



17 June 2026

Dear Colleagues

RE: Call to Action: Strengthening Our Response to Child Neglect in Bolton

Child neglect remains one of the most prevalent and harmful forms of abuse affecting children in Bolton. Its impact is profound, enduring, and far-reaching, affecting children's development, wellbeing and future life chances. Tackling neglect has been a shared priority for Bolton's Safeguarding Partners and the wider partnership throughout 2025–2026. However, we must be clear and unequivocal: the progress we are seeing is not yet sufficient to deliver the change that children in Bolton need and deserve.

We recognise that identifying and responding to neglect is complex and often cumulative, linked to poverty, parental mental health, substance misuse, and domestic abuse. While these challenges exist, we must strengthen our system response with urgency. We are issuing this call to action to all statutory and relevant agencies across Bolton. We expect leaders and practitioners to act now, individually and collectively, to strengthen our response to neglect.

In the next six months, all organisations are expected to demonstrate measurable progress in early identification, multi-agency working, addressing cumulative harm and ensuring children's lived experiences inform all decision-making. This requires prioritising neglect in practice, acting early, strengthening professional curiosity, embedding tools and guidance, working together effectively, and maintaining a clear focus on impact for the child.

Over the next six months, we will:-

- Implement a multi-agency assurance framework with shared indicators, audit, and evidence of impact on children.
- Strengthen scrutiny and challenge through partnership governance.
- Align with inspection expectations (Ofsted, CQC, HMICFRS).
- Test progress against safeguarding review learning, including drift, disguised compliance, and cumulative harm.
- Focus on impact, asking clearly: what is changing for this child?

We will support partners to strengthen their response, however, we will also hold all organisations to account for delivery and impact. All organisations will be expected to evidence tangible improvements in practice, workforce capability, multi-agency collaboration, and outcomes for children. To support this, we have provided an accompanying document to enable organisations to reflect, evaluate progress and identify improvement needed in their organisation.

As Safeguarding Partners, we are clear that this call to action must lead to demonstrable and sustained improvement.

Yours sincerely

CS Helen Critchley
District Commander
Bolton

On behalf of:-

Sandra Bruce, Local Authority, Delegated Safeguarding Partner

Chief Superintendent Helen Critchley, Greater Manchester Police, Delegated Safeguarding Partner

Elizabeth Walton, Greater Manchester Integrated Care Board, Delegated Safeguarding Partner

Call to Action: Tackling Child Neglect in Bolton Supporting Document

Purpose

This supporting document accompanies the *Call to Action: Tackling Child Neglect in Bolton* issued by Bolton's Safeguarding Partners. It sets out why addressing child neglect is a shared priority across all organisations working with children and families. It aims to strengthen understanding of the impact of neglect, reinforce collective responsibility, and support consistent, effective practice at every level.

The document provides a framework for reflection and action, guiding strategic leaders, managers, and practitioners to assess how well their organisation identifies, responds to, and prevents child neglect. It emphasises the importance of early intervention, professional curiosity, and multi-agency collaboration to improve outcomes for children.

Ultimately, this document is intended to drive system-wide change by ensuring that neglect is recognised, addressed promptly, and embedded as a core safeguarding priority—so that every child in Bolton has the opportunity to thrive.

Why Tackling Child Neglect Matters To Your Organisation

For children living in neglectful circumstances, they can experience:-

- Poor physical and emotional development
- Impaired brain development
- Long-term mental health difficulties that persist into adulthood
- Educational disadvantage
- Increased vulnerability to exploitation

Experiencing childhood neglect, can impact on adulthood:-

- Emotional and mental health: Childhood neglect can lead to low self-esteem, difficulty managing emotions, and increased risk of anxiety, depression, and long-term psychological distress.
- Relationships and coping: It may affect the ability to build healthy relationships, leading to trust issues, social isolation, vulnerability to harm, and difficulties with stress regulation and decision-making.
- Physical health and life outcomes: Neglect is linked to poorer physical health, higher risk of chronic illness, harmful coping behaviours (e.g. substance misuse), and reduced educational and employment opportunities.
- Long-term and intergenerational impact: Effects can be enduring and cumulative, sometimes influencing parenting and increasing the risk of intergenerational neglect—though resilience is possible with the right support.

It is essential that all organisations in Bolton take an active role in addressing child neglect early, as prompt identification and intervention are critical to improving outcomes and future life chances.

Our Collective Responsibility

Addressing neglect requires system leadership, professional curiosity, and consistent practice at every level.

Strategic Leaders¹

(Lead and Deputy Safeguarding Partners, Chief Executives of NHS Trusts, Education Leaders, Chief Executives of Voluntary or Community Organisations, Chief Officers within Probation, Leaders with responsibility for Services to Adults)

Strategic leaders must:-

- Champion neglect as a priority safeguarding issue
- Drive whole-system alignment across partnerships
- Ensure sufficient resources and workforce capacity

¹ As defined in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 p15-17

- Embed neglect within strategic plans and commissioning priorities
- Promote use of evidence-based tools and approaches
- Provide robust oversight and challenge through governance structures
- Ensure learning from reviews is implemented and monitored

Call to Action:

In your organisation, reflect:-

- How well has the organisation embedded tackling child neglect within their single agency system?
- How well are all levels of the organisation working collaboratively with other partners to share responsibility for the early identification of child neglect and preventing the escalation of harm to children?
- How do leaders at all levels of the organisation ensure there is consistent understanding, threshold application, and required responses to child neglect in daily practice?
- Does the organisation have the right resources, and workforce skills and capacity to effectively identify, assess and respond to child neglect?
- How does the organisation ensure the consistent use of evidence-based tools, approaches, and frameworks?
- Does the organisations governance structures ensure there is robust oversight and constructive challenge when evaluating the impact of organisational responses to children's lived experiences of neglect?
- If there are concerns about the organisation's response to child neglect, what action is being taken to address this?
- How am I visibly championing neglect as a safeguarding priority and how is this reflected in strategy, culture, and leadership in this organisation?

Senior and Front-Line Managers

(Assistant Directors, Heads of Service, Service Managers, Team Managers, Designated Safeguarding Leads, Named Practitioners, Head Teachers, Chief Inspectors, GPs, Early Years Leads, Team Managers, Training, Development and Practice Leads)

Senior and Front-line Managers must:-

- Ensure staff are **trained and confident in recognising neglect**
- Promote **consistent use of neglect tools within single and multi-agency assessment frameworks**
- Provide **reflective supervision** that explores drift, disguised compliance, and cumulative harm
- Challenge **threshold decisions and delays**
- Strengthen **multi-agency working and information sharing**
- Ensure **the child's lived experience remains central**

Call to Action:

In your service, reflect:-

- How do I know that staff are trained, supported, and confident in recognising the early and cumulative signs of neglect in children?
- Are neglect tools being used consistently and effectively across assessments—and what assurance do I have about the quality of this practice?
- Through supervision and oversight, how am I identifying and challenging drift, disguised compliance, and the long-term impact of cumulative harm on the child, whether in my service or others?
- Where thresholds, decisions, or timelines are not meeting the child's needs, how am I constructively challenging and escalating to secure the right response?
- How am I ensuring strong multi-agency collaboration, effective information sharing and analysis, and that the child's lived experience is clearly understood and central to all plans?

Practitioners

(Social Workers, Health Visitors, Midwives, Front-line Police Officers, Teachers, Children's Homes Staff, Criminal Justice, Adult Services and Those Working In The Voluntary and Community Sector)

Practitioners must:-

- Recognise early indicators of neglect (including subtle and chronic concerns)
- Use professional curiosity to **understand the lived experience of the child**
- Actively engage with families while **maintaining a clear focus on the child's welfare**
- Use neglect tools to explore the impact on the child and record evidence clearly
- Escalate concerns where **progress is limited or risks remain**
- Work collaboratively with partners to provide **coordinated support**
- Be reflective and work collaboratively to share and critically analyse information

Call to Action:

For the children and families you help, reflect:-

- What is it like to be this child today and live in this family network? What might this child's life look like in 10–20 years if nothing changes?
- What early or subtle signs of neglect might I be noticing, what does it tell me about the type(s) of neglect the child is experiencing and what impact is this having on the child?
- How have I sought to understand the child's voice, feelings, and lived reality beyond what is immediately presented by the family or situation?
- Am I actively engaging and supporting the family while keeping the child's welfare, safety, and developmental needs at the centre of my decision-making?
- Have I used appropriate neglect tools to understand and evidence impact, record concerns clearly, and build an accurate picture over time?
- Are we breaking patterns of neglect or managing them?
- If progress is limited or risks remain, what am I doing to escalate concerns and work collaboratively with partners to challenge, reflect, and strengthen the response?

Further Reading and Resources

Please refer to Bolton Safeguarding Children Partnership (BSCP) resources:

- BSCP Neglect Strategy
- Neglect Toolkit, including Screening and Assessment Tools
- Multi-agency thresholds guidance
- Learning from local and national Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews
- Training and workforce development offers
- Early Help pathways and guidance

Access via: **Bolton Safeguarding Children Partnership website (BSCP):-**
[Child neglect – Bolton Safeguarding Children](#)

Final Message

Tackling neglect is everyone's business. In six months BSCP will be seeking assurance from all statutory and relevant organisations as to how they have embedded Bolton's Tackling Neglect Strategy and supporting resources, and what impact has it made for the children and families they work with.

Every interaction matters. Every practitioner has a role. Every child deserves better.