

Bury Safeguarding Children Partnership



Neglect Strategy

2023/2026

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Bury Safeguarding Children Partnership

Tackling Child Neglect

What is Child Neglect?

Definition. To recognise child neglect and develop effective interventions to tackle child neglect there must be an agreed definition and common understanding of what it is. There are two statutory definitions of child neglect: one for criminal and one for civil purposes.

Child neglect is a criminal offence under the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 where it is defined as failure

"to provide adequate food, clothing, medical aid or lodging for [a child], or if, having been unable otherwise to provide such food, clothing, medical aid or lodging, has failed to take steps to procure it to be provided"

The civil definition of neglect used in child and family law is set out in the Children Act 1989 as part of the test of 'significant harm' to a child. This is expanded upon in Working Together (HM Government 2018 page 104) statutory guidance which describes 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 and development".

A child may experience neglect if a parent or carer fails to or is unable 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).

or

- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

As well as the statutory definition, it is important to have regard to the specific needs of children subsumed under the term 'failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological (and/ or emotional) needs.

- Medical neglect – minimising or denying children's health needs and failing to seek appropriate medical attention or administer medication/treatments
 - Nutritional neglect – failure to thrive/childhood obesity
 - Emotional neglect – unresponsive to a child's basic emotional needs
 - Educational neglect – failure to provide a stimulating environment, support learning or ensure school attendance
 - Physical neglect – not providing appropriate clothing, food, cleanliness and living conditions
 - Lack of supervision and guidance – failure to provide an adequate level of guidance and supervision.
- Horwath (2007)

NICE GUIDANCE ¹ describes child neglect as a situation involving harm to the child or young person. It is the persistent failure to meet the child or young person's basic physical or psychological needs that is likely to result in the serious impairment of their health or development. This may or may not be deliberate. There are differences in how parents and carers choose to raise their children, including the choices they make about their children's healthcare. However, failure to recognise and respond to the child or young person's needs may amount to neglect.

Children can experience neglect in all socio-economic groups, but where they and their families are living in poverty it can be challenging to differentiate between unmet need and neglectful parenting.

It is important that all frontline practitioners can differentiate between:

- Inadequate parenting because of a lack of parenting skills and/or inappropriate expectations of children and/or malice

And

- Inadequate parenting because of systemic issues e.g., social, environmental, or parental risk factors (such as parental depression, anxiety, problematic substance misuse, financial difficulties and homelessness or mental ill health).

Inadequate and neglectful parenting has an adverse impact on children irrespective of the cause or motive. One of the salient features of neglect is a breakdown in the parent-child relationship which becomes a barrier to care-giving (Tanner and Turney, 2000). The difference between a family living in poverty with a strong parent child relationship and one in which the relationship has broken down is important in deciding what to do next.

The kind of intervention and the level of help and support required by children and families must depend on the root cause of the neglectful parenting.

Young Person's Definition of Neglect².

In 2014 Childline undertook a survey to ascertain what children and young people understood to constitute neglect. On the basis that every child and young person has the right to be looked after properly, the children and young people with whom they worked concluded that the absence of some or all the following would be experienced as neglect.

- Clothes that fit and are clean and warm and shoes that fit and keep feet dry.
- Enough to eat and drink
- Protection from dangerous situations
- Somewhere warm, dry and comfortable to sleep
- Help when ill or injured
- Love and care from parents or carers
- Support with education
- Access and help with medication if needed.

¹ NICE, Child abuse and neglect, N.I.f.C.E. (NICE), Editor. 2017, NICE.

² <https://www.childline.org.uk>

Why Bury needs a strategy to tackle Child Neglect

Neglect is the most common form of child maltreatment in the UK, in the year 2020 – 2021 concerns around neglect were identified for half of the children who were the subject of a child protection plan in the UK – this is mirrored in Bury where in the same year of those child protection plans started 48% were in respect of concerns about neglect.

The exact number of children suffering from neglect nationally is unknown, due to its multifactorial nature and complexity. However, trends in surrogate measures of neglect, such as dental caries and numbers of underweight children help to provide an estimate of the prevalence of child neglect.

Child poverty has been rising since 2011 – whilst the actual number of children in England has increased by 3% - the number of children living in poverty has risen by 15% - virtually all this rise being in working families³.

Many children who are not from families in poverty will experience maltreatment and most children in families who are living in poverty will not. 'Poverty is neither a necessary nor sufficient factor but is perhaps the most pervasive factor' associated with child maltreatment including neglect. (Bywater et al's evidence review for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2016)

- The average rate of childhood poverty in Bury (after housing costs) is 32.1%.
- In 2020 -2021 the number of children in England under 16yrs living in low-income families was the same as in 2012 -13 (18.5%) but since 2012 -13 there has been a 26% increase in the number of under 16yr old children in Bury living in low-income families.
- In 2020 -2021, 14.5% of the population of Bury (28,000 people) were classified as 'income-deprived'.

Bury is the 80th most income deprived of the 316 local authorities in England (excluding the Isles of Scilly) and has areas of extreme income related deprivation.

- 30 of the 120 neighbourhoods in Bury are amongst the most income deprived in England.⁴
- In the most deprived neighbourhoods in Bury 54.5% of people are estimated to be income-deprived – compared to 2% in the least deprived neighbourhoods in the borough. Childhood Poverty in Sedgely ward is more than 50%.
- Neighbourhoods within Radcliffe, Moorside and Bury East (c11,000 people) are amongst the 10% most deprived in the country.

"Children who live in the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods are ten times more likely to be looked after or on a child protection plan, than children in the least deprived 10% of areas (Bywaters et al., 2020). Deprivation is a contributory causal factor in child abuse and neglect and a growing body of research is strengthening the evidence of this relationship (Bywaters & Skinner, 2022; Bywaters et al., 2016).⁵

The effect of child neglect is well documented and can have a serious impact on a child, particularly if chronic (long term). The persistent failure to meet children's needs undermines their resilience,

³ Barnard et al 2018 in 'Neglect in the context of poverty and austerity: Frontline Briefing '(2019) www.researchinpractice.org.uk

⁴ www.ons.gov.uk Exploring disparities in income across local authorities 2021

⁵ www.gov.uk Bywaters & Skinner in Independent Review of Children's Social Care 2022.

leading to avoidable health and developmental problems, distress, unhappiness and harm and poorer life chances.

Quite apart from the human cost there is a significant financial cost.

The cost of poverty to the UK is approximately £78 billion per year. To tackle the impact and cost poverty has on individual's lives, it costs £69 billion- £1 in every £5 of all spending on public services (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Counting the cost of UK Poverty, 2016).

An NSPCC study (2017)⁶ determined a conservative estimate of the economic costs of child maltreatment to be in the order of £90,000/child over his/her lifetime – the largest contributors to the overall cost being social care costs, short term health-related costs and the costs resulting from a lower probability of employment.

The independent review of social care⁷ highlighted that the financial cost to society of the poor outcomes for 'Children in Need' and 'Children in Care' is more than 2.3 billion per year (PWC, 2021)⁸

- The demand for children's services in Bury has risen steadily over the last decade. In the period 2013 to 2021, the rate of Child Protection Plans in Bury increased by 70%. The number of children in local authority care in Bury has increased by 5%.⁹

Impact of Neglect on Children

We know that the impact of neglect on children and young people is significant and can be long lasting, including a multi-generational effect. Neglect causes substantial distress to children and young people, often leading to poor health, education and social outcomes and potentially can be fatal. The Department for Education's report "Missed opportunities: indicators of neglect – what is ignored, why and what can be done" (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) and in the year ending March 2021, of all children who became subject of a child protection plan 48% were identified as needing protection from neglect (Department for Education characteristics of children in need 2021 -2022).

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (Annual Report 2020) found that whilst child neglect was the primary form of serious harm to children in only 7% of the serious incidents reported to them, it was an underlying feature of 35% of fatal incidents and 34% of non-fatal incidents and was recognised as a feature in 40% of all deaths related to maltreatment, including in 45% of all Sudden Unexplained Infant Deaths. Their thematic analyses of rapid reviews involving non-accidental injury and suicide identified neglect as a key aspect of harm or early childhood experiences.

This strategy to tackle child neglect in Bury, recognises the human and economic cost of child neglect. The message contained in the Ofsted Thematic Inspection Report (2014) is key to ensuring the strategy is effective.

⁶ Conti, G. et al (2017) The economic cost of child maltreatment in the UK: a preliminary study. London. NSPCC.

⁷ www.gov.uk Independent Review of Children's Social Care 2022

⁸ [The Case for Change - The Independent Review of Children's Social Care \(childreneworld.org.uk\)](http://www.childreneworld.org.uk)

⁹ www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-authority-interactive-tool-lait

Local authorities delivering the most comprehensive action to tackle neglect are more likely to:

‘Have a neglect strategy; use evidence based theoretical models and frameworks for assessing neglect and to have a systematic improvement programme addressing policy, thresholds for actions and professional practice at the front line’.

Ofsted Thematic inspection (2014)

Strategic Aim

The aim of the strategy to tackle neglect in Bury is:

To Prevent Child Neglect and Reduce the Number of Children Experiencing Neglect.

Prevention, Early Recognition and Accurate assessment is at the heart of our strategy, it will require action by all partner agencies - statutory and non-statutory – and collective commitment and leadership to address child neglect and drive the system, culture and process changes required to reduce the prevalence of child neglect in the borough.

This document provides the framework which underpins our approach and should be considered alongside other key documents and initiatives including our:

- Let's Do It Strategy
- Cost of living and Poverty strategy
- Neglect Toolkit
- Early Help Strategy
- Integrated Safeguarding Partnership Continuum of Need

and

- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 (HM Government)
- The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Annual Report 2020

Core Strategic Objectives

1. Prevention.

- We will ensure we understand the scale and impact of child neglect in Bury and evaluate the impact of the support we provide to children and families.
- We will secure collective commitment across all partner agencies to address child neglect and to demonstrate effective leadership in driving forward the system, culture and process changes required to reduce the number of children and young people experiencing neglect.
- We will ensure appropriate service response to children and young people living in neglectful situations before a statutory intervention is required.

2. Recognition.

- We will improve awareness and understanding of neglect across the whole partnership elevating the issue of child and adolescent neglect to the highest level of awareness and priority that this most prevalent form of child maltreatment merits.
- We will improve awareness of the general public in relation to the issue of neglect
- We will ensure that the children's workforce is skilled, competent, and confident to recognise the early signs of neglect and when working with neglectful families.
- We will agree common outcomes, measures, and metrics on the effectiveness of single agency and multi-agency service provision
-

3. Assessment.

- We will ensure effective assessments – which include consideration of socio-economic circumstances, the impact on the individuals concerned, on people's functioning (Poverty Aware Practice) and capacity to change and which take account of family history.
- We will ensure assessments differentiate between unmet need and neglect.

4. Response

- We will ensure response to need is timely and proportionate.
- We will ensure a common, consistent approach to working with children and families, which is evidence based, client centred, strength based and supports sustained behavioural change.
- We will ensure frontline practitioners share a common language and understanding of levels of need and thresholds for help and intervention.

Best Practice Principles

This strategy rests on 8 best practice principles informed by research. These provide the framework for how we will tackle child neglect in Bury.

These best practice principles are consistent with the values and principles described in the Bury 'Continuum of Need'

1. Shared Understanding.

All practitioners and partners working with children and families in Bury will have a 'shared understanding' of child neglect, its causes, presentation, impact and will understand that all children can suffer neglect regardless of social class, culture, disabilities, or age.

All children, regardless of age, disability, ethnicity, culture, special needs, and caring responsibilities will be equally protected from neglect. Practitioners will be aware of the indicators of neglect and pay particular attention to children with special educational needs/disabilities who are potentially more vulnerable. This common understanding and language is provided through a shared approach to working with children and families and through the multi-agency use of shared assessment tools including the Graded Care Profile.

- 2.** Professionals and partners will be '***confident and knowledgeable***' in recognising and responding to child neglect through accessing high quality training and evidenced based resources. Practitioners will be confident to challenge families about change and sustainability and be skilled in the recognition and management of parental non-compliance.
- 3.** All practitioners will use '***strengths-based approaches***' and 'Poverty Aware Practice'¹⁰ when working with families to promote good parenting and tackle the indicators of neglect.
- 4.** The **voice of the child will be heard**, there will be a focus on their lived experience so that assessments and care plans are child and outcome focused with clear timescales and the views of children and families will be listened to and considered in services and delivery.

It is important that children and their families feel in control of and have a say in the types of support they access. This is especially important for children with disabilities and those with communication difficulties.

Ideally, practitioners should be able to speak directly in the first language of the individual. Working through interpreters is a lengthier process and often affects the richness of the information being provided. However, many of our services do not have a workforce that matches the community being served in terms of diversity. This means that interpreters will be needed on occasion. Family members must not be used to interpret sensitive or complex matters.

- 5.** Early indicators of neglect will be recognised, followed by a ***timely early help assessment*** so that help and support are offered as early as possible through collaboration amongst agencies.

Historical information will always be considered to inform the present and to identify children and families experiencing intergenerational neglect. Where there is insufficient progress, statutory assessment will be undertaken without drift or delay.

¹⁰ See Bury Practice Guidance 'Poverty Aware Practice'.

6. Children experiencing neglect will receive ***'the right help, at the right time'*** through a shared understanding and application of the Bury Continuum of Need, through effective information sharing and timely interventions by agencies.

Professionals in education, early help and health often have a unique insight into the life of a child or young person it is therefore important that all partners ensure that effective information sharing takes place.

7. ***'Evidenced-based approaches, tools and services'*** that reduce risks and meet the needs of children experiencing neglect will be used - use of the Graded Care Profile 2 (GCP2) will be standard practice.

The Continuum of Need provides guidance on the thresholds for help and support to keep children safe in Bury. It is important that practitioners from all agencies are aware of how neglect presents and the mechanisms for transitioning between levels of response as needs increase or decrease.

This information is particularly important for professionals who work with adults, who must consider the impact of the adults' personal difficulties on their capacity to provide 'good enough' care for their children.

8. ***Practitioners and partners will challenge each other appropriately to ensure good practice.***

Escalation procedures will be used effectively to resolve differences in decision making.

What We Will Do

The Bury Safeguarding Partnership will:

- Work with the *Children's Strategic Partnership Board, the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Locality Board and the Integrated Care Board* to ensure a co-ordinated approach across all relevant strategies and the development of shared understanding and investment among partners to find solutions to the problem of child neglect in Bury.
- Take a strategic approach to identifying measures that can be undertaken across partners to minimise the incidence of neglect and address the underlying causes of neglect.
- Build on the range of resources across partners to develop a joined-up approach to preventing and minimising the incidence of neglect.
- Ensure the business plan reflects the development and roll out of this strategy.
- Set up a multi-agency task and finish group to drive the strategy forward.
- The Bury Safeguarding Partnership will monitor the effectiveness of the strategy.

The Multi-Agency Task Group.

The multi-agency group will include representation (Neglect Champions) from all key partners.

- This group will develop and drive an 'Action Plan' to tackle child neglect against agreed timescales and agreed outcome measures, it will monitor progress and report quarterly to the Safeguarding Partnership.

This group will facilitate:

- Establishment of a small number of task and finish subgroups to deliver the action plan.
- An audit of available interventions which help and support families in the borough where children are at risk of neglect and identify gaps and indicators of successful interventions.
- Improvement of data capture around Early Help activity to identify hotspots and gaps in Early Help service provision.
- Analysis of new, emerging data – identification of the key underlying causes and risk factors for neglect in the borough and take a coordinated approach to targeting and addressing causes of neglect and the reasons for unmet need and working collaboratively with those driving Bury's '**Let's Do it strategy**' and '**Cost of Living and Poverty strategy**'
- Review of training available to all agencies, delivery of an updated multi-agency training offer in respect of neglect (a combination of workshops, face to face sessions and online resources) so that all practitioners can recognise neglect at the earliest opportunity and provision of support for single agencies to develop internal training responses to child neglect.
- Multi-Agency training to relaunch and embed the use of the Graded Care Profile² by the end of 2023.
- Training for frontline practitioners in the use of age-appropriate communication during the assessment process.
- Establishment and delivery of targeted training for adults' agencies to support improvement of joint working with children services especially in relation to the impact on children living in households where parents/carers have learning disability or mental ill health ('whole family approach').
- Evaluation of practice across the partnership through audit and benchmarking against guidance - single and multi-agency quality assurance activity against agreed measures

(including direct feedback from children and families) to ensure the training and use of tools is making a difference. This to include annual multi-agency 'neglect themed' audits for at least the next 3 years to provide longitudinal study.

- Development of an Anti-Poverty Practice Framework
- Awareness campaigns that encourage positive parenting and a local population that recognises and reports child neglect at the earliest opportunity.
- Scoping of available resources to repair damage caused to children who have experienced neglect – identify gaps in specialist provision.

And

- Development of a performance indicator booklet for reporting on child neglect.
- Monitoring of the effectiveness of the strategy and the impact of the multi– agency responses and intervention with neglect cases and provide reports to the Executive.

How we will Measure the Success of the Bury Strategy to Tackle Child Neglect.

A performance management framework will be in place to track the progress of the strategy implementation. Whilst an overarching aim is to reduce the number of children and young people who are experiencing neglect and need statutory intervention, it should be recognised that in the short to medium term due to improved recognition there may be an increase in the number of children receiving early help services, subject to child in need and child protection plans and in local authority care because of neglect.

The performance management framework will include:

- The outcome of regular neglect themed multi-agency audits of and quality assurance work of early help and social care which will evaluate the:
 - ✓ effectiveness of multi-agency working,
 - ✓ evidence of early identification,
 - ✓ quality and timeliness of assessment including understanding of family history, use of poverty aware practice and use of the Graded Care Profile.
 - ✓ quality of plans and timeliness and appropriateness of response to identified need.
 - ✓ impact of plans.
- Feedback from parents and children who have engaged with services because of neglect.
- Feedback from parents collected at early help, child in need, initial child protection case conferences, child protection case review meetings and case closure.
- Listening to young people's views of the help and support they have received through participation in forum's/surveys/feedback following the completion of early help intervention and at children in need, initial child protection case conference, child protection case.
- Listening to feedback from frontline staff.

And monthly reports on the following indicators:

- Level of uptake (by agency) of training on recognition and impact of child neglect.
- Level of uptake of training (by agency) in 'age-appropriate communication' during assessment.
- Practitioner evaluation of the effectiveness of 'neglect training.'
- Use (by agency) of Graded Care Profile with families where there are concerns about child neglect.
- The number Early Help Assessments completed (by agency) due to concerns about neglect.
- The number of children and families in receipt of Early Help services where there is a concern for neglect.
- The percentage of referrals to children's social care where the primary concern is child neglect and the proportion that progress to statutory assessment.
- The number of children in need in receipt of a 'child in need' plan for more than six months.
- The number of children/families for whom the primary concern had been 'child neglect', who achieve their outcomes and who no longer require statutory service provision.
- The number of repeat referrals (within 2 years) to children's social care due to concerns about neglect.
- Level of uptake of training across children and adult social care in joint assessment and delivery of 'whole family approach'

- Number of children on child protection plans due to concerns about neglect.
- Number of children subject to child protection re-registration (within 2 years) due to concerns about neglect.
- The number of children under 5years attending a child-care setting especially those in receipt of Early Help services and those subject of a 'child in need' or 'child protection' plan where there are concerns about neglect.
- The school attendance of children in receipt of Early Help services, in receipt of a 'child in need' or 'child protection' plan where there are concerns about neglect.
- The number of 16 -18year olds about whom there are concerns for neglect not in education/training or employment (NEET).
- The number of children and young people admitted to hospital for planned oral health procedures.

What Will Be Evidence of a Successful Child Neglect Strategy?

The Performance Indicator Booklet will evidence:

- Good practice with all agencies working together (audit).
- Improved frontline practitioner confidence in identifying, assessing, and addressing child neglect (audit)
- Consistent and high use by all frontline practitioners of the Bury Continuum of Need and the Bury Practice Guidance (audit).
- Timeliness in the identification of child and family need, high quality assessment of need and the right intervention quickly in place (audit).
- An *increased* identification of child neglect across the partnership, including by communities and voluntary sector organisations consequent on public awareness campaigns and practitioner training.
- An *increase* in the numbers of early help assessments for children where there is a concern for neglect and a corresponding reduction in the number of referrals to children's social care.
- *Increase* in the number of children and families whose needs have been met and outcomes achieved who transition from statutory services to early help and from early help to universal services.
- Children and young people reporting improvements to their daily lives quickly once interventions start.
- A *reduction* in the *number* of children subject of 'child in need' plans for neglect.
- A *reduction* in the *duration* of 'child in need' plans due to concerns for neglect.
- A *reduction* in the *number* of children subject to Child Protection Plans for neglect.
- A *reduction* in the *number* of children 'Looked After' because of neglect.
- Children who meet the threshold for local authority care are identified quickly and care plans resolved quickly (audit).
- *Reduced* number of repeat referrals for statutory services and repeat 'child in need' or 'child protection' plans.
- A *decrease* in non-attendance of children at health appointments.
- An *increase* in the number of under 5s attending child-care settings, especially for those with an open social care plan for neglect.
- An improvement in school attendance for children, especially for those with an open social care plan for neglect.
- Improved outcomes for adolescents experiencing neglect i.e., *reduced* number 'NEET'
- A *reduction* in the number of children and young people who are admitted to hospital for planned oral health procedures.
- A *reduction* in the number of 'rapid reviews' and 'serious case reviews' where neglect is a feature.