

Swindon Safeguarding Partnership

Swindon Self- Neglect Strategy

Produced with experts by experience

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Always Care:

Swindon Self-neglect Strategy

Voices of people who self-neglect:

Whilst everyone makes decisions that others may consider to be unwise, practitioners and services must never dismiss self-neglect as a 'lifestyle choice'.

Is it really a choice when:

- **You didn't choose to live this way, but adapted gradually to circumstances**
- **You don't see how things could be different**
- **You don't think you're worth anything different**
- **Your mental ill-health makes self-motivation difficult**
- **Impairment of your executive brain function makes your decisions difficult to implement**

Introduction:

This strategy was developed alongside the adult scrutineer group and those with lived experience of self-neglect and/or hoarding behaviour.

Our Ambition is for Swindon is to be:

- A borough that always comes together to support and protect the safety and wellbeing of people who experience self-neglect.
- Where those who are experiencing self-neglect feel supported by, and at the centre of the support from those who are supporting them.
- For Swindon to be a borough where those experiencing self-neglect are supported to build on and increase self-confidence and self-worth.

We know that people who self-neglect can find it difficult to allow practitioners and services into their lives. This may be because of feeling they are being judged or not understood. Professionals need to be mindful that, some behaviours whilst harmful, may have also helped them to manage stress and trauma.

We also know the challenges for practitioners and services in engaging and supporting people, who for various reasons, find it difficult to accept that help.

This is why we have developed this Swindon Self-Neglect Strategy.

Our approach is informed by:

- The lived experience of people in Swindon who self-neglect
- The experiences and views of practitioners and services
- Compassionate and trauma informed approaches, and
- Learning from Safeguarding Adults Reviews (SARs) in Swindon

This Swindon Self-Neglect Strategy sets out our ambitions for the next three years; it cannot however be achieved by any one agency, any one partnership, or any one strategic board alone.

To make real and lasting differences to how we support people who self-neglect in Swindon this needs to be a borough-wide approach.

We are asking for all organisations, partnerships and strategic boards to come together to help us support and protect people who self-neglect in Swindon.

What is Self-Neglect:

The [Care and Support Statutory Guidance \(Updated 28 March 2024\)](#) defines Self Neglect as:

‘a wide range of behaviour neglecting to care for one’s personal hygiene, health or surroundings and includes behaviour such as hoarding.’

[SCIE Self-Neglect at a glance](#), outlines self-neglect as:

- Lack of self-care to an extent that it threatens personal health and safety
- Neglecting to care for one’s personal hygiene, health or surroundings
- Inability to avoid harm as a result of self-neglect
- Failure to seek help or access services to meet health and social care needs
- Inability or unwillingness to manage one’s personal affairs

Self-neglect can involve a wide range of behaviours that can result in a significant risk to a person’s health and wellbeing, such as a lack of self-care and lack of care of their living environment, including hoarding.

A key feature of self-neglect is that the person also declines support or services that could reduce or remove the risk of harm.

It is not possible to determine the root cause of self-neglect, this will be on a case by case basis, but research shows this can be due to experiences of trauma, addiction deteriorating physical or mental health.

What we learned from our Safeguarding Adults Reviews (SARs)

There have to date been eleven SARs for individuals in Swindon who had died in circumstances of self-neglect. The reports were produced by expert independent authors and three were completed locally using Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE)s SAR in Rapid Time Methodology, these identified a series of development and practice challenges for Swindon detailed below:

- To further enable practitioners to have the time and skills to persist with engaging adults who may be declining support where there are significant risks of self-neglect arising from care and support needs and health concerns
- To improve understanding of the significance of mental capacity, the importance of explicit assessment in conditions of high-risk decision-making, including consideration of executive function
- To promote a "think family" approach that sees exploration of familial and social relationships as an important enquiry in order to appreciate signs of safety, vital support networks, but also risks of undue influence or coercive and controlling behaviour
- To support an increase in professional curiosity and what this means for practitioners
- To ensure referrals of safeguarding concerns of self-neglect cases and that repetitive referrals of concerns prompt safeguarding enquiries
- To build on multi-agency working, information-sharing and communication between services, both statutory and third sector, by ensuring that a response to need and risk is coordinated, with a lead professional and agency and overseen by regular use of multi-agency meetings
- To ensure that supervision promotes and records reflection on the approach being taken, challenges any normalisation or desensitisation of risk, and supports practitioners to manage complex and challenging issues;
- How to use the resources that are available in Swindon to best effect in supporting people who self-neglect, particularly where mental health needs and alcohol dependency are both present.
- Promoting best practice in relation to self-neglect where the person at risk is alcohol dependent
- To promote trauma-informed practice in working with people who self-neglect.
- To ensure that the person-centred support is in place to engage with the person there are concerns about.

Our Three Year Self-Neglect Strategy

The Swindon Self-neglect strategy is based around four core pillars: People, Prevention, Partnership and Practice.

These four P's build upon the learning from experts by experience, practitioners, services and our Safeguarding Adult Reviews in Swindon and reflect the areas of development that need to be taken forward across the borough.

As no single body, partnership or organisation can make the difference alone. We are asking all organisations, services, and strategic partnerships to support this strategy, to own the areas of development as their own, and to take the always care commitments:

Always Care Commitments:

People	Always work with and alongside people who self-neglect
Prevention	Always work to prevent the risk of serious self-neglect
Partnership	Always bring partners together to support those at risk
Practice	Always develop and support best practice in Swindon

The following sections set out our plans as a Safeguarding Partnership towards achieving these commitments for people in Swindon. They also set out our expectations of all partnerships, organisations, services and practitioners that work to support people who self-neglect.

People: Always work with and alongside people who self-neglect

Our Swindon-wide professionals' statement:

"Respecting boundaries and giving the individual control over our interventions. Taking small steps and working alongside the individual to build up trust and rapport"

Our commitments and expectations as a Safeguarding Partnership:

Work with citizens with lived experience in developing our approaches to self-neglect

We will always seek to work together with people with lived experience of self-neglect to build on our learning, services and approaches. Ensuring practitioners have the skills, training and understanding to work with people who self-neglect, and with consideration of their unique lived experiences. Important elements of this include understanding of:

- Swindon Safeguarding Partnership multi-agency policy, procedures and guidance
- Mental capacity (including executive capacity)
- Trauma informed approaches
- Professional curiosity
- Strength-based approaches
- Alcohol dependency
- Home fire risk awareness

Promote a skilled workforce in Swindon able to work with and alongside people who self-neglect

- Build on the Learning & Development plan for self-neglect in Swindon, inclusive of learning events and resources
- Develop safeguarding supervision guidance, with specific reference to self-neglect
- Promote strength-based person-centred approaches to practice in self-neglect
- Promote borough-wide expertise and practitioner understanding of Mental Capacity, including Executive Capacity, in the context of self-neglect and alcohol dependency
- Promote evidence based best practice guidance as identified within national research within our policies, procedures and workforce development

Partners to provide supervision and reflective practice opportunities

Working with people who self-neglect can be challenging, ensure your practitioners have the practical and emotional support needed, as well as opportunities to reflect on and develop their practice.

Prevention: Always work to reduce the risk of serious self-neglect

Our Swindon citizen-led statement:

'I need to be aware of what options are available to me, supported without judgement and be able to trust that information I am given'

Our commitments and expectations as a Safeguarding Partnership:

To raise awareness of self-neglect in Swindon

Develop generic resources for members of the public and practitioners, that can be used across the partnership. To raise awareness of self-neglect within your partnerships, organisation and services; and develop resources where needed to support your practitioners to identify and respond to self-neglect.

To establishing self-help networks

Explore and develop self-help approaches for people who experience hoarding behaviours, such as peer support groups.

To promote early intervention approaches

Develop and promote early intervention guidance regarding the refusal of services essential to someone's health and wellbeing and ensuring this is imbedded in the workforce.

To promote home fire risk awareness approaches and resources across the partnership

Ensure your staff, citizens and volunteers have the skills, knowledge and confidence to identify and respond to home fire risks. Ensuring assessment processes enable practitioners to identify and respond to concerns.

Partnership: Always bring partners together to support those who self-neglect

Our Swindon citizen-led statement:

“Professionals to be aware of and implement the legislation to support people’s wellbeing and safety so everyone works as a team (there is no I in team). A job shared is a job halved”

Our commitments and expectations as a Safeguarding Partnership:

Develop borough-wide approaches to self-neglect

Engage with key partnerships, forums and stakeholders to gain borough-wide awareness and support for this Strategy, and commitment from all partners in undertaking effective multi-agency working.

Work together in partnership for those who self-neglect

Work with an independent partner and key sector stakeholders to explore how to develop best practice in multi-agency working within Swindon. For all partners to work positively to engage with each other, aiming to be the first to act and be the organisation that brings others together effectively.

To review related borough-wide and organisational strategies to ensure that self-neglect is recognised and responded to

Organisations and partnerships are requested to review related strategies to ensure self-neglect is appropriately included and responded to. This will help ensure the system in Swindon in its widest sense works together to identify and respond to risks.

Access to services and resources

Each organisation needs to assure itself that its staff and volunteers know how to access services needed to support people who self-neglect.

Ensure services and contractors commissioned by your organisation understand their role and responsibilities in relation to adults who self-neglect

It is vital that basic safeguarding awareness is known across all partners and how to seek support should they identify concerns.

Practice: Always developing and supporting best practice for Swindon

Our Swindon citizen-led statement:

"All information is good information, act upon this information"

Our commitments and expectations as a Safeguarding Partnership:

Policies, procedures and guidance

Develop and promote multi-agency policies, procedures and guidance that support best practice in self-neglect, such as:

- Swindon Safeguarding Partnership Self-Neglect Policy
- Professional curiosity guidance
- Think Family, Work Family approaches

Exceptional Risk Panel

Provide a panel for multi-agency escalation of concerns in circumstances of exceptional risk

Practice Development Guides

Develop checklists for organisations that outline areas for consideration, in ensuring best practice is delivered by their service in relation to self-neglect. For example:

- Experts by experience top tips
- Mental Capacity Act Guidance

Learn from practice

- Imbed a multi-agency audit processes to evaluate and feedback on practice
- Undertake spotlight learning events to inform best practice
- Disseminate the learning to inform future practice

Service provision

- Provide practitioners with the time needed to work with people who self-neglect and to commit to multi-agency approaches
- Adopt flexible approaches to working with people self-neglect, recognising their reasons for finding it difficult to accept support.

Assure yourself of good practice

Don't assume; know that your organisation is working in the best ways to support people who self-neglect. Ask questions and take steps to assure yourself of practice within your organisation.

Governance

The self-neglect sub-group will remain responsible for the works undertaken and developing and managing the workplan and actions identified.

Appendix A: What Swindon residents with lived experience told us:

**“Don’t judge me by the chapter you have walked in on. I have a past and a future, I am not defined by my current situation” –
Experts by experience**

In developing this Swindon Self-Neglect Strategy we are indebted to the people with lived experience of self-neglect who have taken their time to share their views and experiences with us. This is a summary of what they told us:

Building relationships is so important:

- "You have to trust the person you are working with. If you don't trust the person you won't be able to work together and make changes."
- "Don't judge me"
- "Don't rush me, it will take time."
- "Things will get worse before they get better"
- "Listen to me. Don't come in with your own agenda"
- "Be aware that my current situation is as a result of trauma; talking and addressing the situation means me reliving the trauma"

As is understanding and empathy for people's unique life histories and circumstances:

- "Quick fixes don't work"
- "I have got a past that has led up to today"
- "This did not happen overnight"
- "I did not choose this"
- "Do not ignore what I am saying, this can make me more anxious, it is my experience"

What makes a difference:

- "Professionals who listen effectively"
- "Allowing me to work through things in my own time at my own pace"
- "Do what you say you will do"
- "Don't promise me something you can't deliver. No empty promises"
- "Praising the little things"
- "A little help and understanding goes a long way"
- "Be empathetic, use your listening skills to understand my experience and trauma"
- "Let's walk together to reach our destination. You can learn a lot from walking in my shoes"

Appendix B: What practitioners and services told us:

“Although we hear it less, it is frustrating when we are told it is a lifestyle choice. I don’t believe anyone chooses to be a hoarder or addict.”

We consulted with practitioners and services across statutory and non-statutory agencies as to the challenges and approaches required to best support people who self-neglect in Swindon. This is a summary of what they told us:

Time is a challenge:

- "Referrals for self-neglect are often pushed back as agencies do not have the time required to work with individuals who are self-neglecting. Even more so when there is also drug and alcohol use."
- "An individual has the right to decline support but by the nature of them self-neglecting more patience and creative avenues should be explored across agencies."
- "Trying to understand the reasons behind the behaviour can help to determine the most effective approaches and who is best placed to engage and lead partnership support"
- "Less work load to allow us to build the appropriate working relationship"

Information, awareness and training:

- "Having easily accessible information with regards to self-neglect so that professionals could identify behaviours and increase their understanding of the impact of how self-neglect affects individuals".
- "It is necessary to have an in depth understanding of how alcohol, substance misuse and mental health could contribute to self-neglect".
- "Lack of understanding around trauma awareness and strength-based approaches."
- "[Greater] consideration of executive capacity"
- "Informal learning amongst teams with best practice and resources shared and discussed and to know where to find local resources and services that can support."
- "Mandatory for staff to have safeguarding training that includes self-neglect."
- "For all professionals and agencies to understand the section 42 safeguarding criteria"

Multi-agency working is really important because:

- "Lots of silo working is no good for the person".
- "A Nominated lead professional to be in place for all self-neglect cases"
- "Effective MDTs where practitioners have confidence in this working well and leading to positive outcomes for the person there are concerns about. (In it for the long hall)"
- "Clear process, roles and expectations [from professionals]"
- "Clear decision-making rationales shared and recorded"
- "Multi-agency interventions and support that puts the individuals beliefs and wishes (wherever possible), at the heart of interventions is most likely to be successful and lead to long-term and positive behavioural change."
- "Consistent approaches to allow us to build the appropriate working relationship"
- "More support and understanding for providers"

- “Risks clearly recorded.”

Easier access to services would assist:

- "Greater awareness of services available to support around self-neglect"
- “Easier access to counselling/therapy, drug/alcohol support and mental health support services”
- “More support in the communities for mental health”
- “A lot more focus needs to be on mental health”

Mental Capacity Act:

- “Better understanding of working with those who have been assessed as having capacity”
- “Understanding the balance between Mental Capacity, Human Rights and Duty of Care”
- “Understanding functional capacity”
- “Understanding executive functioning”

Need for earlier intervention:

- "Professionals assuming a patient is just making 'unwise decisions' without considering the reasons for those actions is a barrier to care. In many cases, this leads to the patient being discharged from services providing the care"
- "The patient did not attend appointments or was not present which meant they missed care and again were discharged"
- "To be pro-active and to offer support earlier to individuals prior to them being in crisis".

A focus on positive engagement:

- “Giving the person your time as a worker and making them feel they are worth your time can go a long way to changing their outlook on life.”
"Patients need to feel safe, valued, loved, advocated for, affirmed, allowed to fail and restart"
- “Easy read options to support individuals understanding”
- “Having difficult conversations, honest... Not giving up, maintain hope for change”
- “It would be beneficial to spend time with them at the end of the meeting to go over anything they do not understand such as acronyms and language / words used.”
- “Individuals to be asked if support is available form family, friends, neighbours? As well as professionals.”

Team barriers and management support:

- “Supervision support/challenge/directed to resources/critical reflection”
- “Time given by teams to free staff up to complete training.”
- “Safeguarding teams need to be more present in people lives.”
- “Time restraints and lack of support from management.”
- “Requests for additional support often taking several weeks. This makes it hard to use early intervention”
- “Effective processes for rapidly responding to concerns”