The state of child neglect in the UK
Recommendations for the UK Government

Based on an annual review by Action for Children in partnership with the University of Stirling

Action for Children
3 The Boulevard
Ascot Road
Watford WD18 8AG
Telephone: 0300 123 2112

Action for Children is committed to helping the most vulnerable and neglected children and young people in the UK break through injustice, deprivation and inequality, so they can achieve their full potential.

actionforchildren.org.uk
Background

Action for Children, in partnership with the University of Stirling, is committed to producing an annual review of child neglect. In this report, we take the research findings and provide wider context to set out Action for Children’s recommendations to the UK Government in Westminster.

To see detailed findings and analysis, please read the full research report at:

actionforchildren.org.uk/policy-research/research

Summary of recommendations to the UK Government

Action for Children has the following recommendations for the UK Government in Westminster:

- The Government must honour its commitment to increase early intervention services with clear statutory duties for early help included in the new Working Together statutory guidance.
- The Government must revise the inspection framework so that no local authority can receive an excellent inspection rating unless it demonstrates sufficient and effective early help services.
- The Government must commission Ofsted to conduct a thematic review on child neglect focused on early intervention.
- The Government must urgently implement the integrated child health and welfare check recommended in the Tickell Review and ensure that it is appropriate, accessible and easy to use.
- The Government must introduce a web-portal for the public to seek help for children they are worried about. It should include a facility to report concerns about a child directly to the relevant council area via a postcode function.
Introduction

Child neglect

Action for Children has been working with vulnerable families for over 143 years. We know that too many children across the UK are experiencing chronic neglect throughout large parts of their childhood. They are not getting the early help they need, when they need it.

Neglect is the most common reason that children are made subject to a child protection plan with neglect featuring in 60 per cent of all Serious Case Reviews. These child protection statistics are just the tip of the iceberg with studies suggesting up to 10 per cent of children in the UK suffer from neglect.

Young people have said that neglect makes them feel invisible, lonely, unloved and depressed. Others have said they have thought about self-harming and suicide.

There is significant evidence about the severe impact of neglect upon children’s wellbeing and development, in the early years as well as the teenage years. Neglect can take different forms, ranging from obvious physical signs such as being severely under or over weight, to children being left alone in the house or on the streets for long periods of time. Children may lack parental support to go to school, miss health appointments, have no opportunities to have fun or be ignored when distressed.

For some, child neglect can result in death, either through starvation or due to accidents because of a lack of supervision.

Our annual review

This report is based on the second in a series of annual reviews to gauge the scale of child neglect and monitor the effects of changes in national and local policy and practice.

In 2011/12, we found that police and social workers were increasingly aware of neglect, but that they were also frustrated at not being able to help children before needs and concerns had escalated. As resources get tighter and services are seeing increased levels of need, we are concerned about the growing number of children who are experiencing neglect but whose needs are deemed to fall below the line to receive child protection services. That is why for our 2012/13 review we wanted to find out what professionals within universal services - such as health services and schools - can actively do to help neglected children and how they can work best in local areas to make a difference to children’s lives.

Between June and October 2012, we gathered evidence from the public and professionals in a range of ways:

- A survey was undertaken in 27 local authorities (boards in Northern Ireland) across the UK.
- 12 in-depth, on-site multi-agency focus groups were undertaken in three areas across the UK.
- A total of 3,263 adults in the general public responded to an online poll.
- 2,153 professionals responded to an online poll (1,248 primary school staff, 181 pre-school/nursery staff, 379 health professionals).
- 196 social workers and 200 police officers also gave their views.
- The findings from 2012 were compared with similar polls commissioned by Action for Children in 2009 and 2011 to see if there have been any changes.
- We collated published statistics from across the UK and internationally.
- We analysed policy developments across the four nations of the UK.

Findings from the research report and this recommendations document will inform our influencing activity and provide policy makers with the evidence they need to make the right decisions to improve the lives of neglected children. Although this document and our recommendations apply to the UK Government in Westminster, we will continue to work with the devolved administrations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to improve the lives of neglected children.
Key findings from the research

Key findings of our 2012/13 annual review are set out below.

The scale of child neglect

Neglect is the most common initial reason that children are placed on a child protection register or made subject to a child protection plan. The total numbers of children subject to child protection proceedings across the four nations of the UK giving neglect as the primary or contributory reason were: 1,450 (49% of total number) in Wales; 1,131 (46% of total) in Northern Ireland; (2010); 18,590 (44% of total) in England (2011) and 1,646 (42% of total) in Scotland.

These child protection statistics are just the tip of the iceberg and do not show the true scale of neglect. Studies suggest up to 10 per cent of children in the UK suffer from neglect.

We spoke to professionals in social care (police and social workers) and in universal services including early years staff, teachers and health visitors. Ninety-one per cent of the professionals we surveyed said they came across children who they believe are being neglected. Twelve per cent of professionals reported coming into contact with children who are experiencing neglect on a weekly basis.

There are still inadequate systems for collating accurate figures specifically in relation to child neglect. While there continues to be some piecemeal and localised collection of data about the numbers of children requiring targeted support, for example Child Protection and Child in Need Census returns in England and CAF data in Wales, current data collection does not fully represent the true scale of child neglect. There needs to be a range of data systematically gathered across all levels of need if we are to really know how many children are experiencing neglect across the UK. Commissioners must have a clear understanding of the problem if they are to plan and commission services that will really make a difference to the lives of neglected children.
An increase in suspected neglect and its impact on children

We asked those professionals who said that they are seeing more cases of suspected child neglect than 12 months ago, why they thought this was the case. The most common reason cited by staff working in schools was deterioration in parenting skills (78%). Other main reasons included greater poverty in the area, with this factor rising among all professionals from 44 per cent in 2009 to 66 per cent in 2012.

Professionals reported a variety of ways in which children can be affected by neglect. These included: bullying, physical ill-health and lack of school attendance; as well as a lack of opportunities for new experiences.

Help seeking by the general public

Our findings show that the public are worried about neglected children and want to help. To be able to do this they need more information and an easy way to report their concerns.

An overwhelming majority of adults, 94 per cent, agreed that people should become involved where they have concerns that a child is being neglected.

A third (33%) of those who had a concern about a neglected child did not tell anyone. At 34 per cent, the most likely reason given for not reporting was due to a perceived lack of evidence (an increase of 13% since 2011).

Sixty seven per cent of the public who have had concerns did speak to someone. Over one third (35%) told friends or family. Social services remains the most common professional point of contact, however the number of people speaking to other professionals, such as doctors or nurses, has risen significantly over the last year, from 18 per cent in 2011, to 26 per cent in 2012.

There has been a steady increase in the numbers of people claiming that they need more information about who to contact to get help for a child that they think is being neglected; from 23 per cent in 2009 to 44 per cent in 2012. Over half, 52 per cent, of the public said that if they suspected a case of child neglect they would want to receive information from a Government website.
Figure 2: Which of the following reasons best describes why you (general public) did not feel worried enough to tell someone about it?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t have proof/evidence</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frightened of repercussions (e.g. causing trouble for me or people if I am wrong)</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wasn’t sure it was neglect or child in danger</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know the parents/guardians/family</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s none of my business</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s unlikely to be as serious as things on TV</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t think what was happening was against the law</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: Percentage of the general public who want more information about who to contact for help if they were worried a child is being neglected

- 2012: 44%
- 2011: 37%
- 2009: 23%
Children not getting help early enough

We found that a high percentage of professionals feel powerless to intervene in cases of suspected child neglect: over one third of police officers and social workers; one in four health professionals; two fifths of primary school teachers; and one in four nursery school teachers.

“Agencies must work closely together at an earlier stage and apply the same rigour to early intervention that there is for child protection. We must lower our thresholds of acceptable care with less tolerance of poor standards and a more robust challenge of neglectful parenting.”

Survey respondent, England

Overall, around half the professionals polled feel that there are barriers which make it difficult to intervene in suspected cases of neglect, in particular because of a lack of available services and resources.

Our findings show that professionals in Scotland are less likely to have felt powerless to intervene than their colleagues in the other UK nations. This may be linked to the consistent policy commitment in Scotland to the Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) framework which aims to offer a network of support so that children get the right help at the right time. The network comprises family, carers and universal health and education services.

Limited resources and impact of public spending cuts

“There will be cuts for the next four years and year-on-year cuts will have an impact. Efforts are being made to optimise the resources we do have and it will be a struggle. Children experiencing neglect will not often present themselves through formal routes, and reduced resources will mean heightened thresholds. There will be less people out there to notice neglected children. And although the emphasis is on maintaining front-line staff, if there are reduced numbers of support staff the front-line staff then have to do that function and less time will be spent on addressing neglect.”

Survey respondent, England

While there are attempts to move towards services that intervene early to work with vulnerable families, professionals reported major worries about the sustainability of these developments given the continued stretching and reduction of local authority budgets. This is especially of concern as we know that further cuts are expected, with predictions that money available to fund council services will have shrunk by 90 per cent by 2020.\textsuperscript{i}
Last year, 48 per cent of professionals felt that spending cuts would make it more difficult to intervene in cases of child neglect. Now 29 per cent reported the same. It is important to remember that this is in the context of shrinking resources and these levels represent a significant number of professionals facing more difficult situations.

The spending cuts that have already taken place may have had an impact on the types of cases which are now coming to the attention of children’s social care, with the possibility that they will be likely to only hear about children where there are severe concerns. Of all professionals, those who have had suspicions of child neglect in the past and those who have received training or information around the issue were significantly more likely to state that cuts had a negative or no impact.

“A reduction in funding has meant a general decrease in commissioning – analysis by the LSCB has identified that services that provided social and emotional skills for children have been most affected by the spending cuts.”

Survey respondent, England
Helping neglected children when problems first emerge

Everyone has a role to play in identifying and dealing with child neglect, from the general public to professionals that work directly with children. To move towards services offering children early help to tackle child neglect, we need to better understand these roles and how people can work together to improve the lives of neglected children.

What universal services can do to help neglected children

The value of universal services in identifying and tackling neglect needs to be recognised and understood, with professionals in these services being supported to give children help early when they need it. Even though there are many examples of what universal services can do to help neglected children, we found that only 12 per cent of those we surveyed in a universal role offered a service themselves when encountering a case of suspected child neglect. This suggests that the majority see their role as referring cases to other people or organisations. A referral must not be seen as an end to itself, rather it is the subsequent action taken to support the neglected child that is important.

Six per cent of all professionals we surveyed stated that it was not part of their role to intervene in cases of suspected child neglect. While remaining relatively consistent among different types of professions, this rises to one in seven of those who have not been given training or information around the issue.

Over three quarters (78%) of professionals who have had suspicions of child neglect in the past spoke to their manager/superior. This was highest among staff working in education – 81 per cent of primary school staff and 76 per cent of nursery school staff. Health professionals were much more likely to speak to others about their concerns, talk to the child’s family themselves or offer a particular service.

Professionals in some areas reported that it is increasingly difficult to get help from statutory social care agencies, even for children who they have concerns about and that are seen to be ‘in need’ rather than for whom there are serious child protection concerns. Social work staff themselves have described how they have to ask referring agents what they have put in place already and make a suggestion for what more could be done at a universal level before social work intervention can be considered.

Figure 4: Universal professionals that offered a service themselves in a case of suspect child neglect

- Offered a service themselves
- Did not offer a service themselves

12% 88%
“We have expressed concern in relation to the quality of referrals received by our partner agencies. Referrals generally tend to be vague in nature and fairly non-specific in relation to a child’s needs, parenting capacity and the service that is required in order to meet a child’s needs.”

Survey respondent, Wales

Our findings suggest that there is a view among professionals that there is an increasing emphasis on children being helped by staff providing targeted services based within universal and family support services. This is leading to children and families social care and social work services only becoming involved when there are serious child protection concerns and the likelihood of the need to invoke child protection procedures.

Research shows that it is vital to provide support to families early so that they can change their behaviour. Early help offered by (or within) universal services is seen as more flexible and less stigmatising, thereby making it easier for children and families to accept. It is professionals within universal services who may see the first signs of neglect or who may come into contact with children in need if they do not meet the child protection threshold. In addition, universal service staff can act as ‘brokers’ to ease the relationship between families and more targeted or statutory social work services.

“Schools have an important role – a key thing is to establish relationships with families... We use experience and judgement to understand the family situation and which are the chronic issues which are not going to be resolved overnight.”

Focus group participant, England

Our findings suggest that services such as the Police, housing, staff at Accident and Emergency Units in hospitals and at a Women’s Health Unit are increasingly aware of what to look out for in detecting signs of neglect. Midwives and health visitors continue to identify families who may need extra help and staff in family support services, such as children’s centres in England, are being identified as having an important role to play as they often see children on a daily basis.

Our research reveals pockets of local practice that demonstrate how staff based within universal services can reach out and help vulnerable families where there are concerns about child neglect. Some examples are given overleaf:
Health:
- Nursery nurses part-funded by Sure Start Children’s Centres and Health to support families.
- Health visitor drop-in sessions and advice-giving duty teams at children’s centres.
- Work with fathers.
- Health visitor services supplemented by staff in a family support or lay health worker role.
- Parenting groups and community child minders who provide an enhanced service for vulnerable families.

Education:
- Breakfast clubs and after-school activities.
- Provision of food banks, clothing and showers.
- ‘Wrap-around care’ for vulnerable children.
- Older children mentoring and caring for younger children at lunchtimes.
- Parenting classes provided within schools.
- Adult literacy/numeracy for parents and advice about helping with homework, run at the school.
- Outreach work to support families at home and offer.

Local services working together

“We get golden moments. If it hadn’t been for the joint working from start to finish some of the families we worked with would have lost their children.”

Focus group participant, England

Given the nature of neglect and the complexity of local arrangements, it is inevitable that a number of different organisations will come into contact with children who may be at risk. It is essential that in a local area there is a co-ordinated, multi-agency response to make sure that children do not fall down the cracks between different services and different systems.

To ensure that vulnerable children do not get lost in the system, we need a single approach where children get help whatever the level of concern. Encouragingly our results showed an increased use of the ‘step up and step down’ approach where families can be provided with more formal and/or intensive types of help if required but can also access informal, non-statutory help if their support needs reduce without going back to the beginning of a referral process. Approaches like this need time to embed in local areas and prove that they work.

In response to the need for multi-agency working, there is currently a variety of initiatives being developed across the UK aimed at joining up local responses. For example, in some areas of England Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) have been established to assess need and make sure that all safeguarding activity and intervention is timely, proportionate and necessary.

The MASH aims to ensure that better informed decisions are made about risks to children, including identifying cases where early intervention could remove the risk of harm.
Sitting below the MASH integrated teams can be co-located in a local service hub, such as a children’s or family centre, to offer resources and support to meet the needs of individual children. This is essential if all children, whatever their level of need, are to receive a service to tackle concerns around neglect at an early stage. Although there are examples of good progress towards structures and strategies to support early help for neglected children, this is piecemeal and only happening in some local areas.

**Time to embed early help**

Early help is recognised within policy development but frequent reviews and new initiatives are not creating a stable environment to enable these initiatives to embed. The result is that the rhetoric around early help is not consistently translating into practice. For example, the recommendations from the Munro Review have been slow to implement, or in some cases rejected by Government. There are currently significant changes to health, education and children services systems, the impact of which are yet to be seen, but we are concerned that this will result in safeguarding slipping down the agenda with local agencies being unable to cope in a time of reduced resources.

Learning needs to be shared across the nations based on an underpinning commitment to early intervention. The Government must allow time for implementation and evaluation of early help systems to enable developments to become established and have a chance to take effect. There must be a period of consolidation supported by Government activity to enforce existing duties to provide early help.
Measuring outcomes for neglected children

Our review found that there appears to have been little progress overall in the ways in which services judge whether they have been effective in helping neglected children either individually or collectively. This is a particular issue in relation to measuring the effectiveness of early intervention and prevention measures.

“It is crucial that we find ways to evidence improvements as a result of preventative and early intervention support work so that we can justify the importance of funding them.”

Survey respondent: Northern Ireland

Some local areas reported methods of measuring outcomes for individual children, such as the use of formal reviewing data to measure progress towards identified aims for children in the Child in Need, Looked After Children and children with Common Assessment Framework (CAF) plans systems. There also appears to be greater use of case audits to look at outcomes for children and some areas have developed frameworks for these.

Across the devolved nations frameworks are being developed, for example in Scotland, there is on-going development of outcomes frameworks based on the GIRFEC well-being indicators. In Northern Ireland the Children and Young Person’s Strategic Partnership has an outcomes focus and Regional Outcomes Groups have instigated processes to measure impact against six High Level Outcomes. In Wales, Results Based Accountability and the use of individual action plans for children which are more outcomes focused is being developed. The Outcomes Framework for Social Services in Wales is intended to be in place by April 2014.

However, despite all these initiatives local areas were not able to gather consistent and robust data to indicate that neglected children’s lives in the UK have been improved as a result of an appropriate intervention. For an individual child, information held by all involved agencies needs to be shared about his or her health, education and well-being to track the trajectory of their development against expected developmental norms. The same process could be scaled up for wider service evaluations if better data collation and linkage could be developed.

In England, the Tickell review of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) recommended that the Government introduces a way of measuring a child’s development; a single integrated review at age two to two and a half. This would combine health and social checks into one single review creating a simple, accessible way to ensure that all children are assessed in the early years.

Activity to measure the impact of service provision on outcomes for children needs to be prioritised, not least to evidence the contribution of early intervention approaches.
Conclusions and recommendations

The recommendations in this section are drawn from the research findings and the external policy environment.

An unacceptable number of children are experiencing neglect. National and local change is urgently needed so that neglected children are identified swiftly and helped.

A commitment to early help

The evidence for early help is established and accepted, however more needs to be done to show a firm commitment to providing help for neglected children when they need it.

Local authorities have a duty to provide services for children in need under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, this means they must safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need and promote the upbringing of such children by their families by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children’s needs. Although this puts a clear focus on meeting vulnerable children’s needs it does not amount to a duty to provide early help services.

In recognition of the need to put early intervention on a clearer footing, the Munro Review proposed a new statutory duty to be introduced on early help. The Government rejected this recommendation stating that an additional duty is not needed as there are existing duties on all partner agencies to co-operate to improve children’s wellbeing under section 10 of the Children Act 2004. We do not think that this is the case.

Section 10 of the Children Act 2004 places a duty on local authorities in England to ‘make arrangements to promote co-operation’ between partners ‘with a view to improving the well-being of children in the authority’s area’. Well-being includes elements including protection from harm and neglect. As the duty is only to make arrangements to promote co-operation, this offers no strong accountability for providing early help. In addition, section 11 of the Children Act 2004 requires agencies to make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, but again this does not place a requirement on agencies to provide early help services.

In the area of vulnerable adults the Government is proposing to introduce an ‘early help’ duty upon local authorities through the Care and Support Bill. This states that a local authority must provide services which will contribute towards preventing or delaying the development of needs for care and support by adults in its area. If this is appropriate and possible for vulnerable adults, then why not for children?

The Government must honour its commitment to increase early intervention services with a clear statutory duty for early help included in the new Working Together statutory guidance.

In addition to providing a duty on early help, local authorities need to have clear funding streams dedicated to early help.

The Early Intervention Grant (EIG), valued at £2.3 billion in 2012/13, was welcomed as a way of focusing spending on prevention. However, the EIG will be absorbed into wider local government funding from April 2013. Money reallocated from the existing EIG includes funding of free early education entitlement (from September 2014 the scheme will cover 260,000 children and cost around £760 million) and £150m which Children’s Minister Edward Timpson has stated will be allocated to fund the Adoption Reform Grant. Figures from the Local Government Association
suggest an additional £49 million will be removed from early intervention services in 2013/14 and 2014/15. After these allocations, the remaining funding available for early intervention services will be £1.6 billion as part of the Business Rate Retention Scheme by 2014/15.

The Government has stated that early intervention spending will be made visible through the publication of the funding profile for each local authority. However, there is a fear that reducing the fund and shifting it into a general pot will halt the progress that has been made. Beyond the spending review, we would like assurances that early intervention allocations are prioritised within the new funding arrangements at both national and local level into 2013/14 and beyond.

In its final report on the child protection system in England, the Education Committee recognised that there is great variation in thresholds for intervention by local authorities recommending:

“...the Government commission research to understand the impact of varying thresholds in different areas, and whether thresholds for section 17 and section 47 interventions are too high and/or rising in some areas. Ofsted should also monitor and report on the variation between local authorities’ provision and changes over time."

(Education Committee, 2012:59)

Following the Munro Review, Ofsted is introducing new joint multi-agency inspection arrangements for the protection of children. The inspection includes a focus on early help for children and young people at risk of harm who have been identified by local partners where services are provided or commissioned. The new arrangements are an opportunity to provide an incentive for local authorities to work with partners to provide early help to neglected children. But this will only work if the effectiveness and number of early help services is given sufficient weighting within the final Ofsted grading to ensure that it is treated as a priority.

The Government must revise the inspection framework so that no local authority can receive an excellent inspection rating unless it demonstrates sufficient and effective early help services.

Knowing we have made a difference

The Education Committee (2012:86) 'strongly encourages all local authorities to consider the merits of moving to multi-agency co-location models. For best practice, this should include co-location of local police child abuse teams with children's social care.'

There are some new initiatives to support families, such as local Multi-Agency Safeguarding Teams and integrated support below them to ensure that all children and families receive a service. A 'step up, step down' approach is being implemented in some areas and is a clear way of allowing children to move between services, ensuring that at all times they are getting the early help they need. Learning from these approaches needs to be shared to assist implementation, but progress may prove impossible with continued funding cuts.

Children are continuing to fall in the gap between universal and targeted services. We need to tackle the challenge of the universal/targeted service divide and move towards all responses being viewed as one with the shared intention of improving outcomes for neglected children.

Major systemic change within health, education and children’s services means that safeguarding is in danger of slipping down the agenda and that there might be a negative effect on people’s ability to change given current pressures on resources. New systems must facilitate the identification and response to neglect. For example, in England, health and wellbeing boards could have a role to play in reporting the progress of health and social care agencies in providing early intervention family support services that meet the needs of the local area to
tackle neglect. This could also help encourage multi-agency dialogue and a local area commitment to the allocation of resources to early help.

To ensure that local areas are working together to respond to child neglect at the earliest possible stage, they should undertake thematic reviews of their progress and make effective use of available data across the continuum of need, such as individual management records as well as any Serious Case Reviews. Trends need to be monitored year on year to assess what progress is being made.

Mirroring local reviews of responses to child neglect, we need regular and consistent national reporting. The Department for Education commissions a biennial thematic review of Serious Case Reviews which draws our themes and trends with the aim of enabling lessons to be learnt from cases, informing policy and practice.\textsuperscript{xiv} This is a welcomed approach, but a better thematic understanding of child protection issues would result from both reviews and inspection information being considered together; including data about emerging vulnerability and early help.

Ofsted holds inspection data and carries out a programme of thematic enquiries. Therefore, Ofsted is well placed to conduct a review on child neglect which would focus on early intervention, as well as explore children’s journeys and where lessons can be learnt.

The Government must commission Ofsted to conduct thematic reviews on child neglect focused on early intervention.

It is vital that we are able to measure the difference we have made to the lives of neglected children. One way of achieving this was recommended in the Tickell Review of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).\textsuperscript{xxvi} Tickell called for Government to test the feasibility of a single integrated review at age two to two and a half. Encouragingly, the Government has put together a group to develop the integrated review. The check needs to be introduced quickly and be light touch. To ensure we know whether a child has continued to develop beyond two to two and a half, we would want to see the integrated review repeated at an older age.

The Government must urgently implement the integrated child health and welfare check recommended in the Tickell Review and ensure that it is appropriate, accessible and easy to use.

The need for consistent measurement systems and evidence could be facilitated by the newly commissioned Early Intervention Foundation (EIF).\textsuperscript{xxvii} The EIF has been procured by Government to provide advice and support to local commissioners around early intervention and assist procurement and evaluation; as well as build the evidence base on what works in early intervention in the UK.\textsuperscript{xxviii} The EIF should seek funding for the evaluation (including specifically for Randomised Controlled Trials) of early intervention family support services; as well as work to bring stakeholders together and broker meetings between funders, researchers and providers.
Helping the public find information

Our findings show that the public are worried about neglected children and want to help. To be able to do this they want more information and an easy way to report their concerns.

The Government must introduce more effective routes for the public to seek help for children they are worried about. The WithScotland website is a model that could be replicated across the UK. As well as containing basic information on child neglect, it has a facility to report concerns about a child directly to the relevant council area via a postcode function.

In England, the Department for Education website provides guidance on ‘what to do if you’re worried a child is being abused’. This could be improved by embedding a postcode function to allow the public to directly contact the relevant council.

The Government must introduce a web-portal for the public to seek help for children they are worried about. It should include a facility to report concerns about a child directly to the relevant council area via a postcode function.
Endnotes


ii Action for Children young campaigners’ child neglect video is available via http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/campaigns/child-neglect-in-2011/introduction

iii The survey asked about the ways in which children with unmet needs could come to the attention of someone in a position to help, and the nature and funding security of the services for children and their families.

iv Focus group participants included practitioners from children’s services, health service staff, Local Safeguarding Children’s Boards members, third sector, police, housing and education.

v YouGov panel, field work September 2012, figures weighted and representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

vi Through YouGov panel, with fieldwork September 2012.

vii Ibid.

viii Through a YouGov panel among 2,496 professionals with field work August 2009 and through a YouGov panel among 2,702 professionals with field work June 2011.

ix Information was gathered about children subject to child protection plans or on child protection registers for the primary reason of neglect. Further information was gathered about children who may more broadly be considered to be at risk of neglect such as children affected by parental substance misuse, domestic abuse and mental health problems. Statistics collated by international bodies such as WHO and UNICEF were also scrutinised.

x Through YouGov panel among 2,496 professionals with field work, August 2009.


xii Further information on the Devon MASH is available via: http://www.devon.gov.uk/mash-leaflet-april2011.pdf


xxiii Communities and Local Government Minister Brandon Lewis responded to Parliamentary Question on early intervention. Available via: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmhansrd/cm121217/text/121217w0004.htm#1212187000073
How Action for Children helps neglected children

As well as campaigning for reform, Action for Children provides services in communities throughout the UK to support children and tackle neglect. We work at all levels of need from preventative programmes through to providing therapeutic services to children in the care system.

We know that if we intervene at an early enough stage we can work effectively with families to prevent neglect. What makes the most difference is being able to form a trusting relationship with families. Across our network of children’s centres we offer a range of evidence-based parenting programmes, as well as providing intensive support services to improve relationships and behaviour.

An independent review by the University of Salford showed that our targeted family support services removed or prevented concerns about neglect in 68 per cent of cases. Key to our success were skilled staff, effective outreach and use of the Action for Children neglect assessment tool. Building on these findings we are developing the Action for Children Family Partners service.

We show the difference we make through the careful analysis of impact, with each of our services producing an annual report card. We produce an annual assessment of our impact in the Action for Children Impact report.

Action for Children is committed to sharing our knowledge and expertise. Funded by the Government, we worked with the University of Stirling to produce training materials to help professionals to identify and respond early to child neglect. Additionally, we are partners in an European Social Research Council sponsored project with the Universities of Stirling and Dundee to ensure that practitioners such as teachers, nurses and social workers are supported to provide the best possible response. We will produce an ‘Action on Neglect’ pack setting out improved pathways to help for neglected children and their families.

In addition to providing services, Action for Children actively campaigns on the issue. We believe that the current criminal legislation governing child neglect, passed in 1933, is both complex and outmoded. There is no protection in criminal law against emotional or developmental neglect, while the law requires parents to provide for only the very basic environmental needs of their children. Working with leading academics, politicians and child protection experts we have drafted a clearer legal framework and are lobbying the Government to use our alternative offence as a replacement to the current out-dated law.