

<b>CREATING OPPORTUNITIES AND TACKLING INEQUALITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>	AGENDA ITEM NO. 7
<b>14 NOVEMBER 2016</b>	PUBLIC REPORT

<b>Report of the Corporate Director for People and Communities</b>		
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## **THE PETERBOROUGH NEGLECT STRATEGY AND APPROACHES TO ADDRESS NEGLECT IN PETERBOROUGH**

### **1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1 This report provides information to Members about the Council and Safeguarding Children Board’s neglect strategies. These have been developed in response to evidence of relatively high numbers of children affected by neglectful parenting in the City.

The development of a Neglect Strategy was also a recommendation from the Ofsted inspection of children’s services in May 2015.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:
1. Note the contents of the report and the appended Strategy, and
  2. To consider requesting a further report on the response to the effectiveness of the Neglect Strategy in 12 months’ time.

### **3. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE PRIORITIES AND RELEVANT CABINET PORTFOLIO**

- 3.1 This report relates to the corporate priority to safeguard vulnerable children and adults.
- 3.2 This report falls within the portfolio of the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services.

### **4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 The City of Peterborough includes a compact urban area with a rapidly growing population. Population estimates from 2013 indicate that there are 48,400 children and young people living in a City with a total population of 189,000. Some of the challenges of rapid growth can be exacerbated by a migrant and mobile population and this has led to concerns about levels of poverty in some areas of the City.
- 4.2 It is estimated that around 12,000 children in Peterborough are living in poverty, while around one third of the total population live in the 20% most disadvantaged areas in the country. The recently developed Child Poverty Strategy is now in place and will help agencies to address some of the poor outcomes many children who grow up in sustained poverty experience.

- 4.3 Families who have very limited financial means do not necessarily neglect their children. There is, however, some research that indicates that the additional strain of living in poverty can increase the likelihood of neglect.
- 4.4 Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015 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 care-givers);
- or:
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.
- It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child’s basic emotional needs.’
- 4.5 Neglect is one of the most challenging issues to address and to achieve sustained change. This is because neglect can have many different aspects and can manifest within families in so many different ways that it can be hard to develop meaningful strategies for addressing the issues without becoming overwhelmed.
- 4.6 There have been a number of serious case reviews related to neglect over recent years. A common theme of these is that while agencies may have correctly identified families where neglect is an issue, they have often failed to identify the seriousness of the impact of the neglect on the children concerned.
- 4.7 There are a number of indications of relatively high levels of neglect in Peterborough. For example, as of October 2016, just under 70% of children subject to child protection plans were identified as being at risk from neglect, compared with an average of around 50% of children subject to child protection plans in our statistical neighbours.
- 4.8 The great majority of children who are subject to child in need plans are receiving services because of neglectful parenting or domestic abuse. There were 406 children in need per 10,000 in 2015 in Peterborough, compared with a statistical neighbour average rate of 360. This again indicates that there are more children open to children’s social care as a result of neglect than in similar areas.
- 4.9 It was indicators such as these that led to the Ofsted recommendation to the local authority that it should develop a neglect strategy. Ofsted made a similar recommendation to the Safeguarding Children Board - that it should also consider whether to develop a neglect strategy.
- 4.10 The Council, other partners and the safeguarding children board have worked closely together to develop the strategies. It was agreed that it would be more helpful to have a two-part document that linked across the Safeguarding Board and the Council. The documents are deliberately reflective of one another, and both draw on the new thresholds guidance that was also launched in September 2016. This was to ensure that there is a consistency of message being conveyed about around the safeguarding of vulnerable children.
- 4.11 The neglect strategies were developed by a multi-agency task and finish group. The Safeguarding Board’s document [which can be found at Appendix 1 to this report] addresses the definition of neglect and how important it is that agencies work together to identify neglect at the earliest possible stage. It outlines the expectations of action that each agency should

take, and the importance of working in partnership with parents as far as possible. The Public Health aspects of neglect are highlighted, and it is evident that learning around the management of Child Sexual Exploitation in this context can also be translated to the neglect arena.

- 4.12 The safeguarding board strategy offers support to professionals in identifying the type of neglect a child may be experiencing, and offers various tools in support of doing so. Identified impact measures of the safeguarding board strategy are multi-agency in nature, emphasising that for neglect to be tackled effectively requires action by the partnership as a whole.
- 4.13 The local authority neglect strategy [which can be found as Appendix 2 to this report] is focused more specifically on how agencies can help to tackle neglect in the smaller cohort of children where it is likely to have a more serious long term impact on outcomes. The intention is to provide practitioners within Early Help and children's social care with support in working with families to address the issues they are facing.
- 4.14 There are two definitions of neglect in this document, which are designed to help professionals clarify the thresholds between Early Help and children's social care intervention in this very complex area of practice. These definitions, together with the principles of how we will work with families were consulted upon with parents as well as with practitioners. One of the key principles is the recognition that gaining consent for any intervention we offer is more likely to achieve improved outcomes for children. This draws on evidence that including families in defining both the problem and possible solutions is more productive than services being imposed from outside. Services imposed in this way are more likely to be resisted by families.
- 4.15 Frequently, the most important factor in improving the lived experience of children, especially in relation to neglect, is developing a clear plan that all involved understand and has clear progress measures. Developing such a clear and agreed plan with measurable milestones is where practitioners can often struggle, particularly where there are multiple manifestations of neglect in one household, or a parent has significant issues of his or her own that distract professional focus. The strategy offers support in all these areas, and explains when a case would begin to meet the threshold for social care assessment and intervention.
- 4.16 While it is the case that children's social care should only be accessed when a child is felt to be at risk of significant harm through persistent failures attributable to parental care, it is also emphasised within this strategy that where this is the case, there is a need for tight planning and decisive action by Social Care.
- 4.17 Historically, neglect cases are more likely to be the ones that suffer most from delays in decision-making. Practitioners can also be over-optimistic, for example, that relatively small improvements indicate that the situation within the family is improving, where in reality the underlying issues have not changed and pre-existing patterns of neglectful parenting will re-emerge.
- 4.18 Research over recent years has demonstrated the very significant physiological harm that can be caused to children who suffer neglect, in respect to brain and physical development and long-term emotional wellbeing. The local authority strategy therefore places clear expectations on children's social care to address issues swiftly and effectively and to take robust action to safeguard children where evidence of change is limited.

### **Supporting practitioners to identify and address neglect and improve outcomes for children**

- 4.19 Early Help professionals currently use an Early Help Assessment to help them to identify needs within families, and a distance measured tool called the Outcomes Star to help families track progress being made in addressing issues. Both tools will remain in place but will now be supplemented by the Quality of Care Graded Care Profile tool. The Quality of Care tool is much more focused on neglect as a specific issue and can be used by practitioners either instead of

the more general assessments, or in order to build on understanding gained from the use of one of the more general tools.

- 4.20 The Graded Care Profile is based on a significant amount of research. This has found it to be a very practical approach to addressing neglect that is also both effective and time efficient. It works on a simple principle of breaking down the possible areas of neglect into easy headings, and then creates a scoring system for each area that should be completed with the parent and family. A targeted plan is then constructed to address the areas that have scored highly, and reviewed at agreed intervals. The Quality of Care tool rescores at each review, meaning that it is immediately evident in which areas progress has or has not been made.
- 4.21 Families like the transparency of the approach, and professionals find that they are able to stay on track in their work with a family. The objectivity of a numerical score also supports escalation of worries when required, or evidences the success of a piece of work and enables de-escalation. Early Help practitioners are being trained in this new model throughout the autumn, and it should subsequently be used in most cases that are then referred to children's social care where neglect is the main feature.
- 4.22 This same Graded Care Profile approach is also being adopted within children's social care, and all children affected by neglect will be expected to include a Quality of Care tool as part of the assessment. Where there is longer term involvement with families, there is now an expectation that the Quality of Care tool is repeated at helpful intervals, such as before each Review Child Protection Case Conference. This will enable progress to be measured and support decision-making around whether families can be stepped down from children's social care or whether there is a need to escalate to legal action.
- 4.23 The Graded Care Profile approach will also support better decision making for children subject to child in need plans. It is at this level that many neglect cases are located and have the potential to drift as well-meaning but unfocussed plans have only limited impact on outcomes for children. Use of the same approach at all levels through early help and children's social care will have clear benefits for improving outcomes for children, as long term patterns in the quality of care they receive will be much more visible.
- 4.24 The approach will also support the extension of the Strengthening Families model beyond child protection to working with children in need within children's social care. Strengthening Families and the Graded Care Profile approach work well together, both helping practitioners to work with families to identify protective factors as well as issues that need to be addressed, and supporting the development of measurable, outcome focused plans.
- 4.25 Training in both Strengthening Families and the Graded Care Profile Quality of Care approach will be rolled out to children's social care staff in the autumn. The Graded Care Profile Quality of Care training is being provided by the Safeguarding Board in order to enable joint training of all practitioners and to facilitate discussion and learning across agencies. The Strengthening Families training will take place internally, and will focus on the principles of the model and the importance of developing tight and measurable plans, particularly in relation to the management of neglect. The Service will be fully operational in both these areas by January 2017.

## **5. KEY ISSUES**

- 5.1 Key issues for the above include:
- There are indications that more children are impacted by neglect in Peterborough than in other similar areas;
  - Neglect is best addressed in the very early stages;
  - Once neglectful patterns of parenting have become established, they can be very difficult to change;
  - Tackling neglect effectively requires practitioners to work closely with families to develop focused and measurable plans against which progress can be measured;

- Children affected by serious and sustained neglect can experience a range of very poor outcomes;
- Where serious neglect is established, there is a need to avoid drift and take effective action where necessary to safeguard children and young people;
- The safeguarding children board and local authority neglect strategies that have been developed together provide practitioners with support and guidance in identifying neglect and in working effectively with families to help them to address the issues in a sustainable way.

## **6. IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Developing and implementing the two neglect strategies is relevant for all areas of the City. The way that neglect tends to be concentrated in areas where there is more material deprivation does, however, mean that the way that the strategies are applied will vary.
- 6.2 There are no financial implications as developments will be managed within existing resources. The actions being taken to address neglect as set out within this report are in line with the statutory duties of local authorities to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people. The report also sets out proposals and actions to ensure the Council's compliance with its statutory duties under The Children Act 1989 and The Children Act 2004 and including the statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2015.

## **7. CONSULTATION**

- 7.1 The creation of the Strategy was carried out through a fully consultative approach. A multi-agency working group was established with representatives from Health, Police, Early Help, Education and the Voluntary sector all involved. The full draft strategy was shared with the Early Help professional network, and their views were incorporated into the final document. Most importantly, parents were also consulted through the Children's Centres in relation to the definition of neglect at each stage and the principles on which we would wish to base our work with families. Amendments were also made to these following feedback, and some comments are included directly in the document.
- 7.2 The Safeguarding Board held their own consultation process, and this included children and young people through a variety of school environments.

## **8. NEXT STEPS**

- 8.1 Implementation of the Neglect Strategy will take place through the autumn of 2016, and the Committee is asked to note the planned monitoring schedule below.
- 8.2 The Strategy will be monitored on a quarterly basis through the arrangements already in place to monitor the impact of the action plan that was developed following the Ofsted inspection in May 2015. There will also be an annual report to the Peterborough Safeguarding Children's Board. Single and multi-agency auditing will be carried out regularly, as well as monitoring of specified performance data, in order to assess the effectiveness of activity undertaken.

## **9. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

- 9.1
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015
  - Ofsted Single Inspection Framework Report for Peterborough September 2015
  - The Ofsted Action Plan November 2015
  - Action for Children "Action on Neglect" 2013
  - Threshold document September 2016

## **10. APPENDICES**

- 10.1
- Appendix 1: Peterborough Safeguarding Children's Board Neglect Strategy.
  - Appendix 2: Peterborough City Council Neglect Strategy.