



Buckinghamshire Multi Agency Neglect Strategy

September 2017

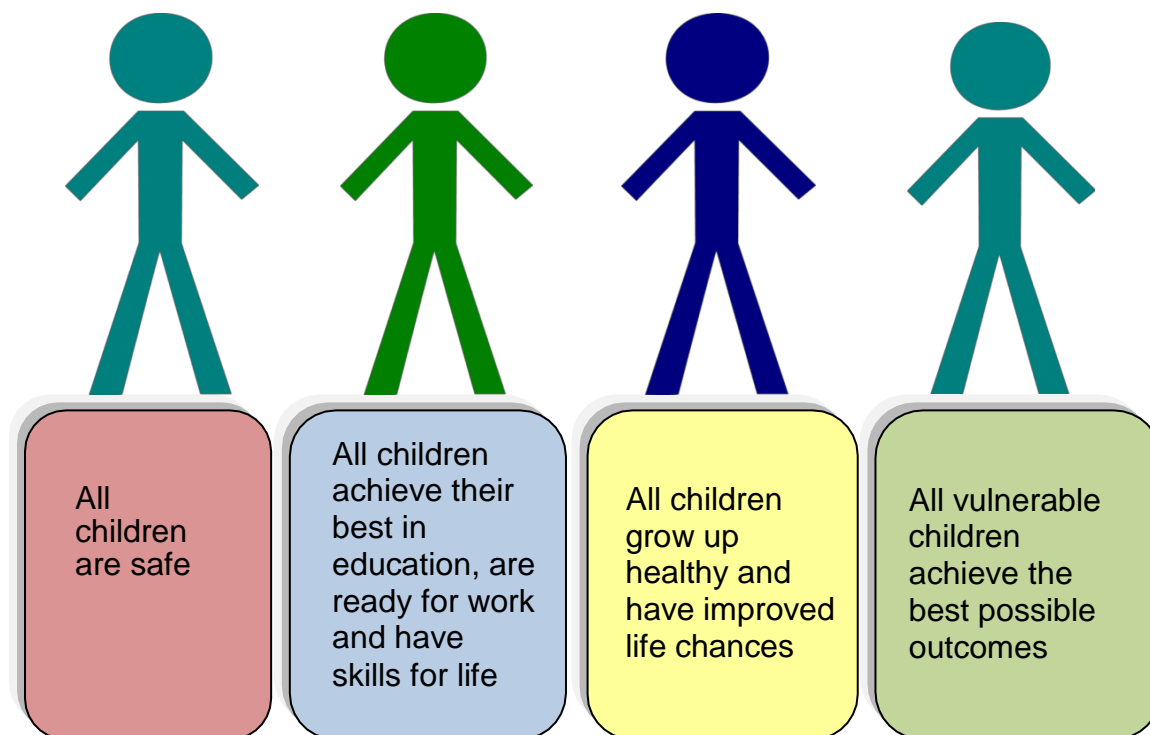
Introduction

The neglect of children and young people is one of the most difficult areas within the child care and protection field to identify, assess and intervene in. The impact of neglect on children and young people can be enormous. Neglect causes great distress to children, leading to poor health, educational and social outcomes as well as being potentially fatal. Lives are destroyed, children's abilities to make secure attachments are affected and their ability to attend and achieve at school is reduced. Their emotional health and wellbeing is often compromised and this impacts on their success in adulthood and their ability to parent in the future.

The Buckinghamshire Neglect Strategy has been developed to ensure our workforce (including services that work with adults with care and support needs) is able to recognise neglect and provide an effective response which will improve outcomes for children, young people and their families. Integral in the strategy is the identification and engagement of families at the earliest opportunity by preventative services, including effective assessment and development of a clear action plan.

What is our Partnership Vision for Children and Families in Buckinghamshire?

Our vision of better outcomes for children and families shared by all in Buckinghamshire:



Purpose and Scope

The development of this strategy has been supported and endorsed by the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board and it is designed for use by all of those who work with children and families in all agencies and settings as well as adults with care and support needs.

The purpose of this strategy is to set out clear strategic aims and objectives with clear priorities for how all partners can develop and achieve a multi-agency co-ordinated approach where neglect is an issue and ultimately prevent the neglect of children in Buckinghamshire.

This strategy identifies both the statutory definition of neglect and other factors to consider which will enable early identification of neglect issues at practitioner level. It also covers the range of need across the continuum, including supporting families as early as possible to prevent significant harm to children and family breakdown.

Definition

The definition of neglect from Working Together 2015 states:

'Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- *Provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment)*
- *Protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger*
- *Ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care givers)*
- *Ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.*

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

A helpful reminder of the specific needs which are often subsumed under the banner of failing to meet 'basic needs' are:

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

This provides practitioners scope to offer support and early help, before thresholds for statutory action are met. There is an overlap between emotional abuse and many forms of child maltreatment. This is especially true of neglect; therefore, when working with children subject to neglectful situations an understanding of emotional abuse is also necessary.

Neglect Nationally

In March 2013 the NSPCC commissioned the University of East Anglia to explore the circumstances in which neglect can be catastrophic and have a fatal or seriously harmful outcome for a child. The work was carried out by reviewing and conducting a systematic analysis of neglect in 139 serious case reviews in England, between 2009 and 2011. The published report identified how risks of harm accumulate and combine, and highlighted the

points at which intervention might successfully have helped contained risks.

Key messages from the research:

- Neglect is much more prevalent in serious case reviews than had previously been understood (neglect was present in 60% of the 139 reviews from 2009-2011)
- Neglect can be life threatening and needs to be treated with as much urgency as other categories of maltreatment
- Neglect with the most serious outcomes is not confined to the youngest children, and occurs across all ages
- The possibility that in a very small minority of cases neglect will be fatal, or cause grave harm, should be part of a practitioner's mindset. Practitioners, managers, policy makers and decision makers should be discouraged from minimising or downgrading the harm that can come from neglect and discouraged from allowing neglect cases to drift
- The key aim for the practitioner working with neglect is to ensure a healthy living environment
- Healthy relationships for children need to be formed with parents, family and friends

[‘In the child’s time: Professional Response to Neglect’](#) – Ofsted thematic audit 2014 found that *‘The pervasive and long-term cumulative impact of neglect on the well-being of children of all ages is well documented’*. Findings from inspections and research evidence the following aims:

- Early recognition
- Robust management oversight and supervision
- Specialist training
- Acknowledgement of complexity
- Effective and timely professional responses both for help and protection

Why Neglect is a priority in Buckinghamshire

A large proportion of children subject to Child Protection Plans for Neglect live in deprived areas of Buckinghamshire. However, we need to be aware that cases of neglect may equally be found in more affluent or rural areas.

Neglect represents a key issue for the BSCB and now fits within the Early Help, Thresholds and Neglect priority. This reflects the fact that we recognise all our partners play a key role in picking up the signs of neglect, particularly the early signs.

Neglect is not currently one of the identified areas in the Buckinghamshire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) although statistics on neglect are produced alongside all other forms of abuse. This will be addressed as part of the action plan to ensure that neglect is reported on as an identified area in the JSNA.

The [Buckinghamshire Early Help Strategy](#) has the following specific need to highlight the importance of neglect that will ensure neglect is seen as a major issue for identifying early help services.

The Issue – Too many children are on child protection plans, especially due to neglect.

The Scale of the Issue – Buckinghamshire’s annual average rate of children who were the subject of a child protection plan at 31st March 2016 was 37.6 per 10,000 children. Our statistical neighbour was 36.64. However, as at 31st August 2017 580 children were on a child protection plan, which is a rate of 47.5 per 10,000. 57% of these child protection plans fall under the category of neglect.

Many children subject to Child Protection plans for Neglect are in sibling groups. A concern or

referral in relation to one child may result in all the children of that family becoming subject to a Plan.

Number of children and young people on child protection plans

	Number of child protection plans
31 st March 2013	477
31 st March 2014	242
31 st March 2015	332
31 st March 2016	454
31 st March 2017	564

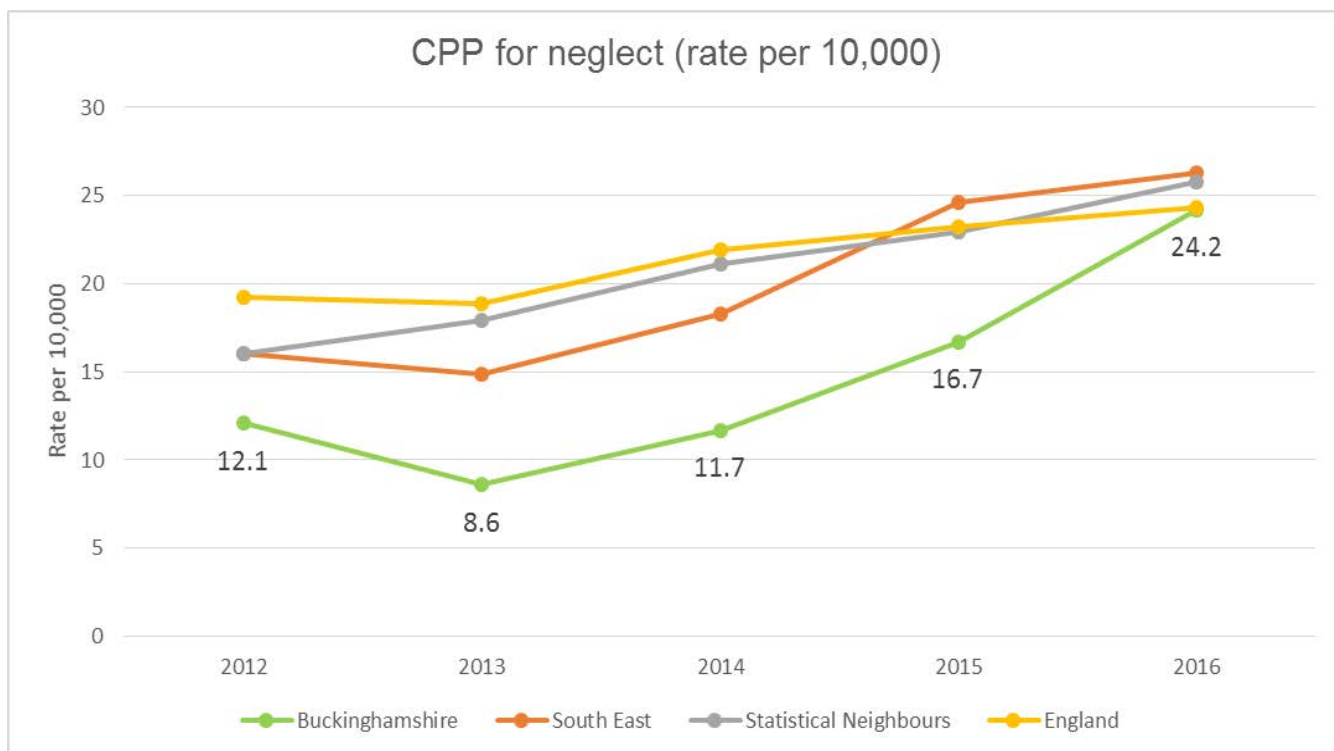


Figure 1: LAIT (Local Authority Interactive Tool), Department for Education

Figure 1 shows the rate of children on child protection plans per 10,000 of the under 18 population. This shows that the rate for Buckinghamshire has been rising to be more in line with our statistical neighbours and England averages.

The Role of Early Help in Addressing Neglect

The impact of neglect on children is often cumulative, advancing gradually and imperceptibly and therefore there is a risk that agencies do not intervene early enough to prevent harm. It is important that all agencies, Health, Schools/Education, Children’s Centres, Police, Probation, Housing, Voluntary and Community Organisations, identify emerging problems and potential unmet needs and seek to address them as early as possible. It is equally important that practitioners are alert to the danger of the cumulative impact of neglect and long term consequences. Avoiding repeat short term interventions is important to ensure that sustained improvements are maintained.

The lessons learnt from Ofsted thematic inspections on joint working between children’s services and adult mental health services highlighted the lack of signposting to early help by

adult services and particular delays in considering the impact of paternal mental ill health on children.

[Working Together \(2015\)](#) requires local agencies to have in place effective assessments of needs of children who may benefit from early help services. In Buckinghamshire, partners should effectively utilise the Early Help Assessment (EHA Outcomes Star) to assess unmet needs and co-ordinate appropriate support. The delivery of an effective Early Help offer is not the responsibility of a single agency - it requires a 'Whole-Family' approach owned by all stakeholders working with children, young people and families.

In order to address neglect in Buckinghamshire it is important that all agencies work together in an integrated way, using the EHA and co-ordinating work through the 'Team Around a Child or Family' to assess and plan services for children and families.

A directory of Early Help Services is available to support practitioners to locate and access relevant services. This can be accessed on the [Buckinghamshire Family Information Service](#) website. It is similarly important to ensure that when specialist services are 'stepping down' there is continued longer term co-ordinated support, to enable parents to sustain the improvement in care that has been achieved.

Strategic Aims and Objectives for Neglect

The following key principles underpin our strategic aims and objectives:

- Child focussed within a whole family approach – the safety, well-being and development of children is the overriding priority
- Outcome focused – work with children and young people needs to be measured by its impact on outcomes
- Shared understanding and collaboration – significant regard needs to be given to the overlap between neglect and other forms of child maltreatment such as domestic abuse and substance misuse, and timely and effective identification, assessment and support
- Information sharing – ensuring effective information sharing to inform assessments and evaluations of risk, including historical information to be inform the present position and identify families at risk of inter-generational neglect.
- A well trained workforce able to identify and intervene in cases of neglect

The aim of this strategy is to improve identification of neglect in families; to improve agencies' responses to these families; to achieve positive outcomes for children, young people and families and to ultimately improve practitioner education, learning and awareness to prevent neglect from taking place in Buckinghamshire.

These will be achieved by ensuring the children's workforce is sufficiently skilled to identify and effectively act on neglect issues to positively engage with families at the earliest opportunity, thereby promoting their resilience and willingness to engage with agencies.

Within this aim the strategy has the following three objectives:

1. To improve the awareness and understanding of neglect, both within and between agencies working in Buckinghamshire, including Adult services. This includes a common understanding of the thresholds for access to Early Help and safeguarding services.
 - a) A common understanding of neglect between and within agencies is crucial to allow effective identification and a common language. This will be supported by this strategy, effective guidance and the development of a skilled workforce through the provision of high quality training.

- b) Understanding of the Buckinghamshire [Thresholds](#) will help to ensure that the right help from the right agency or agencies at the right time is given to children, young people and families.
 - c) Working effectively between services working with children and adults to offer a whole family approach to identifying and responding to issues of neglect.
2. To improve the identification and assessment of children and young people, including unborn children, living in neglectful situations before statutory intervention is required, including the use of appropriate assessment tools.
- a) Practitioners are properly skilled to be able to identify and act on indicators of neglect in the families they work with. This includes an understanding of the pathway into Targeted Services for Early Help via an Early Help Assessment and the coordination of Multi-Agency support through the Team around the Family. It also means a confident and skilled workforce knowing when and how to share concern over a child's welfare when child protection concerns may be apparent.

The assessment process should be completed by using the appropriate assessment tools specifically developed in relation to neglect. Buckinghamshire County Council's Social Care staff and other practitioners operating at levels 3 and 4 are further supported through training on the Graded Care Profile (GCP) as part of the Strengthening Practice Programme, thus ensuring a range of evaluative tools.

Professionals should use the Graded Care Profile to help with the identification of the present situation in a dynamic way, to ensure that progress can be measured over time to inform appropriate action for the family and to provide a structured approach to measuring progress, This is equally applicable for families being managed in targeted or specialist services and consequently all professionals who act as lead professionals or come into contact with families should be familiar with the Assessment Tool.

- b) Through the use of an Early Help Assessment, complemented by the Graded Care Profile, information should be shared effectively across partner agencies in order to build a full picture of the child or young person and their family. This process will also help identify additional areas of support which can be accessed through the 'Team around the Family' process. This should also include identifying positive support which can be provided through the extended family and friend's network.
 - c) Clear and robust thresholds 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 co-ordinated way through the Team around the Family model.
3. Developing and sustaining a clear Multi-Agency response to neglect.
- a) The BSCB through its Performance & Quality Assurance Sub Group will monitor the effectiveness of the Multi- Agency response to neglect through audits, practitioner and family feedback and scrutiny of performance information. Findings from the monitoring will be presented into the BSCB for scrutiny and to inform future development of this strategy.
 - b) Relevant developments in service provision are promoted and clear for practitioners on a Multi-Agency basis.
 - c) Agencies to hold responsibility for ensuring their workforce has access to relevant

training and development opportunities and to support practitioners by signposting them to relevant BSCB Multi-Agency training for neglect and how to use the Graded Care Profile

- d) Providing practitioners with effective skills and tools to work with families where Neglect is identified as taking place.
- e) Supporting practitioners to resolve common problems when working with families experiencing neglect by providing them the necessary tools to ensure neglect does not occur.

Measuring Success

The success of this strategy will be measured based on a range of quantitative and qualitative measures.

The first measure of success of this strategy will be to ensure that practitioners working in Buckinghamshire are identifying and reporting neglect effectively. This heightened awareness may initially increase the number of referrals and cases where neglect is a key feature. However ultimately we would hope to see the following improvements

- Reduction in the % of children on child protection plans for neglect for 12 months or more
- Reduction in % of repeat child protection plans for neglect (this is where the 2nd plan category is neglect and the previous plan was also neglect)
- Reduction in % of children and young people subject to a children in need plan for neglect for more than 6 months
- Reduction in the number of children entering care for neglect
- BSCB Multi-Agency audits of neglect child protection plans show good impact of the plan and good use of the Graded Care Profile
- Early Help Assessment and Children's Social Care audits show good use of Graded Care Profile
- Increase in the % of children subject to a child protection plan for neglect where health and school attendance has improved
- Feedback from parents and children collected at children in need, initial child protection case conferences, child protection case review meetings and at case closure.