

## Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board Response to Neglect

- 1 The prevalence of neglect in Blackpool and the attendant multi-agency response has been a concern of Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB) for a number of years now. Following the completion of a thematic review of the management of children who had been neglected and an apparent rise in the number of children subject to Child Protection Plans on the grounds of neglect, the issue was agreed as a priority area within the Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board 2015-2017 Business Plan.
- 2 Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board has subsequently agreed a Neglect Strategy which includes the following priorities:
  1. To ensure that the multi-agency workforce is properly equipped to identify neglect
  2. To evaluate the effectiveness of assessment tools
  3. To enable multi-agency practitioners to effectively respond to neglect
  4. To ensure that Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board understands neglect in Blackpool
  5. To hold partner agencies and commissioners to account for the provision of services to address neglect.
- 3 Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board has sought to develop its understanding of the prevalence and response to neglect through consultation with practitioners and through the development of a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) chapter on the topic. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment chapter highlights the breadth of issues that neglect can encompass and the attendant difficulties in measuring its overall prevalence. It is able however, to provide an estimate that 2,500 children in Blackpool experience some form of neglect based on national data. A smaller number will require statutory intervention to address neglect and more recent received data indicates that 58.5% of the 369 children subject to a child protection plan on 31 March 2017 were registered under a category of neglect, although this figure has fluctuated between 49% and 65% during the last five years (Blackpool's practice of allowing registration under multiple categories of abuse renders comparisons with other local authorities difficult); this approach has been changed.
- 4 Delivery of the Neglect Strategy was initially delegated to the Neglect subgroup whose primary focus was the identification and delivery of a neglect assessment tool. By providing a Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board mandated neglect tool it was expected that practitioners from different agencies would be able to identify neglect consistently, thereby enabling them to evidence their assessments and measure change over time. Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board consequently agreed to pilot, in conjunction with the NSPCC, a suite of neglect assessment tools that includes a basic screening checklist to identify if neglect is present, the in-depth Graded Care Profile 2 (GCP2) assessment that assesses the type and scale of neglect, together with a number of more specialist assessment tools that assess issues associated with neglect. The assessment tools were piloted by a small multi-agency group of practitioners in the Spring of 2016, before being fully implemented later in the year.
- 5 Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board trained trainers provide basic briefings within their own agencies that cover the characteristics of neglect and the use of the more basic tools, including the screening checklist (Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board also delivered this briefing to approximately 35 attendees at a schools' twilight meeting). Practitioners with more direct involvement with children who may be experiencing neglect attend a two day training programme delivered by Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board, the completion of which is necessary to become a licenced user of the Graded Care Profile 2 tool and to use the wider suite of tools. At the time of writing 238 practitioners have completed the two day training programme, including 76 children's social care staff, 51 schools staff and 39 health professionals. Training courses continue to be offered on a monthly basis, while more targeted approaches have been employed to train early years settings and are planned for Health Visitors and Probation.

## Appendix 5d

- 6 Anecdotal feedback from practitioners regarding their use of the tools has been positive and has indicated that the tools enable them to better identify neglect and, equally, can provide them with the confidence not to make a referral to children's social care when they have evidence that neglect is not as severe as they initially thought. Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board has however, been concerned as to the lack of evidence of the use of the tools in referrals to children's social care and has therefore recently agreed a protocol for the use of the tools that makes the use of the screening mandatory for all referrals to children's social care on the grounds of neglect and introduces an expectation that the tool will be used for all children subject to a child protection plan on the grounds of neglect. The use of the tools is also being supported through the new Keeping Children Safe in Blackpool thresholds document, which includes specific reference to their use to assess neglect, and the attendant assessment and referral forms. Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board will further evaluate the use of the tools through meetings with all Graded Care Profile 2 licenced practitioners during the autumn period and through audits of the use of the new referral form and thresholds document in the new year. A marketing campaign to professionals is also planned for the autumn period with the aim of increasing awareness of the issue of neglect and promoting sign up to the training programme.
- 7 Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board continues to seek assurance from partner agencies that interventions are in place to identify and address neglect. Recent examples have included the universal roll out of the Baby Steps programme, as part of Better Start. Baby Steps provides prospective parents with an eight session educational programme that supports attendees to know how to care for their baby, reduce the stress associated with parenting a new-born and to improve the lives of their babies. Equally, the resilient therapies approach that forms the centre of Head Start (and is embedded within the new thresholds document) seeks to address many of the factors associated with neglect in older children. The ability of all staff who have contact with families to identify neglect has been recognised by Blackpool Coastal Housing who have developed safeguarding 'cue cards' for their maintenance staff that outline what neglect (and other safeguarding issues) might look like and who to report it to. The need for more universal approaches to the use of the neglect screening checklist has also been recognised by Waterloo Primary Academy who used it to assess their entire reception intake in 2016 and in the commissioning of the health visiting service which will make it a mandatory part of the assessment of all pre-school children from April 2018.
- 8 More recent Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board activity in terms of neglect has focussed on preparation for a potential Joint Targeted Area Inspection that would focus on the front door of children's services and the multi-agency response to the neglect of older children (aged 7-15). The Neglect Subgroup has consequently been re-purposed as a Joint Targeted Area Inspections preparation group and a process developed to meet the requirements of inspectors. An initial audit of five children subject to child protection plans under the category of neglect did provide evidence of effective identification of neglect, application of thresholds and multi-agency working. However, issues were noted in respect of responses to plans that were not progressing as expected and in the completion of parenting assessments. As a consequence of this audit Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board is developing a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Standards document that outlines the expectations of all agencies and practitioners at each stage of the safeguarding process. Agencies are currently undertaking single-agency audits of a number of cases that have been identified as falling within the cohort that the Inspectorates may review, while a further multi-agency audit is planned for late September. More generally, Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board recognises the need for ongoing work to develop the partnership response to neglect in Blackpool and has therefore retained the topic as a key theme within its 2017-2019 Business Plan, with a focus on the need to embed and evaluate the use of the neglect assessment tools.