

# Oxfordshire Neglect Strategy

2020 - 2023

**Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board**



## 1. Our Vision and guiding principles

We need to understand and act on the 'lived experience' of the child who is suffering neglectful circumstances and where possible support their family to change.

A local child who suffered extreme neglect would like all professionals to remember:

**'The future will always change'**

We aim to reduce the impact of neglect on the emotional and physical well-being of children in Oxfordshire by identifying it earlier within families as part of our early help and preventative approach and through partnership working to support parents to enable change. We are intervening early because we know how damaging the long-term impact of neglect is to children.

### What is neglect?

"Neglect is the ongoing failure to meet a child's basic needs and the most common form of child abuse. A child might be left hungry or dirty, or without proper clothing, shelter, supervision or health care. This can put children and young people in danger. And it can also have long term effects on their physical and mental well-being." <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/neglect/>

### Our Guiding Principles

#### For children and families

- We will recognise the 'lived experience' of children and young people and listen to and act on their voice at all times.
- We are committed to a 'Whole Family' (Think Family) approach and the involvement of all family members and especially fathers.
- All partners will prioritise identifying neglect early for all children, including older children\* and coordinating assistance through early help processes.
- Our communication and information sharing across agencies and with families will be the best that we can make it.
- We will ensure that our support and interventions are backed up by evidence that they will be effective and make a difference to the outcomes for children, young people and their families.
- We will ensure that our interventions are timely and that children do not continue to experience circumstances where their well-being and life chances are jeopardised.
- We aim to deliver a public health message about neglect to whole communities.

#### For our workforce

- Our most senior managers will lead by example and actively drive our work to tackle neglect and improve outcomes for children experiencing neglect and ensure this is a top priority and highly visible issue within our agencies and across our partnerships.
- We will ensure that our practitioners and managers are confident in working

with neglect and able to identify it early, recognise a concern and what action needs to be taken to achieve the best outcomes, using language that is appropriate to the whole family.

- We will ensure our practitioners are mindful of diversity, additional vulnerabilities and special needs and disabilities so that children and young people have equal rights to protection from neglect.
- We will make sure that practitioners have enough time to reflect and receive good quality supervision and multi-agency training to support their work.
- We will ensure that the tools and interventions we use are effective and evidence based to achieve the best outcomes for children and families.
- We will measure success based on positive outcomes e.g. readiness for school; inclusion in school; peer support and challenge; resilience; positive relationships with adults and peers.

[\\*https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/growing-up-neglected-a-multi-agency-response-to-older-children](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/growing-up-neglected-a-multi-agency-response-to-older-children)

## **Our governance arrangements**

The Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (OSCB) has established a Neglect Strategy Task and Finish Group jointly chaired by senior leaders in Oxford Health and Children’s Social Care and supported by a multi-agency Practitioner Forum who advise and champion our work to tackle neglect. The energy and commitment of the Practitioner Forum has been commended and we are committed to ensuring it is at the heart of our work and drives our direction of travel. We will review whether the forum would be even more effective, with greater engagement, if it were held on a locality basis in each of the three areas, north, central and south.

There will be an overarching Action Plan managed by the Strategy Group (Appendix 1). In addition, each member agency of the Task and Finish Group (App 5) will develop its own Neglect Action Plan based on suggested common core components (App 2 & 4) and report back to each quarterly meeting, in order to ensure a more robust ownership and responsibility at an individual as well as a collective agency basis.

The Neglect Strategy Group reports back to the OSCB Business Group on a quarterly basis and a challenge event on the impact of the revised strategy on the child’s lived experience will be held later in 2020. The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) Executive Group is taking a keen interest in how the work to tackle neglect is progressed.

## **2. What children and young people have told us**

In March 2020 the Children’s Trust Board undertook a second audit of how well children and young people feel they are supported by the range of services set up to meet their needs. These quotes selected from 150 responses powerfully support the need for consistent relationships, the importance of being listened to and sharing information.

“I couldn’t have been happier with my experience with most services I use. Ranging from mental health to health services.”

“Mental health services - too long to wait for consultation.”

“Key2 Futures Oxford was just fantastic always on the other end of the phone when needed and Mayday Trust - I have a coach that meets me every week and checks if I'm ok most days.”

“Schools and other services (NHS etc) need to share more information between each other in order to help students more.”

“No one listens because every adult believes they know better than every child in the world.”

### 3. What inspections, reviews, audits and performance reporting have told us

The strategic direction of our work on neglect has been incrementally influenced by the following:

- Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services in April 2018,
- Neglect Peer Review in July 2018 led by Directors of Children's Services,
- Ofsted Focused Visit to Oxfordshire in February 2020,
- Partnership Learning Review relating to two living children, who suffered extreme neglect, despite being known to universal services, which reported to the Case Review and Governance Sub Group in March 2020.
- Multi-agency neglect audits undertaken in 2018/19/20.
- Our Neglect Dashboard which reports on performance at each quarterly meeting of the Neglect Strategy Group.

There is a stark consistency to the findings from all this activity which has led to the refresh of our strategy and a renewed commitment to improvement.

#### 3.1 Ofsted Focused Visit 2020

The inspectors at the Focused Visit 2020 noted that the majority of children in need and those subject to a child protection plan receive an effective service at an appropriate level of intervention. However, in relation to neglect they specifically commented:

“They (*the local authority*) are not complacent about the continuing stubborn challenge of addressing the cumulative impact of neglect for children. A small minority of children are living for too long in circumstances where they continue to experience neglect and emotional harm. Management oversight and planning require strengthening so that drift and delay are prevented and that all children's lives improve quickly.”

“Action taken by the local authority and the safeguarding partnership to ensure that the issue of neglect is effectively addressed has had limited impact on improving practice. The local authority is aware that there is more to do. Although the issue is more visible, training has been provided, and professionals can access a good range of resources and tools, these are not being routinely used. In a few cases, there is an over-reliance on the ability of very vulnerable and compromised parents to be able to enforce written

agreements to keep their children safe. This includes women or men experiencing domestic abuse. Progress, or lack of progress, is not routinely measured or specifically assessed and analysed. As a result, social workers, supported by early help workers, cannot be certain about the extent of progress being made or of when more assertive action needs to be taken.”

They also raised concerns about the attendance of partners at child protection conferences and reviews. Cases seen included important decisions made to end child protection plans without significant agencies being present and involved in those decisions.

### **3.2 Peer Review in 2018**

Whilst the Peer Review was largely positive about the direction of travel and quality of our neglect work there were some important recommendations relating to taking a more outcome focused approach to our work with a stronger research and evidence base to our interventions. We are progressing this through an innovative partnership with Oxford Brookes University from 2019-22.

### **3.3 Partnership Learning Review findings**

The Partnership Learning Review into children living in circumstances of chronic neglect has also raised a number of important challenges for the partnership and has stated that the Neglect Strategy Group, in its leadership role within the safeguarding children partnership, should take responsibility for the oversight of all recommendations in the report and ensure they have impact. These include:

- Developing a case study to demonstrate the impact of improved practice within the school in question which can be shared with other schools and education settings. The Education Safeguarding Advisory Team (ESAT) Manager should be tasked with sharing this case study and other good practice models in neglect, disguised compliance and thresholds, with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) in schools to show how to achieve practice change. Crucially good practice models should cover:
  - Thresholds of need
  - Logging and recording concerns
  - Single & multi-agency communication

The ESAT Manager should then collate feedback from the schools within the schools' s.175 / 157 annual return as to how the learning has changed practice in all schools.

- Ensuring that there is a cultural shift across universal services so that Early Help Assessments continue to be developed as a helpful multi-agency tool to use to understand a family's story/provision of support services and that there are clear messages as to how an Early Help Assessment can help them.
- Updating our neglect action plan so that it addresses the on-going systemic and practice issues of identifying, naming and responding to all types of neglect. Key actions should include:
  - responding to adolescent neglect
  - understanding practitioner barriers to using the Neglect Portal
  - ensuring Housing colleagues have sound knowledge and skills in identifying neglect
  - seeking evidence that conversations about neglect are happening at the earliest point

- seeking evidence that colleagues in universal services e.g. school staff/midwives/health visitors know where to seek advice.
- Promoting the use of Family Group Conferencing earlier in the pathway for children and young people in need of support in their families via Early Help and Child in Need arrangements.

### **3.4 Multi-agency audit work**

Our multi-agency audit work on neglect reinforces the findings of the Focused Visit and Partnership Review. The cross-agency findings include:

- the need for chronologies to have a greater focus on child impact;
- increasing opportunities for multi-agency reflection on casework progression to provide a deeper understanding of each other’s responsibilities, perspectives and challenges, potentially enabling a reduction in agency barriers to timely, collaborative intervention to reduce the negative impact of neglect
- Multi-agency colleagues need to know what is expected of parents/carers, and of the local authority, during formal processes and to understand legal frameworks to identify level of risk and whether there should be statutory intervention e.g. pre-proceedings.
- Practitioners need to use the right tools at the right time to strengthen their evidence base in relation to the “tipping point” for when safeguarding action is required to tackle neglect.
- Consider building on bespoke teaching sessions in health to other key groups of professionals focusing on ‘Having difficult conversations’ to increase knowledge and skills on how to engage challenging parents and how to discuss neglect in the family home and the impact on the children within it.

### **3.5 Neglect Dashboard**

Our Neglect Dashboard continues to highlight the fact that we are not tackling neglect early enough and too few children who go to be Children in Need or subject to Child Protection Plans have been identified and supported at early help stages, we are not using our available tools sufficiently to help identify neglect early and we are concerned about the high numbers of children who are suffering neglect who are absent from school.

## **4. How we will tackle neglect**

We have drawn on the learning from all these important sources of feedback and revised our Neglect Action Plan 2020 to reflect this. The Neglect Strategy Group will take a lead on implementing the plan on behalf of OSCB and will report back on progress to the Business Group on a quarterly basis.

Whilst some agencies have specific responsibilities because of their roles and statutory functions, we are all responsible for working effectively together, sharing information and spotting the signs of neglect early and making sure that the right people are involved, who are able to support families to change and enable their children to thrive and be successful. We will all support each other and share our expertise to develop practical, focused and impactful action plans. We will do this in accordance with Chapter 1 of the statutory guidance Working Together 2018.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/729914/Working\\_Together\\_to\\_Safeguard\\_Children-2018.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/729914/Working_Together_to_Safeguard_Children-2018.pdf)

We will tackle neglect by using the tools, interventions, resources and training available to us on the revised OSCB [Neglect Practitioner Portal](#)

We will use:

- The Child Care Development Tool\*\* to identify neglect early.
- Graded Care Profile for more focused work to tackle neglect.
- Team around the Family and Threshold of Needs matrix to ensure the right people are supporting the whole family early and needs and risks are identified so that additional support or more specialist interventions can be provided if necessary.
- Multi-agency planning forums to support families and reduce risk.
- Multi-agency chronologies\*\* to ensure information is shared across key partners to support and protect children.
- The Outcome Star to measure progress and success.
- Professionals in Adult Services for specialist advice to help support parents if they have specific needs as part of our Family Safeguarding Plus offer – specifically in relation to mental health, domestic abuse and substance misuse.

\*\*Oxford Brookes University is currently evaluating the use of our neglect assessment tools and our approach to multi-agency chronologies and will report back in 2022.

Our universal and targeted services like health, housing, voluntary and community sector services, schools, education and early years settings all have a key role in recognising signs of neglect and bringing agencies together to assess and plan to intervene and support early or refer on to more specialist help if necessary. We are involving Adult Services and Community Safety partners to ensure that practitioners and managers from all services are alert to signs and risk of neglect for children.

We recognise that neglect often co-exists with other forms of abuse or risk factors so this strategy will link with work undertaken in other areas such as domestic abuse, substance misuse, adult mental ill health, child poverty etc.

## **5. Impact of COVID-19 pandemic**

Everything that we stand by in this strategy holds good in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, but we also recognise that this crisis has the potential for instances of neglect to be masked, because children are less visible and seeing fewer other trusted adults outside their immediate family. This has implications on services during recovery and beyond.

We are very mindful that the impact of the pandemic is, and will continue to be, far-reaching in terms of influencing new ways of working and the remodelling of services. We are determined to keep the needs of children and young people living in neglectful circumstances in the forefront of our thinking as we make any changes.

## **6. In conclusion**

We are determined, as a partnership, to learn from good practice and areas in which we need to improve, so that we identify and tackle neglect early and prevent and reduce the damage to children of the long-term impact of neglect.

## Appendix 1: Overarching Neglect Action Plan: to be overseen by Neglect Strategy Group

Objective	Action	Lead	Time-frame	RAG/Progress
1. Ensure each agency is held to account for their individual and collective responsibility in delivering on improving the lived experience of children who are neglected and their outcomes.	1.1 At each Neglect Strategy Group meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review each agency action plan and overarching action plan and ensure actions are being progressed and co-ordinated;</li> <li>- Address system wide issues, practice and impact;</li> <li>- Review performance/impact through revised Dashboard;</li> <li>- Identify any key issues to be escalated to OSCB/MASA.</li> </ul>	Strategy Group Chairs	Ongoing	
	1.2 Be held to account through quarterly reporting to OSCB; MASA as required; and a report to respond to the OSCB challenge: <i>“Will the Neglect Strategy impact on the lived experience of children and young people in neglectful households today?”</i>	All  All	1/4ly  March 21	
2. Ensure practice and development is evidence led and outcome focussed.	2.1 Refresh the Neglect Performance Dashboard so that it focuses on fewer measures that can demonstrate impact for children and that we are identifying neglect and intervening earlier.	OCC Performance Team	July 20	
	2.2 In partnership with Oxford Brookes, in-depth review of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The effectiveness of our neglect assessment tools; use of Multi-Agency Chronologies;</li> <li>- The barriers and facilitators to practitioners using neglect tools and chronologies;</li> <li>- Implement best practice findings.</li> </ul>	Oxford Health, CSC, Oxford Brookes	June 22	
3. Disseminate best practice across all services, via the active engagement of the ambassadors in the NPF. Practitioners contribute to learning, practice/service improvement.	Review Neglect Practitioner Forum and consider whether it would be more effective and ensure broader engagement and ownership if there were three locality groups in each of the north, central and south areas.  Meetings to be jointly led by partners in Health and Children’s Social Care.  Consideration to be given to holding meetings virtually.	Leads for Practitioner Forum	Sept 20	



4. Improve practice in the light of the learning from the Partnership Review (PR) of March 2020 in relation to two children known to universal services who suffered chronic neglect.	4.1 Producing a good practice case study of improved practice within the school attended by the children in the Partnership Learning Review, for sharing across schools and education settings. Good practice model to cover: - thresholds of need; - logging and recording concerns; - single and multi-agency communication.	PLR Panel/ OSCB Business Unit Manager	Sept 20	
	4.2 ESAT Manager to share the case study and other good practice models in neglect, disguised compliance and thresholds, with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) in schools to show how to achieve practice change.	ESAT Manager	Dec 20	
	4.3 The ESAT Manager to collate feedback from the schools within the schools' S.175 / 157 annual returns regarding how the learning has changed practice in all schools.	ESAT Manager	July 21	
5. Ensure that there is a cultural shift across universal services so that Early Help Assessments continue to be developed as a helpful multi-agency tool to use to understand a family's story/provision of support services and that there are clear messages as to how an Early Help Assessment can help them.	5.1 Set up an Early Help Assessment Task and Finish Group to carry out a multi-agency review, take stock of where we are, identify what is going well and what are the challenges that need to be addressed. This group should be a Task and Finish Group of the Learner Engagement/Early Help Board and also report to the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board via the Neglect Strategy Group.	Head of EH/ MASH; Health lead	Oct 20	
	5.2 Request that the Learner Engagement/Early Help Board and the Safeguarding in Education Sub-Group review the data, take action to reverse the trends and report back to the Neglect Strategy Group on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low numbers of children who are on CIN/CP Plans for neglect who have been subject to an Early Help Assessment;</li> <li>• High levels of school absence for children identified as suffering from neglect;</li> <li>• Assurance that all early help practitioners/staff in universal and school based services and settings know where to go for help and advice.</li> </ul>	LE/EH Board; SiE Sub-Group	Oct 20	

## Appendix 2: Suggested Core Components of Individual Agency Action Plans

<b>Address the ongoing systemic and practice issues of identifying, naming and responding to all types of neglect</b>
1. To ensure <i>all</i> colleagues have sound knowledge and skills in identifying and naming neglect early (housing named specifically).
2. To seek evidence that conversations about neglect are happening at the earliest point.
3. To ensure management oversight and planning is strengthened to prevent drift and delay and progress is measured to clarify whether more assertive action needs to be taken to tackle neglect.
4. To seek evidence that colleagues in universal services e.g. school staff/midwives/health visitors know where to seek advice.
5. To understand and overcome practitioner barriers to using the Neglect Portal.
6. To promote and embed use of toolkits and in particular Child Care Development Checklist and Multi Agency Chronologies to ensure practitioners use the right tools at the right time to strengthen their evidence base in relation to the “tipping point” for when safeguarding action is required to tackle neglect.
7. To ensure attendance at child protection conferences/reviews and active participation in decision-making either in person or virtually.
8. To clarify and embed response to adolescent neglect.
9. To enhance training opportunities by building into all modules of neglect training the use of the Child Care Development Tool/Multi-Agency Chronologies and ‘Having difficult conversations’.
10. To contribute to multi-agency reflection through case mapping in core groups.
11. To identify agency response to COVID-19 recovery on new ways of working, service delivery and modelling in tackling neglect.
12. Any other areas to be determined by each agency according to self-assessment of priorities to tackle neglect.

### Appendix 3: Additional actions for Children’s Social Care

Objective	Action
1. Facilitate and embed use of Multi-Agency Chronologies (MAC)	1.1 Plan for electronic platform for ease of collation in LCS.
	1.2 Build into PSW consultations.
	1.3 Increase focus on child impact in chronologies.
2. Ensure system is in place to monitor attendance of partners at child protection conferences and reviews either in person or virtually and provide robust and accurate feedback to agencies.	2.1 Establish a robust process for collating, distributing, monitoring and improving partner attendance at conferences and reviews, overseen by PAQA/OSCB.
	2.2 Review mechanisms for immediate feedback to agencies of non-attendance and impact on decision making and outcomes.
3. Embed multi-agency learning from findings of multi-agency neglect audit work across the partnership.	3.1 Increase opportunities for multi-agency reflection on casework progression through case mapping in core groups to provide a deeper understanding of each other’s responsibilities, perspectives and challenges and to prevent drift and delay.
	3.2 Ensure partners know what is expected of parents/carers, and of the local authority, during formal processes by sharing pre-proceedings with core group members at first core group following decision for pre-proceedings.
	3.3 Provide suitable training for partners on relevant law, pre-proceedings and the Public Law Outline – with an emphasis on child impact recording and understanding pre-proceedings process.
	3.4 Review tools in use to identify what is good practice and ensure practitioners use the right tools at the right time to strengthen their evidence base in relation to the “tipping point” for when safeguarding action is required to tackle neglect.

4. Provide guidance on use of IT and social media e.g. photography, skype etc.	Launch and embed guidance on use of IT and social media.
5. Promote use of Family Group Conferences (FGC) earlier in the pathway.	Promote and evidence use of FGC earlier in the pathway for children and young people in need of support in their families via Early Help and Child in Need arrangements.

#### Appendix 4: Proforma for Individual Agency Action Plans

Objective	Action	Input	Desired outcome	Lead	Time-scale	RAG/Progress

#### Appendix 5: List of agencies in the Neglect Strategy Group who will provide a plan

Oxfordshire County Council, Children's Social Care  
 Oxfordshire County Council, Education Service  
 Oxfordshire County Council, Public Health  
 Oxfordshire County Council, Adult Social Care  
 Oxford Health, NHS Foundation Trust  
 Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group  
 Oxford University Hospitals  
 Thames Valley Police  
 City and District Councils led by Oxford City Council  
 National Probation Service  
 Community Rehabilitation Service  
 Children's Strategic Commissioning  
 John Henry Newman School to review potential plan with a view to sharing with other schools

## Appendix 6: Glossary

CIN/CP	Children in Need/Child Protection
CSC	Children's Social Care
EH/LE Board	Early Help/Learner Engagement Board
ESAT	Education Service Advisory Team
FGC	Family Group Conferencing
IT	Information Technology
LADO	Local Authority Designated Officer
LCS	Children's Social Care Management Information System
MASA	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements Executive Group (Senior Safeguarding Partners)
MASH	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub
NPF	Neglect Practitioner Forum
OCC	Oxfordshire County Council
OSCB	Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board
PAQA	Performance, Audit and Quality Assurance Sub Group
PR	Partnership Review
PSW	Principal Social Worker
SiE	Safeguarding in Education Sub-Group