

Liverpool's Multi-Agency Neglect Strategy: 2014 - 2016

(V10)

Actions to prevent, reduce and manage the effects of neglect on children and their families

This strategy has been developed with reference to the City Region Child Poverty & Life Chances Strategy, Liverpool's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, the Integrated Early Help Strategy, and the Children & Young Peoples Plan.

1. Background and 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 destroyed, children's abilities to make secure attachments are affected and their ability to attend and attain at school is reduced. Their emotional health and well-being is often compromised and this impacts in their success in adulthood and their ability to parent in the future.

1.2 At the year-end (2013 to 2014) 39.3%¹ (155) of Child Protection Plans in Liverpool were under the category of neglect. In addition to children who are subject to child protection plans, there are also children who are not yet in receipt of statutory child protection services but who are being offered early help due to concerns relating to neglect and those whose needs and protection plans address more obvious concerns such as emotional abuse who may also be suffering neglect².

1.3 At the same time Liverpool is facing pressures from significant reductions in funding, there is evidence of increased levels of poverty and deprivation³. In this context, the early recognition of neglect and timely and effective responses to neglect is vital in providing families with the help they need.⁴ It is significant to note that between April 2013 and March 2014 eighteen Liverpool young people (aged between 12 and 16) were placed in secure accommodation for 'welfare' reasons. All of them had a history of early childhood neglect and persistent absence from primary school. The financial cost of the 18 secure placements was £1,195,342.00.

1.4 The findings of Ofsted's thematic inspections of neglect⁵ present a mixed picture in respect of the quality of professional responses to neglect. The quality of assessments in

¹ Due to be validated by May 2014

² Year end (2013 to 2014) 394 children and young people were the subject of child protection plans - 35.8% (141) of child protection plans were under the category of emotional abuse; 17.5% (69) were physical abuse and 7.4% (29) sexual abuse.

³ For example increased use of food banks; increased use of the Liverpool Citizen's Support Scheme and a seven fold increase in Discretionary Housing Payments.

⁴ A report commissioned by three leading children's charities projected that the number of children living in extremely vulnerable families is set to almost double by 2015 (H Reed, In the eye of the storm; Britain's forgotten children and families, Action for Children, 2012; www.actionforchildren.org.uk/policy-research/policy-priorities/in-the-eye-of-the-storm-britains-forgotten-children-and-families)

⁵ 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>

neglect cases overall was found to be too variable. Almost half of assessments seen either did not take sufficient account of family history or did not sufficiently convey or consider the impact of neglect on the child. The local authorities providing the strongest evidence of the most comprehensive action to tackle neglect were more likely to have a neglect strategy and a systematic improvement programme addressing policy, thresholds for actions and professional practice at the front line.

2. Purpose and Scope

2.1 The purpose of this document is to set out the strategic aims and objectives of Liverpool's approach to tackling neglect. This strategy also identifies key principles under which work around neglect should be undertaken and identifies key priority areas of work in order to improve Liverpool's response to neglect.

This strategy has been developed in conjunction with multi-agency partners working within Liverpool and should be considered alongside other key strategies, policies and procedures, such as Liverpool's Integrated Early Help Strategy⁶ and the Responding to Need Guidance and Levels of Need framework⁷.

Liverpool is committed to improving our attempts to effectively tackle neglect. Neglect has been identified as a priority for both the Local Safeguarding Children's Board and the Children's Trust Board.⁸ Tackling neglect is also one of the priorities of Liverpool's Integrated Commissioning Strategy.⁹

3. Definition of Neglect

3.1 The definition of neglect from statutory guidance, Working Together to Safeguard Children, Department of Education¹⁰ (2013), is: *'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;*

⁶ <http://liverpool.gov.uk/media/687328/earlyhelpbookletstrategy.pdf>

⁷ <http://liverpool.gov.uk/media/798052/lscb-booklet-web.pdf>

⁸ The Children's Trust Board and the LSCB commissioned a joint workshop event on neglect facilitated by Professor of Child Welfare, Jan Howarth (Doncaster University) in December 2013

⁹ Link to be inserted

¹⁰ HM Government, Working Together to Safeguard Children – A guide to interagency working to promote the welfare of children, (March 2013)

- ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers);
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

3.2 It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs'. Determining what constitutes a 'persistent failure', or 'adequate clothing' or 'adequate supervision' remains a matter of professional judgement. Even when professionals have concerns about neglect, research indicates that they may be unlikely to consider how they can help or intervene, apart from referring to children's social care.¹¹ Research also indicates that social workers knowledge of child development is not always well developed and that as a result they are less likely to understand the impact of neglect and the importance of timely decision making to avoid significant harm.¹² These factors contribute to neglect not being well recognised and its impact not well understood.

3.3 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 'failure to meet basic needs'¹³. These include:

- medical neglect
- nutritional neglect
- emotional neglect
- educational neglect
- physical neglect
- lack of supervision and guidance

3.4 There is an overlap between emotional abuse and many forms of child maltreatment and this especially true of neglect. So when practitioners are working with children who are experiencing neglect and understanding of emotional abuse is also important. At the year-end (2013 to 2014) 39.3% of Child Protection Plans were under the category of neglect and 35.8% were under the category of emotional abuse.¹⁴¹⁵

¹¹ B Daniels, J Taylor, J Scott, Noticing and helping the neglected child; literature review, Report to department for Children, Schools and Families, University of Stirling, 2009.

¹² C Davies and H Ward Safeguarding children across services: messages from research, Department of Education, 2011

¹³ Howarth, Child Neglect: Identification and Assessment, London (Palgrave MacMillan, 2007)

¹⁴ Liverpool's Safeguarding Children Board Procedures link <http://liverpoolscb.proceduresonline.com/index.htm> and link to 'Recognising emotional abuse' - http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/emotional_abuse.htm

¹⁵ Children's and Young People's emotional health and wellbeing has been identified as a priority in Liverpool's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment link (page 7) : www.liverpool.gov.uk/jsna

4. Prevention of Neglect

4.1 A number of factors (social determinates) increase the likelihood of neglect in some families. Vulnerable families may have a combination of the following risk factors:

- **Child risk factors**

Disability
Behavioural problems
Chronic ill health

- **Parental risk factors**

Poor mental health, especially maternal mental health difficulties
Drug and alcohol (substance misuse)¹⁶
Domestic abuse
Parents' own exposure to maltreatment
Lack of experience of positive parenting in childhood

- **Wider Determinants of Health**

Poverty
Unemployment
Poor social support

4.2 The above underlines the importance of a preventive public health approach that focuses on reducing the risk factors that cause neglect.¹⁷

5. The role of Early Help in addressing neglect

5.1 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. It is equally important that practitioners are alert to the danger of drift and 'start again' syndrome.

¹⁶ The Ofsted thematic inspection on joint working between children's services, adult mental health services highlighted the lack of signposting to early help by adult services and particular delays in considering the impact of paternal mental ill health on children. *What about the children?* Ofsted 2012; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120122

¹⁷ Liverpool's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment : www.liverpool.gov.uk/jsna

5.2 Working Together (2013) requires local agencies to have in place effective assessments of needs of children who may benefit from early help services. In Liverpool, agencies should effectively utilise the Early Help Assessment Tool (EHAT), formerly known as 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 families.

5.3 In order to address the relatively high levels of neglect in Liverpool it is important that all agencies effectively use the EHAT to assess and plan services for children and families. Likewise, it is important there is continued longer term co-ordinated support, post social care involvement, to enable parents to sustain the change in the care given to children.

6. Guiding Principles

This Strategy rests on key principles which provide a strategic framework:

- a) enabling a shared understanding of neglect and the safety, well-being and development of children is the overriding priority.
- b) ensuring the early recognition and identification of the signs and symptoms of neglect and the importance of effective collaboration amongst agencies co-ordinated through the EHAT, (Early Help Assessment Tool).
- c) early help needs to be of a kind and duration that improves and sustains the safety of children and young people into the future.
- d) children with additional needs such as special education needs and disabilities are potentially more acutely vulnerable¹⁸.
- e) beneficiary engagement is critical therefore the views of children and young people and their families with regards to 'what works' will inform the development and implementation of effective interventions.
- f) ensuring a 'Whole-Family' approach is owned by all stakeholders.
- g) all agencies need to consider historical information to inform the present position and identify families at risk of inter-generational neglect.
- h) ensuring effective information sharing to inform assessments and evaluations of risk.

¹⁸ The Ofsted thematic inspection *Protecting disabled children* identified delays in disabled children who were suffering neglect receiving appropriate services. Protecting disabled children, Ofsted, 2012; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resouces/120122

- i) agencies need to challenge each other about improvement made by families and its sustainability.
- j) work with children and young people needs to be measured by its impact on outcomes.
- k) suitable statutory action needs to be taken if insufficient progress is achieved and methods have been unsuccessful in addressing levels of risk present.
- l) significant regard needs to be given to the overlap between neglect and other forms of child maltreatment such as domestic abuse and substance misuse etc.

7. Strategic Aims and Objectives:

7.1 Liverpool aims to ensure early recognition of neglect and improve agency responses to children and young people affected by neglect through strong and effective multi-agency leadership. To that end the strategy has 4 core objectives.

These are:

- a) **To secure collective commitment to addressing neglect across all partner agencies and to demonstrate effective leadership in driving the appropriate system, culture and process changes required forward.**
 - b) **To improve awareness and understanding of neglect across the whole partnership. This includes a common understanding of neglect and the thresholds for intervention.**
- The Liverpool Safeguarding Children Board Document - 'Responding to Need Guidance and the Levels of Need Framework' has been designed with partners from across the Children's Trust and the LSCB to ensure that children's needs are responded to at an appropriate level and in a timely way. The guidance provides clear and robust thresholds.
 - Staff across the children's workforce will be expected to undertake training, (basic and advanced level), so that there is consistency of practice and application of thresholds. Each agencies' lead for safeguarding will be expected to ensure that staff within their agency has accessed the training.
- c) **To improve the recognition, assessment and response to children and young people living in neglectful situations before statutory intervention is required, including the appropriate use of assessment tools.**
- The Liverpool EHAT (Early Help Assessment Tool) should be used in order to draw agencies together to identify needs and early support for a family. The assessment process for children and young people living in neglectful situations should be timely, robust, multi-agency; child focused and incorporate the views of the child/young

person and family. Support should be co-ordinated by a practitioner (lead professional) with whom the family have an effective relationship.

- Neglect themed assessment tools currently used by children's social care will be reviewed and refreshed to ensure their effectiveness in measuring what has changed in a family over a period of time, and (as appropriate) providing evidence for statutory interventions.
- Information will be effectively shared across partner agencies in order to build up a full picture of the needs of the child or young person and their family, including historical information. This process will also help to identify areas of support which can be accessed at an early stage, for example community and third sector organisations.
- Once developed, Liverpool's Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) will play a significant role in supporting more robust information sharing.¹⁹ The development of the MASH will include a responsive system that adopts a 'step-up' & 'step-down' approach so that there is a continuous conversation about children's needs which avoids repeat assessments.
- Practitioners will be provided with training that will equip with the skills to effectively recognise, assess and respond to concerns of neglect.

d) To ensure the effectiveness of service provision.

- Evidence-based practice will be developed and promoted to ensure the use of effective interventions that work for children, young people and their families.
- Work with children and young people will be measured by its impact on outcomes. The views of children and young people (the Voice of the Child) and their families with regards 'what works' will inform the development and implementation of effective interventions.
- Multi-agency audits undertaken by the Liverpool Safeguarding Children's Board's audit sub group will also inform the effectiveness of interventions. The audits will seek evidence that the 'Voice of the Child' has been considered in all assessment, planning a review processes.
- A Joint Commissioning Framework will direct commissioning intentions for early help and whole family approaches to ensure maximum effectiveness, impact and value.

8. Governance and accountability

8.1 Governance will be provided by Liverpool's Children's Trust Board (a sub group of the Health and Wellbeing Board) and challenge will be provided by Liverpool's Local

¹⁹ A MASH is a centre which brings together agencies (and their information) in order to identify risks to children at the earliest point and respond with the most effective interventions. The purpose of the MASH is to make best decisions which will keep children safe.

Safeguarding Children's Board. The Children's Trust Board will monitor progress against the strategic objectives on a quarterly basis. The Local Safeguarding Children's Board will challenge the Children's trust Board on the effective delivery of the strategy via regular outcome indicator progress reports.

9. Key indicators for measurement of the effectiveness of the strategy

9.1 It is important that measures of success are established and agreed. The following outcome indicators will demonstrate the effectiveness of the strategy and its implementation:

- a) Reduction in the number of re-registrations under the category of neglect.
- b) Reduction in the number of repeat referrals to Care Line post Single Assessment
- c) Reduction in persistent school absenteeism
- d) Reduction in the number of Looked After Children
- e) Increase in the number of 'open' EHATs completed per agency (proxy indicator)

It should be acknowledged that in the short to medium term, through improved recognition of neglect etc. there may be an increase in some of the above indicators.

9) Delivery Plan The plan outlines the activities required to deliver the objectives of this strategy. Attached (Appendix 1)