

SANDWELL MULTI-AGENCY NEGLECT STRATEGY 2022 – 2024: TACKLING NEGLECT



Document Control

Version Control/amendment	Date
Jade Maynard	07.01.2022

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Foreword

A message from Lesley Hagger, the Chair for Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership:

Sandwell's multi-agency strategic partners are committed to ensuring the early identification of neglect and seeks to ensure that all agencies work together so that anyone who comes into contact with children and young people is able to recognise and respond to cases where a child or young person may be at risk of being neglected or at risk of harm from neglect. Neglect has been identified as a priority for Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership (SCSP).

SCSPs ambition is for all children and young people growing up in Sandwell to live in safe environments, with their needs being met to enable them to reach their full potential and enjoy the best possible life. Our overarching aim is to reduce levels of neglect and prevent neglect where possible in Sandwell.

The vision of Sandwell's multi-agency Neglect Strategy is to build a shared understanding of neglect, ensure that all agencies are able to recognise neglect at the earliest opportunity and provide timely appropriate responses, with the intention to evaluate our practice, building on good existing practice and identifying gaps in service delivery and provision.

Partnership working is a fundamental part of achieving positive change for children and families; commitment from partners alongside listening to the voices of children and young people and understanding their 'lived experiences' will successfully support the aims of this Strategy.

Introduction

The fundamental purpose of this strategy is to provide a framework that underpins Sandwell's approach to working and tackling all forms of child neglect across the borough. The strategy should not be considered in isolation but alongside other key documents and initiatives, including:

- Working Together to Safeguard Children
- Sandwell's Threshold Guidance
- Sandwell's Early Help Strategy

We know that the impact of neglect on children and young people is significant and can be long lasting, including a multi-generational effect of neglect. Neglect causes substantial distress to children and young people, often leading to poor health, education and social outcomes and potentially, can be fatal. Additionally, ensuring we include unborn and under 1's that are recognised as priorities area for Sandwell.

The Department for Education's report "Missed opportunities: indicators of neglect – what is ignored, why, and what can be done?", in November 2014, noted that neglect is the most common form of child maltreatment in England. 43% of children who were the subject of protection plans at that time had experienced neglect. By 2016 this proportion had risen to 46% (Bowyer and Wilkinson, 2017). The Office for National Statistics (ONS) in 2020, reporting the figures from April 2019 to March 2020, revealed that neglect continues to be the most common initial category of abuse, standing at 50.5%.

Neglect affects children of all ages and can involve a single event, or more usually is the persistent failure to meet a child's needs over time, resulting in the cumulative effect of neglect.

Neglect is directly linked to the parent or carer's capacity to recognise and respond to the child's needs and can also be compounded by poverty, poor housing and economic deprivation which can undermine parental resilience. This strategy will help us to focus on real issues where children are prone to neglect such as obesity, dental health, housing/homelessness, missed health appointments,

school readiness and non-school attendance. The JSNA will form part of our consultation and inform the workplan to tackle neglect in Sandwell.

On the 8th June 2021 the SCSP facilitated a conference 'Is neglect being neglected?'. The aim of the conference was to raise awareness on why neglect is a priority for the SCSP, understand how to tackle neglect together and understand factors which contribute to neglect and the impact on children.

Visual Minutes:



Key Principles

Sandwell's Strategy is based upon some key principles which frame a shared recognition and response to neglect for our workforce and provide the strategic framework for addressing our concerns:

- It is essential that practitioners and partners working in Sandwell with children and families have a shared understanding of neglect and its impact on children. It is an expectation that all practitioners and partners will have read and understood this document, as well as Working Together (2018) the safety and wellbeing of children experiencing neglect is a priority.
- Children living with neglect will receive the right help and protection through a shared understanding and application of the threshold of need framework, effective information sharing and timely interventions by all agencies.
- Early recognition followed by timely assessment and intervention.
- A collaborative and consistent approach from all agencies with effective information sharing.
- The voice of the child is a vital part of tackling neglect; hearing their voice and focusing on their 'lived experiences' will inform practice and decision-making at all levels.
- Multi-agency professionals and partners will become confident and knowledgeable by

accessing high quality training and evidenced based resources.

- Children where neglect is suspected or where children are living with neglect will benefit from evidenced-based approaches, tools and services that reduce risks and meet their need. This includes use of the Graded Care Profile 2 (GCP2) across the safeguarding continuum as standard practice.
- Practitioners and partners to be curious about family circumstances and events. Assessments will consider family history and the cumulative impact of neglect, demonstrating a clear understanding of the ways in which different forms of neglect affect children.
- Practitioners to feel confident to challenge families about change and sustainability with historical information to both be considered to inform the current situation and identify children and families with intergenerational neglect.
- Practitioners and partners will challenge each other appropriately to ensure good practice. Escalating procedures will be used effectively to resolve differences in decision making.
- Practitioners will use a strengths-based approach when working with families to promote good parenting through support and interventions, in order to tackle the indicators of neglect.
- The views of children and families must be listened to and considered in services and delivery.
- Learning from Local and National Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPR's) will be disseminated and embedded within practice.

Sandwell's Deprivation

- The Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019 shows Sandwell's average deprivation score as ranked 12th most deprived local authority in England, out of a total of 317. Previous IMD results for this measure show that Sandwell's position has declined slightly relative to other districts in England. Sandwell was the 13th most deprived local authority in 2015.
- Within the West Midlands conurbation there is a central corridor of severe deprivation that runs from Birmingham, through Sandwell, into Wolverhampton, parts of Walsall, and Dudley. The less deprived areas are around the extremities of the conurbation and within the adjoining district of Solihull.
- Sandwell's location at the centre of this deprived urban area means that the Borough does not benefit from having a semi-rural fringe - indeed, Sandwell is the only Metropolitan Borough outside London that does not adjoin a Shire district. The likely impact of a largely deprived hinterland should not be underestimated as a significant limiting factor on the potential to address some of Sandwell's deprivation characteristics.
- England is made up of 32,844 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs), 186 of which are in Sandwell. One in five of Sandwell's LSOAs fall into the most deprived 10% nationally in 2019. A further two-fifths fall into the most deprived 10-20%, so overall 60% of Sandwell's LSOAs fall within the worst 20% nationally, and 97% within the worst 60% nationally, clearly displaying the high levels of deprivation prevalent in large parts of Sandwell.

Neglect in Sandwell

Sandwell Child Protection Profile (Town and Ward Profile) 473 Children.

These tables look at all the current children who are on a Child Protection Plan as of 30 April 2021 by town and ward. As can be seen the highest town rates are Tipton with a rate of 86.5 (this also coincides with the significant high numbers of Child Protection within the Princes End Ward of Tipton with a rate of 13.9 per 1,000 children). The lowest town rates are Oldbury.

Town	Number CP	%	Population U18 of Town	Rate Per 10,000
Oldbury	56	11.8%	12551	44.6
Rowley Regis	80	16.9%	12275	65.2
Smethwick	70	14.8%	16179	43.3
Tipton	89	18.8%	10289	86.5
Wednesbury	68	14.4%	9466	71.8
West Bromwich	90	19.0%	18329	49.1
OOB/Not Recorded	19	4.0%		
Grand Total	473	100.0%	79088	59.8

Sandwell has higher numbers of children on Child Protection Plans due to emotional abuse and less due to physical abuse in comparison to statistical neighbours and national comparators, although neglect is similar to statistical neighbour and national averages.

Category of Abuse	Number Sandwell	% Sandwell	% Statistical Neighbour 2020	% England 2020
Neglect	229	48.4%	47.6%	49.9%
Emotional Abuse	215	45.5%	42.0%	37.8%
Physical Abuse	16	3.4%	6.2%	6.3%
Sexual Abuse	10	2.1%	3.9%	3.7%
Multiple: Neglect, Emotional Abuse	3	0.6%	0.3%	2.3%
Grand Total	473	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Sandwell Child Protection Neglect Profile (town and ward Profile) 229 Children

This tables look at all the current Children who are on a Child Protection Plan due to Neglect as of 30 April 2021 by town and ward (229 Children).

Town	Number CP	%	Population U18 of Town	Rate Per 10,000
Oldbury	32	14.0%	12551	25.5
Rowley Regis	31	13.5%	12275	25.3
Smethwick	29	12.7%	16179	17.9
Tipton	40	17.5%	10289	38.9
Wednesbury	46	20.1%	9466	48.6
West Bromwich	39	17.0%	18329	21.3
OOB/Not Recorded	12	5.2%		
Grand Total	229	100.0%	79088	29.0

Defining Neglect

To recognise and tackle neglect we must establish a clear and consistent understanding of what neglect is. Neglect is difficult to define, with no clear or conclusive standard for 'good practice'.

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) defines neglect as:

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 caregivers)
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment

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

Six Classifications of Neglect

Horwath (2007) identified six different classifications of neglect:

- Medical neglect
- Nutritional neglect
- Emotional neglect
- Physical neglect
- Lack of supervision and guidance.
- Educational Neglect

It is important to note there are particular groups of children who are more vulnerable to experiencing neglect by virtue of their circumstances (Department for Education, 2016). These include, but are not limited to:

- Children with disabilities
- Children vulnerable to exploitation, both sexual and criminal
- Cultural difference
- Children living with parents where there are concerns about poor mental health, domestic violence and abuse, substance misuse
- Children experiencing high levels of poverty and deprivation

We will work with children and young people will be effectively measured by its impact on outcomes for children. Long term improvements will be measured by a reduction in the number of cases reaching the threshold for statutory intervention.

How do our young people in Sandwell define neglect?

This is what neglect looks like for our young people in Sandwell:

For this Strategy we have consulted with a group of care experienced young people who are part of the Sandwell Care Leavers Forum supported by Sandwell Children's Trust. The young adults who are all care leavers, have suffered adversity within their lives. The group met and openly shared their experiences of suffering neglect within their childhood.

Here are some of Sandwell Care Leaver's words....



During the discussion the young people defined neglect as lots of things that included their education, home life, care personally and emotionally, domestic abuse, their environment and mental wellbeing.

Their words to a worker would be

'LISTEN TO THE CHILD'

and

'DO EXTRA DIGGING THIS COULD HELP KEEP CHILDREN SAFE'.

Children with disabilities

Children with disabilities are 3.7 times more likely than other children to be neglected or abused. There can be varied reasons, such as their high care needs and increased vulnerability. As a parent or carer with a child with disabilities, may experience additional challenges or stresses which can exacerbate the potential for neglect and abuse. As a professional you can miss signs of neglect due to the complex needs of the child (SEND | Safeguarding Network - confidence in safeguarding - confidence in safeguarding, 2021).

Educational neglect

Educational neglect is whereby a parent or carer is failing to meet their child's needs in regard to schooling and education. This may be that the parent/carer has not enrolled the child into a school at mandatory age, is not providing stimulating home-schooling environment or support necessary for special education. Educational neglect could be that the parent/carer is deliberately interfering with the child's education, persistent absence from education and or failure to give the child education proper attention and emotional care to support their learning.

Key messages from Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPR's) (previously known as Serious Case Reviews or SCR's)

- Prolonged, entrenched neglect has been a common feature in CSPRs in Sandwell as well as nationally, accounting for 75% of referrals to the National Panel over a 3-year period.
- CSPR's identified the need for a tool to assist professionals in the identification and grading of neglect to ensure that appropriate referrals were made, and action taken. Professionals needed support to recognise, record and monitor early signs of neglect with a tool to give a common language across all disciplines – this led to the implementation of GCP2 tool that is a consistent neglect assessment tool that practitioners can use to understand the level of care a child is receiving.
- Professionals need to understand family background/culture and explore parents' experiences growing up to establish the root causes of neglect. Parents need to be supported to understand this themselves and the impact on their children before being supported to make the necessary changes via practical targeted work. Family history can be explored via the use of a chronology or three generational cultural genograms.
- Midwifery/health services can play a key role in identifying key risk factors during pregnancy to enable assessment at the earliest possible stage.
- Effective information sharing and considering the whole picture gives the best opportunity of identifying the risks posed by neglect.

Risk factors of neglect in SCR/CSPRs

- Trio of vulnerabilities – parental mental ill health, alcohol/substance misuse and domestic violence (current or historic)
- Parents who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in childhood, including those who may have been known to social care i.e. care leavers
- Young parents, including parents living independently for the first time
- Families who come through the 'revolving door' – seeing periods of improvement when services are involved who then struggle to sustain changes independently and are re-referred for support
- Disguised compliance or tokenistic engagement

Protective Factors

- Parental resilience: Manages stress and functions well when faced with challenges, adversity, and trauma
- Social connections: Builds positive relationships that provide emotional, informational, instrumental, and spiritual support
- Knowledge of parenting and child development: Understands child development and parenting strategies that support physical, cognitive, language, social, and emotional development
- Concrete support in times of need: Has access to support and/or services (e.g., healthy food; a safe environment; specialized medical, mental health, social, educational, and legal services, as needed) that address a family's needs and help minimize stress caused by challenges
- Social-emotional competence of children: Encourages family and child interactions that help children develop the ability to communicate clearly, recognize and regulate their emotions, and establish and maintain relationships

Impact of Neglect

There is a considerable amount of research which demonstrates the detrimental damage that is done to children and young people living in situations of neglect that can result in a wide range of harmful problems for a child's wellbeing, early brain development, emotional regulation and cognitive development. Neglect can happen at any age in a child's life, even during pregnancy a mother may

have mental health problems or substance misuse that can lead to damage of the baby's development whilst in the womb (Haynes et al, 2015). Neglect disrupts the ways in which children's brains develop and process information, consequently increasing the risk of emotional, cognitive, attentional and behavioural disorders. Neglect can have a significant and long-lasting impact on development. However, the impact is not easily defined. Different types of neglect can have different consequences. The impact of neglect might manifest differently at different stages of development.

"Neglect is an insidious form of maltreatment. It starves the developing mind of stimulation. It denies the child information and interest about the self and others."
(Howe, 2007)

"Neglect slowly and persistently eats away at children's spirits until they have little will to connect with others or explore the world."
(Erikson and Egeland, Howe, 2005)

Early Help

We recognise the importance of early help with families who experience neglect. Families accessing support at the earliest opportunities through early help services can prevent statutory involvement.

We have established unborn baby network which aims to implement an early he pre-birth pathway which will provide information and advice to professionals, to ensure that pregnant women are enabled to access support services at the right stage in pregnancy.

Within Sandwell we have a network of organisations such as schools, community groups, police, fire, youth services, health and others who have representatives who have been trained in Graded Care Profile (GCP2), an assessment tool which helps practitioners measure the quality of care a child is receiving, to assist in the early identification of neglect. It is important for organisations to work together to improve support for children young people and families.

Through use of GCP2, intervention can be offered much sooner and in identifying the needs a child or a family early on can reduce risk factors and increase protective factors in a child's life.

<https://www.sandwellcsp.org.uk/tackling-neglect/graded-care-profile-gcp2/>

It is more effective to provide early help when problems arise, and early intervention can prevent further problems occurring (Early Intervention Foundation, 2018).

Sandwell's Early Help Strategy aims to enable children and young people in Sandwell to have the best possible experience of growing up, with a wide range of opportunities to grow and develop into healthy, happy individuals and active citizens within our community. The Sandwell Early Help Partnership was established in 2017 as a cross-sector network of local organisations committed to working together to deliver early help to Sandwell families. The initiative takes an asset-based approach to existing provision, aiming to make the most of what we have rather than focusing on deficits or gaps in local capacity. Moving away from the more directive, hierarchical commissioner/ provider relationships seen traditionally, the Partnership aims to support, enable and facilitate its members in their joint working. The Partnership identifies areas or situations where organisations can add value by working together more effectively and confidently and aims to develop better working habits which 'join up' support for families. Support is improved through the sharing of resources, insight, ideas and best practice. Through the work of the Sandwell Early Help Partnership families,

communities, universal and targeted services will all work together more effectively and efficiently to help meet children's and families' needs at the right time.

Our overarching objectives:

PREPARE	PREVENT	PROTECT
<p>Raising the awareness, across the SCSP of understanding neglect and the impact, ensuring there is a clear and consistent approach which governs the multi-agency systems and structures to prevent and tackle Neglect.</p>	<p>To work together across the multi-agency workforce and Sandwell community to establish ways to prevent neglect in Sandwell whilst ensuring there are clear appropriate pathways in preventing neglect at the earliest opportunity.</p>	<p>Ensure partners are stronger at identifying, assessing and intervening in cases of neglect.</p>

How we will achieve our objectives

- We will ensure that all practitioners and partners have access to training and development opportunities to promote the understanding and identification of neglect;
- We will ensure that as part of our Quality Assurance Framework, neglect will be included within our multi-agency audit plan as well as being embedded within our learning and development offer;
- We will disseminate this Strategy to our workforce so that all practitioners and partners understand their role and responsibility in identifying and tackling neglect;
- We will ensure that managers are well equipped to identify common practice 'risks' around neglect (i.e. drift and delay) and manage these through effective supervision and management oversight;
- We will promote the use of evidence-based tools to identify and tackle neglect. The GCP2 tool should be used to assess the parent/carers effort and commitment to the care the child is receiving, identify the presenting strengths, what we are worried about and what resources can be coordinated. The tool can be used to inform decision making, assessments and planning as well as to track improvements, deterioration and or drift;
- We will ensure that the Strategy is robustly monitored through our established governance mechanisms, including an annual report to the SCSP;
- We will target work with families through key partner agencies delivering services to families to raise awareness of neglect and understand the impact of unsafe care on children's development;
- We will promote early identification and recognition of neglect through a range of approaches, such as through education, raising awareness and campaigns with all families and all of the partnership across Sandwell;
- We will highlight best practice and gaps in support for families, ensuring we are informing commissioning and planning of prevention services which are protective of neglect;
- We will speak to families and engage them in the solutions to address issues relating to parenting and their child's care and further enable them to become self-sustaining through their own support networks or early help provision;

Measuring Impact

We will measure the success of our strategy upon the following indicators and will monitor them regularly through performance governance.

- Children, families and frontline practitioners will tell us that things have improved
- Review, monitor and measure the impact of GCP2 tool assessment tool within Sandwell
- Using case study examples to show improvement
- Reduce the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan under the category of neglect for a second time or more
- Increased service requests to Early Help where neglect is an identifying factor
- Increased step-downs from social care to Early Help where neglect is a factor
- Decrease in re-referrals where neglect had been the identifying feature
- Decrease in children being brought into care due to neglect
- Decrease in school exclusions and absenteeism due to neglect
- Reduce the number of young people who are NEET (not in Education, Employment or Training) due to neglect
- Reduce the number of missing episodes of children and young people where neglect is a factor
- Increase the number of children, young people and families supported due to neglect through Early Help plans and assessments.

Whilst the overarching aim is for the numbers of children and young people experiencing neglect is to be reduced it should be recognised that in the short to medium term there will be an increase in reported numbers as a result of the improved recognition of and reporting of neglect.

COVID-19

As the COVID-19 pandemic is on-going across the country it is important to include and recognise the impact of the virus and understand there is a range of different factors that relate to children, young people and families within Sandwell.

The COVID -19 impact inquiry report (July 2021) suggests that the consequences of the virus spreading has led to unmet health needs, mental health problems, educational gaps, increase in unemployment and financial difficulties. For some groups such as young people, disabled people, ethnic minority communities, prisoners, homeless people they have faced many particular challenges. When planning and tackling neglect across Sandwell we will need to be aware of the impact of COVID-19 and consider how we recover from the pandemic nationally and locally.

It was highlighted that inequalities in social and economic condition prior to the pandemic contributed to the high and unequal death toll and that the nation's health should be the highest priority as we rebuild (Build Back Fairer: The COVID-19 Marmot Review, December 2020).

Governance

The governance of and challenge provided to this Strategy will be carried out by the Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership. Multi-agency strategic partners will provide effective scrutiny and challenge to the regularly submitted reports and updates from the Tackling Neglect Sub-Group.

The Tackling Neglect Subgroup:

The focus and remit of work for ‘Sandwell’s Tackling Neglect Subgroup’ (STNS) ambition is to reduce levels of neglect and where possible to prevent neglect from the earliest possible opportunity. Ensuring we have robust systems and processes in place for the early identification of neglect and prevent where possible.

To ensure that children who experience neglect are listened to and safeguarded and that all professionals working with vulnerable families are given the support, knowledge, skills and training required to identify neglect and supporting the families to make appropriate changes.

The subgroup members are representatives from across the multi-agencies, such as health, education, social care, targeted support, police, local authority and SCSP.

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