agencies and to demonstrate effective leadership in driving forward the appropriate systems, culture and process changes required.

The focus of this strategic priority is a recognition of the need for all organisations to show leadership and commitment to identifying and responding to neglect, to promote a culture that encourages professional curiosity, challenge and appropriate escalation of concerns. This commitment is required from all levels and all agencies including those who are in the housing and environmental services.

- Leaders will ensure their staff professionals have a **shared understanding** of neglect and know **what to do if they are worried** about a child and how to **escalate concerns**.
- Early identification and the effective response to neglect will remain a **priority** across all organisations, both statutory and non-statutory.
- Leaders will support **effective joint working between adult and children services** and across relevant strategic Boards; supporting a clear local partnership response to neglect that Thinks Family.
- Leaders will drive the importance of the professional network talking with each other and **sharing information** appropriately in order to tackle neglect effectively.
- Leaders will ensure their staff are **sufficiently trained** (both single and multi-agency training) to recognise and tackle neglect and are particularly alert to the risks arising for children with **special needs and disabilities**
- **Relevant developments in service provision are promoted** and clear for practitioners on a multi-agency basis

Priority 3: Effective recognition, assessment and support

To improve the recognition, assessment and response to children and young people living in neglect, before statutory intervention is required, including the appropriate use of assessment tools and to empower families to respond to children's needs

Through a focus on this priority, it is intended that there is early recognition of neglect, robust management oversight and supervision of practitioners and effective and timely responses both for help and protection.

Early Recognition of Neglect

- Neglect is identified and **named as a concern** by professionals at the earliest opportunity. Professionals know who to contact, and know what will be done in response. This is supported through robust awareness raising and regular training provided by the CHSCB, to partner agencies.
- All professionals “**Think Family**” and are alert to the risk of children being neglected through exposure to domestic abuse, parental substance misuse, adult mental health and learning difficulties.
- Staff do not normalise neglect because of poverty, there is greater awareness of “**Neglect by Affluence**”
- **Early Help** services effectively assess and provide timely, robust multi-agency services to prevent problems getting worse with less children and young people being brought up in households suffering from neglect.

Robust management oversight and supervision

- All professionals receive **effective supervision** to help them test, challenge and reflect upon their analysis of risk to children and young people; particularly in the context of neglect and the cumulative indicators of harm.
- Professionals **challenge each other and escalate** as appropriate when there are professional differences.

Effective and timely professional responses both for help and protection

- All professionals are intently **curious** about family circumstances and undertake or facilitate **home visits** to check on children and young people at home. “**If in doubt, go look**”
- There is effective collaboration and **information sharing**.
- **Hard to engage parents** do not prevent effective intervention with the child or young person.
- All services consider/research **historical information** to inform the present position.
- Professionals are able to identify and address vulnerabilities associated with neglect and **build up families' ability to sustain change**.
- There are clear processes and mechanisms to enable practitioners to **assess and identify risk**.
- Where **neglect themed assessment tools** are used – these are aligned to the early help referral document (Commons support framework & Threshold of need)