



Key Messages from SEWSCB Neglect Audit

As part of the SEWSCB work plan the board commissioned an audit into children at risk of neglect in the board area. The learning and review group for each area completed up to 4 audits; three children on CPR registered for Neglect and one CIN; using the standardised tool. Each group identified a set of key messages from their audits. This report is a summary of the key messages from the audits from each Learning and Review group, concentrating on common themes. The themes should be read in conjunction with the [SEWSCB guidance on neglect](#)

Referral

Unlike other forms of abuse the identification of neglect often relies on the build-up of a picture over time rather than as a result of a specific incident or disclosure. This can mean that the threshold is more likely to be met for other forms of abuse. Referral processes need to be more holistic, picking up on issues over time, and view concerns as a whole; rather than looking at specific incidents. Therefore it is particularly important for:

Referrers to include a full history of all concerns, and what outcome they are hoping for rather than the latest issue; and not make assumptions that local authorities have, or are accessing this information.

For the local authority, where they decide not to take any action following a referral they must feedback to the referrer the decision, the reasons for this decision, and to identify the situations where they need to consider referring again or other next steps.

Where a family is already open to children's services there is a need to consider a s47 following each referral – there is a danger that the significance of a child protection referral is lost where a social worker is already working with the family and the allocations are similar to previous referrals.



Assessment

Points to consider in assessing neglect:

The need to ensure the voice of the child is heard better – and to understand their experience of neglect. There is a risk that children become invisible, and there develops an acceptance of living in neglectful / violent households.

The risk of over-identification with, and focus on the parent: In some cases there was evidence that workers from the different services involved tended to see the needs of the family from the parent's perspective i.e. they were supporting and providing services for the parent. Plans dealt with how to meet parent's needs, with a limited sense of this being translated into how the support should impact on the children's needs and well-being, and the child's unmet needs.

A need for clarity of outcomes – what needs to be achieved? Where an intervention appears to be stuck, or where there is a lack of progress, it may reflect a lack of clarity over outcomes at the outset, particularly as neglect occurs alongside a range of other issues. Lack of clarity at the beginning lead to difficulties in establishing whether interventions are effective. If you are not clear what needs to happen to ensure the children are safe it is difficult to establish when they are safeguarded.

Multiple issues i.e. domestic abuse, substance misuse and alcohol misuse. Can be a focus on presenting issues / most tangible issues, or focus on a 'problem' child, rather than holistic approach. For example an intervention may focus on a single issue, such as school attendance, rather than seeing the underlying issues.

Need to improve analysis – an understanding of the root causes of neglect may lead to a more effective response and more likely to promote engagement. To be effective assessments should not simply describe the issues but seek to understand why the neglect exists. This will lead to a more thoughtful plan. A lack of understanding on the underlying causes and multiple issues can lead to a 'scattergun' approach to services where a range of services can be offered, in the hope that one will work, in a way that is overwhelming for families. Plans need to be pro-active and based on a consideration of what impact services have on children.

Assessments should cover motivation to change. Feigned compliance or disguised compliance should be identified and responded to. A need to be clear whether due to a motivational or capacity issue.

Intervention and Review

The non-engagement or [disguised compliance of families](#) is seen as the biggest barrier to effective planning.

For services to be effective there is a real need for a process of SMART planning, and a robust review process to monitor to ensure that the plan is delivering the desired outcome for the child and where this is not happening to be able to respond effectively. In particular there is a need to respond to issues of none compliance / non engagement

Core groups are a vital tool in ensuring effective multiagency planning and review. However a common theme identified is where core groups are used simply to share info and to update agencies. The core groups should drive the case forward and address on-going risk and therefore should review progress on the plan, identify further risks and develop contingencies rather being a vehicle to 'update' participants.

Reviews need to consider what outcome the services have had on the child, rather than whether the service was delivered. Where services do not have an impact reviews need to consider why not, and what can be done differently, rather than providing more of the same.

Frequent changes in social workers and teams compounded these difficulties, as social workers needed to compound this issue as there is a tendency to 'start again'.

Children at risk of drift are known to both preventative and children's services for long extended periods, there is a need to identify and respond to needs earlier. [Multi agency supervision](#) provides a forum for professionals to come together and consider how to move a case forward in situations which have become 'stuck' or where there lacks a clarity over what can be achieved.