

MULTI AGENCY NEGLECT STRATEGY 2014 - 2015

Our Vision: “The neglect of children of all ages remains one of the biggest challenges for the MSCB and its partners in Manchester. The prevalence of neglect in the city is higher than the national average and we need to accelerate the work and plans we already have to address this. This strategy is the cornerstone on which we can improve our attempts to effectively tackle neglect. Children and young people of all ages have a right to be looked after properly and we are determined that this remains our overarching priority”. **Ian Rush | Independent Chair MSCB**

BACKGROUND

Awareness of child neglect and its consequences on future wellbeing and development of children has increased during the last two decades. Neglect remains notoriously difficult to define, and research shows that it often co-exists with other forms of abuse and adversity. Neglect causes great distress to children and can lead to poor health, educational and social outcomes in the short and long term, and can also be potentially fatal. Consequences can also include an array of 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. (Taylor & Bridge 2005).

The proportion of children who experience neglect remains unacceptably high and neglect is the primary category of why children become subject to a Child Protection Plan. The purpose of this document is to set out the strategic aims and objectives of Manchester’s approach to tackling neglect. This strategy also identifies key principles under which work around neglect should be undertaken, and identifies these key priority areas of work in order to improve Manchester’s response to neglect. This strategy has been developed in conjunction with multi-agency partners working within Manchester and should be considered alongside other key strategies, policies and procedures, which affect children across the Manchester areas, such as “The Early Help Strategy 2013 – 2015” and “Multi-agency level of needs (Threshold) document”.

CONTEXT

Measure	Figure
Children subject to a Child Protection Plan	852 (Sept 2013)
Percentage of children subject to a Child Protection Plan under the category of neglect	48%
Number of children Looked After	1308 (Sept 2013)

STRATEGIC AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

In Manchester it is recognised that tackling neglect remains a key priority area for multi-agency professionals and that early recognition of neglect and improvement of agencies responses to neglect is vital in order to improve the outcomes of children in the Manchester area. We will do this by agreed thresholds and a common approach through multi-agency training and ensuring families engage effectively with agencies.

The strategy has three core objectives:

1. Ensuring the awareness and understanding of neglect, both within and between agencies working in Manchester. This includes a common understanding of neglect and the thresholds for access to agencies.
2. To ensure the children and young people living in neglectful situations receive appropriate and timely intervention and support services.
3. Developing, reviewing and improving a multi-agency response to neglect.

KEY PRINCIPLES

The strategy rests on key principles which provide a strategic framework.

- Enabling a shared understanding of neglect and the safety, wellbeing and development of children is the over-riding priority
- Collaboration amongst agencies is vital to ensure timely identification, assessment and support
- Agencies must ensure that practitioners are trained to recognise and tackle neglect for children with special needs and disabilities.
- Children and young people should expect consistency both in the practitioners and the support offered
- Early indicators of neglect are recognised so intervention can be made as early as possible
- The strategy will be inclusive of participation of service users and learn from the experiences of families living with neglect
- 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
- 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 requires professionals to be curious about family circumstances and events and also requires professionals to challenge each other about improvement made by families and its sustainability
- Work with children and young people will be measured by its impact on outcomes. Statutory services may need to take action if insufficient progress is achieved, when other methods have been unsuccessful or the level of risk presented to the child becomes unacceptable

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STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The strategy has three core objectives, these are:

1. To improve the awareness and understanding of neglect, both within and between agencies working in Manchester. This includes a common understanding of neglect and the thresholds for access to agencies.

- a) A common understanding of neglect between and within agencies is crucial to allow effective identification and a common language.
- b) Understanding of each agency's thresholds for action (and an acceptance that they may not be in alignment) will allow effective and meaningful peer challenge around cases of neglect.
- c) Working effectively between services working with children and adults, in a total family approach.

2. To improve the recognition and assessment of children and young people living in neglectful situations before statutory intervention is required, including the use of appropriate assessment tools.

- a) The Manchester Common Assessment Framework (MCAF) could be used in order to draw agencies together to identify need and support for a family. This assessment process may be complemented by the use of appropriate, recommended assessment tools specifically developed in relation to neglect. 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 family. This support should be delivered by a practitioner that the family have an effective relationship with.
- b) Neglect-themed assessment tools should be used in conjunction with the MCAF to support the measurement of what has changed in a family over a period of time, or providing supporting evidence for statutory intervention. These assessment tools should sign-post practitioners to seeking historical information and raise awareness of the nature of neglect in its presenting features. Practitioners should also be encouraged to use these assessment tools in a dynamic way, to ensure that progress can be measured over time, for example by repeat assessment.
- c) Through the use of the MCAF, complemented by neglect-themed assessment tools, information should be shared effectively across partner agencies in order to build up a full picture of the needs of the child or young person and their family. This process will also help to identify additional areas of support which can be accessed at an earlier stage, for example community resources, third sector organisations, agency project work, faith communities or extended family (where appropriate). Manchester has an "Early Help Strategy" which can be accessed on the Manchester Safeguarding Children Board website.
- d) Clear and robust thresholds should be identified, and effective communication between all agencies should be established (with an understanding of the requirement to share information). Therefore, where additional need has been identified (and this need cannot be met by a single agency), further work is carried out in a coordinated way, where planning needs are recorded having involved the family and a shared understanding of progress and outcomes, which both practitioners and families are committed to. This can be done through the MCAF. The Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) may have a role in collating information at this stage. The Multi-Agency Level of Needs (Threshold) Document can be accessed on the MSCB website.
- e) Develop and promote evidence based practice and effective interventions that work for children and families where neglect is prevalent on a wide, multi-agency basis.

3. Developing and sustaining an agreed, early multi-agency response to neglect.

- a) Manchester continues to look at more effective alternative approaches to child protection planning for children subject to child protection plans under the category of neglect.
- b) Relevant developments in service provision are promoted and clear for practitioners on a multi-agency basis.
- c) Supporting practitioners to allow them to build additional multi-agency support following on from their assessment via the MCAF process.
- d) Providing practitioners with effective skills and tools to work with families experiencing neglect.
- e) Supporting practitioners to resolve common problems when working with families experiencing neglect.