

Learning from Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and Thematic Review

'Why Doesn't Anything Change'

Names of presenters

Housekeeping

- Please put your names and roles in the chat.
- Questions.
- Recording – some sessions.
- Presentation slides/resource pack.
- Recommend you read the [full reviews](#).
- Health Warning

Purpose of the session



- To reflect on the learning from the:
 - Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, Lola, Liam and the Willow Children.
 - Thematic review 'Why Doesn't Anything Change' which focuses on child neglect.
- Consider the findings and learning from the reviews and reflect on how this impacts on practice. The following themes will be covered:
 - The criteria and context of these reviews.
 - Voices of the children and their lived experience.
 - The impact of neglect.
 - Learning themes identified in the reviews such as, professional curiosity, adultification and use of escalation.
 - The importance of a **Think Family** approach.
- Signposting to resources available for practitioners to support professional development



Swindon Safeguarding Partnership oversees the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements for children and adults with care and support needs as set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 and the Care Act.

Safeguarding Partners in Swindon have the responsibility to notify the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel when a child has either died or has been seriously harmed.

During 2025-26, four serious incident notifications were made to the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel; of these four notifications, three progressed to a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review. We have undertaken three separate reviews and an overarching thematic review focusing on neglect.

The final reports were published on the 29th June 2026.

Neglect and Its Impact

Neglect was a factor for all the children in these reviews.

**Neglect is
everyone's
business**



Small signs, noticed early
and acted on thoughtfully,
change lives.

We know that neglect significantly affects a children's:

- Emotional, physical, and developmental wellbeing.

It can lead to:

- Low self-esteem, difficulties forming relationships, and problems regulating emotions.

Ongoing neglect may also:

- Impair cognitive development, resulting in learning difficulties and poor educational outcomes, alongside risks to physical health.
- Lead to social withdrawal and challenging behaviours.

Without intervention, the impact of neglect can be long-term, increasing the risk of mental health difficulties and ongoing vulnerability through to adulthood.

Neglect and Its Impact

Neglect can cause significant harm even in isolated or short-term instances; it does not need to be persistent or cumulative to have a damaging impact on a child's safety, development, or wellbeing.

We must act early and decisively to reduce harm, keeping the child's lived experience at the centre.

This means intervening where needs are unmet, focusing on impact rather than engagement, and escalating where progress is insufficient to ensure the child's safety and wellbeing.

Voice of the Child



Liam



Lola



Willow Children

- This review examined a sibling group being removed from the care of their mother in 2025 due to persisting concerns about neglect and significant harm.
- The removal to alternative care arrangements was preceded by many years of services being involved with the family and included periods of being subject to Child in Need and Child Protection Plans.
- In the immediate weeks prior to being removed, there had been a legal planning meeting, and considerable input from the professional network.
- On the day that legal protection was used, the children were found to be living in dirty, cluttered, and unhygienic conditions with the following:
 - broken glass,
 - human and animal faeces ,
 - bugs in toothpaste
 - flies on unwashed crockery,
 - no clean clothes

The older children were taking on significant caring responsibilities for their younger siblings and mother.

***‘Why
doesn’t
anything
change?’***



What was life like for these children?

Why doesn't anything change?

**Professional
Curiosity**

**Voice of the
child and
lived
experience**

**Professional
Resolution/
Escalation**

**Parenting Capacity
– impacts of self-
neglect, mental
health and
domestic abuse**

**Balancing
support and
safeguarding**

**Triangulation
of
information**

**Critical
Analysis**

**Professional
respect**

**Intersectionality
with other forms
of harm/abuse
e.g. domestic
abuse.**

**Parental
Consent**

**Parental self
reporting**

**Chronologies
and family
history**

Adultification

**Capacity to
change**

**Management
oversight and
supervision**

Thresholds

**Young
carers**

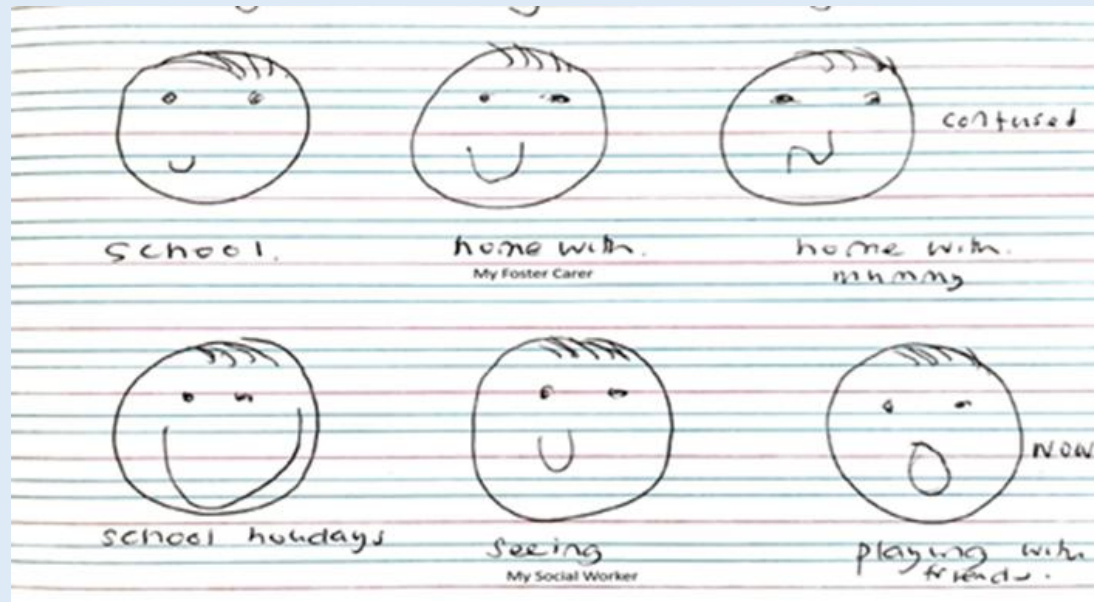
Voice of the Child/Lived Experience

- The review highlights situations where children's voices were clearly expressed but not acted upon.
- Quotes shared by the Willow Children:
 - *they were '**missing their older sibling**' and explained how they wanted to '**cry most days**'*
 - *'**they feel forgotten**' and gave an example of when they were not woken up for dinner.*
 - *they don't really like it when Children's Services are involved but '**it is what it is**'. They have been involved loads of times and they have never found it to be any help or support and there have never been any changes.*

Voice of the Child/Lived Experience

Consider also:

- Nonverbal cues and behaviours.
- Thinking about all children connected to that family or household.
- Neighbour reports



Liam's voice

Voice of the Child/Lived Experience

Working Together to Safeguard Children reminds us of what children have said that they need:

- **Vigilance:** to have adults notice when things are troubling them,
- **Understanding and action:** to understand what is happening; to be heard and understood; and to have that understanding acted upon,
- **Stability:** to be able to develop an ongoing stable relationship of trust with those helping them,
- **Respect:** to be treated with the expectation that they are competent rather than not,
- **Information and engagement:** to be informed about, and involved in procedures, decisions, concerns and plans,
- **Explanation:** to be informed of the outcome of assessments, and decisions and reasons when their views have not met with a positive response,
- **Support:** to be provided with support in their own right as well as a member of their family,
- **Advocacy:** to be provided with advocacy to assist them in putting forward their views,
- **Protection:** to be protected against all forms of abuse, exploitation, and discrimination.

Professional Curiosity

- This is a recurring theme identified in local and national reviews and local audits.
- Alongside being professionally curious, professionals need to remain alert to not relying on, and basing their assessments on, parental self-reporting; triangulating information from all agencies is a fundamental part of keeping children safe from further harm.

What is Professional Curiosity?

- It is where a practitioner seeks to explore and understand what is happening in someone's life, rather than making assumptions or accepting what they are told at face value.
- A combination of looking, listening, asking direct questions, checking out and reflecting on all the information received and not accepting it at face value.
- It means:
 - testing out your professional assumptions about different types of families
 - triangulating information from different sources to gain a better understanding of family functioning which, in turn, helps to make predictions about what is likely to happen in the future
 - seeing past the obvious.

Triangulation of Information

The reviews highlighted the need for triangulation of multi-agency information to understand the holistic lived experience of the child.

Critical analysis prevents fragmented decision-making by considering history and patterns in safeguarding. This can be achieved by:

- **Strengthening assessments** by using multiple sources like observations, records, and partner agency input.
- **Use of Chronologies** to assist in identifying patterns, cumulative harm, and resistance (previously known as disguised compliance) over time through understanding the family's history. This should always form part of any assessment and then decision making.
- **Ensuring database systems** allow for such information to be recorded and extracted is critical to keeping children safe when concerns arise
- **Parental Self-Reporting** Parents provide important information about their circumstances, but it must be balanced with observation and corroboration.
- **Understanding a child's lived experience.**

Threshold Decision-Making and System Pressures

- In local reviews threshold decision-making highlighted an inconsistent application of thresholds. Determining risk levels ensures timely, proportionate responses based on statutory guidelines.
- Inconsistency can lead to premature closure or step-down of support to children and families.
- This is also reflected nationally in the National Panel Neglect thematic report (2026) which highlighted a tendency to interpret minor improvements as signs of success, leading to premature closure of cases.
- Sometimes interventions last only a few months and are closed once parents attend a course or make superficial changes.
- Practitioners described feeling pressured to close cases due to high workloads.
- This contributed to a cycle of short-term engagement, repeated referrals, and escalating concerns, with children's situations deteriorating over time.

Consent

- The refusal or withdrawal of parental consent is not a barrier to information sharing if there are concerns about a child's safety.
- In situations when concerns have been raised about the safety or welfare of a child, and when parents then do not provide consent for further information gathering, assessments or offers of support, professionals should always ask questions and remain child focused.
- Thinking about all children connected to that family or household is also important. The refusal or withdrawal of parental consent might be viewed as an additional risk to the child and should be assessed as such.

Parenting Capacity

- Assessment is not a stand-alone activity. It must be accompanied by planning, intervention and evaluation to lead to improved outcomes for children.
- Assessing parental readiness or capacity to change is equally important and professionals need to be skilled in understanding and assessing the stages of the change process.
- Failure to recognise and understand parent's behaviour and capacity including consideration of history of domestic abuse and parental mental health.
- Consider the intersectionality of risk factors e.g. self neglect on parenting capacity.

Self Neglect and Parenting Capacity

- In the reviews parental self-neglect **was not** explored in terms of the parent's ability to engage with appropriate support and in the assessment of parental capacity to change.
- In respect of the Willow Children the Mother's identified self-neglect and her ability to engage with services offered was a key issue that should have been explored when assessing her parenting capacity.
- Child neglect and the children's role as young carers for their siblings and mother became normalised over time.
- The impact of this on the children's daily lives and experiences was not considered.

Self Neglect and Parenting Capacity

- There were missed opportunities to assess and meet the holistic needs of the family and to offer appropriate support to safeguard the children.
- There was a lack of :
 - a whole family and trauma informed approach in safeguarding practice.
 - analysis of the parent's experience of Adverse Childhood Experiences and the impact on parenting capacity.
 - consideration of how self neglect impacts on children
 - information sharing between partner agencies to gain a holistic picture of the children's lived experience.

Think Family

The reviews have highlighted the need to **Be Curious and Think Family** to Safeguard Children. Practitioners should ask:

- **Are there children living within the household and being cared by a parent who self-neglects?**
- **What is it like to be a child in this family or household on a daily basis?**
- **Do I routinely consider how parental vulnerabilities e.g. parental self neglect, mental health, domestic abuse and substance misuse impact parenting capacity?**

Note: There is a need to balance support and safeguarding, and practitioners must ensure adult support does not overshadow child safeguarding.

The local reviews reflect learning from national reviews which is documented in the [National Panel Neglect thematic report \(2026\)](#) which highlighted that many families experiencing neglect are also facing other complex challenges, but interventions rarely adopted a **Think Family** approach which addressed both children's and adult's needs.

Professional Resolution/Escalation

- The reviews highlighted the lack of use of the Swindon Safeguarding Partnership Adult and Children Resolution Policy
- Informal challenge and escalation, or expressing a different professional opinion has a place, however, if you continue to have concerns about a child's safety or welfare, and no changes have occurred without a reasonable rationale being given, formal challenge and escalation must be progressed.

Adultification

- The adultification of children was identified in these reviews in terms of the Willow Children being expected to take on caring responsibilities for their younger siblings and their mother.
- This adultification was normalised by practitioners.
- In relation to Liam, this was an expectation of him being responsible for his medical treatment of eczema and his personal safety.
- Adultification occurs when children are seen as more mature than they are, leading to unmet needs and less protection.
- It is a type of bias which skews the perception of certain children leading to professionals viewing them as more grown up than their peers which can lead to lapses in safeguarding and unfair treatment.

Young Carers

- When concerns arise about the possibility of a child taking on caring responsibilities, either for siblings or a parent, early assessment and taking a whole family approach is important.
- Being a young carer can lead to a child:
 - taking on adult responsibilities too early,
 - neglecting their own needs,
 - having unmet needs,
 - having a lack of adult supervision.

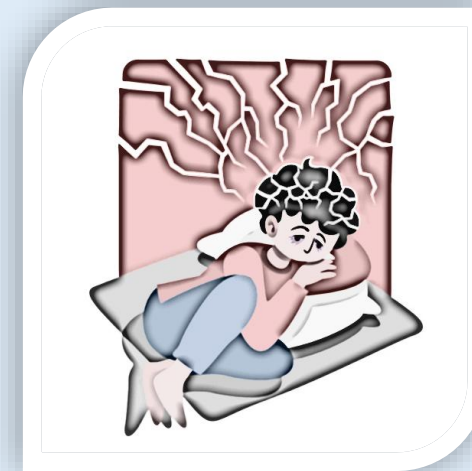
These combined have a cumulative impact on the child's overall health, development and safety.

***'I have to
remind mum
to take
tablets'***
Willow Children

Reflective Supervision/Management Oversight

The reviews highlighted:

- Managers must ensure that they provide regular high quality reflective supervision for practitioners or oversight of children who are experiencing persisting neglect.
- This will help counter neglect being normalised, bias forming, new workers starting again, and over-optimism.
- **Reflective supervision:** is important for all workers, especially those with lead and decision-making responsibilities, to help:
 - reflect on styles of working and engaging parents
 - keep an eye on relationships,
 - power imbalances, bias and prejudices, and
 - remaining child focused.



Learning Themes Identified in relation to Lola, Liam and Willow Children

Other Learning Themes

Other specific themes included:

- **Seeking the views of a child's father:** when safe and appropriate to do so, may yield important and relevant information as part of your assessment. (Lola and Willow Children)
- **Housing Agencies:** Housing agencies and providers are a relevant agency. They may have unique insights into children's lives, and the quality-of-care children receive. Referrals from Housing agencies should always be treated with importance and respect. (Lola and Liam)

Other learning themes

- **Naming the type of neglect** – for example: Medical Neglect:
- For all children, but especially younger children, it is the responsibility of parents & carers to initiate and support the child with treatment, and there should be no expectation of treatment being the child's responsibility. (Liam)

Part time timetables: for children who have poor school attendance a wider management strategy must be considered, ensuring that all agencies understand:

- family history,
- context, and
- implications of reduced attendance at school.

A safeguarding lens should always be considered and linked to practice frameworks, i.e. Early Help or Child in Need Plans. (Liam)



**What can you do
as an
individual/agency
to recognise and
respond to child
neglect?**

Thematic Review

'Why Doesn't Anything Change'

Thematic Review - Key Lines of Enquiry

1. As individual agencies, and collectively as a Partnership, how do we strengthen our response to child neglect?
2. What factors – relevant to these cases - have challenged the Partnership and prevented them from embedding learning from previous reviews, and what opportunities might exist to overcome these challenges, including how to deliver learning from reviews in a different way?
3. Are there any organisational factors which might have impacted the quality & effectiveness of service delivery since 2020?

The findings were also structured using a systemic approach, based on four domains as a way of understanding a whole system response to child welfare concerns, and consist of;

- practice and practice knowledge,
- systems and processes,
- leadership and culture, and
- wider service context.

Contextual Challenges

The findings highlighted:

- wider service context challenges faced locally, recognising the improvement journey Children's Social Care is on, as well as challenges in other agencies such as the Police.
- workload demands,
- staff turnover at all levels,
- professional differences of opinion or challenge and escalation being absent.
- Noting challenges when responding to neglect and chronic neglect, such as the:
 - impacts of poverty,
 - Covid-19,
 - notion that neglect is everywhere and no-where – often resulting in a normalisation of standards and expectations, with professionals becoming desensitised by what they see.

Thematic Review Highlighted

The importance of getting the basics right and focusing efforts on embedding core expectations well, as set out in statutory guidance – this does not appear to be happening consistently. In practice, this translates to:

- Unlikely to be one single intervention or agency that will make a difference for those children that live in families with multiple needs.
- Ensuring the workforce are confident in their practice, knowledge and skills to identify child neglect.

Thematic Review Highlighted

- **Clear Understanding:** expectations and response when neglect is identified.
- **Confident Workforce:** ensuring the workforce is confident in their practice, knowledge and skills to properly assess, understand, and work with children and families to reduce the longer terms impacts of persisting neglect.
- **Leaders and Managers:** to create and maintain organisational conditions which nurture and support such practice.

Keeping in mind
'What is it like to be a child in this family or household on a daily basis?'

In Summary

- This thematic review highlighted many basic and core tasks were either not achieved or not carried out with sufficient quality. For example:
 - historical or chronological information was either not available or not fully used,
 - child focused assessments were lacking, meaningful relationships with children and families were not forged,
 - multi-agency collaboration was limited or often strained.
- Reasons for this were complex, issues highlighted included confusion about:
 - threshold guidance leading professionals to make inconsistent decisions,
 - how and when to assess neglect and a lack of clarity about the tools, when to use them to assess child neglect and professional expectations about what good enough care looks like.
- Ultimately the focus on the child's needs was lost and became too adult focused, leading to parental views being considered above the child's need for safeguarding.

Safeguarding Partnership Response

Safeguarding Partnership Response

1. Strengthening Essential Foundations

- Develop a shared multi-agency definition and thresholds for neglect.
- Redesign neglect tools co-produced with practitioners.
- Introduce a continuous audit and learning cycle with frontline involvement and clear “You Said, We Did” feedback mechanisms.
- Strengthen supervision and managerial accountability.

Safeguarding Partnership Response

2. Culture Change and System Leadership

- Launch a multi-agency neglect communication and culture strategy.
- Promote a shared understanding of neglect as serious harm.
- Embed neglect as a core strategic priority across all partner agencies.
- Ensure executive leadership ownership of neglect improvement.
- Align neglect work with early intervention, prevention, and neighbourhood delivery models.

Safeguarding Partnership Response

3. Workforce Development and Sustainability

- Review and redesign multi-agency learning and training, focusing on reflective and analytical practice.
- Shift towards restorative, strength-based, learning models.
- Improve neglect guidance to be clear, visual, and example-rich, covering adolescent neglect and confident communication with parents.
- Celebrate and share good practice to create an asset-based learning culture.

What to take away from today



Questions



Feedback

We would like to hear your views about this webinar.
Please take a couple of minutes to give us your feedback

Either via the link below

[Spotlight on Learning from Reviews 'Why Doesn't Anything Change'](#)

or scanning the QR code.



Are you on our circulation list?

Do you want to be kept updated about SSP related matters such as training, learning resources and our newsletter?

You can sign up to our circulation list circulation list by clicking on this link: <https://forms.office.com/e/f7CRNF6Wax>

Or using the QR code.

