

Self-Neglect Audit Learning Briefing

Background and purpose of the audit:

Self-neglect is a complex area of practice which presents unique challenges for professionals working in this area of practice. Self-neglect became a focus of attention for safeguarding when in 2014 the Care and Support Statutory Guidance for the first time included it among the forms of abuse and neglect that can lead to a safeguarding enquiry or a Safeguarding Adults Review (SAR). That self-neglect is often challenging is demonstrated by the fact it features in approximately 200 SARs nationally to date.

The Performance, Quality and Audit (PQA) Subgroup undertakes themed multi-agency audits on behalf of the East Sussex Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB). In November 2020 the PQA Subgroup conducted an audit of cases involving multi-agency responses to self-neglect. The audit set out to assess the effectiveness of the revised self-neglect procedures (which were launched in 2019), the extent to which these are embedded in practice and how effectively agencies work together to support adults who are experiencing self-neglect.

Please use this briefing to review the key learning from this audit and as a prompt in supervision and team meetings to discuss the issues raised with your colleagues.

What worked well

The audit findings emphasised the importance of applying the [self-neglect procedures](#) as set out in the Sussex Safeguarding Adults Policy and Procedures to ensure a robust and coordinated multi-agency response to supporting adults who self-neglect.

The cases audited had evidence of:

- ✓ Good initial response and risk assessment to respond to situations where immediate safety measures were required.
- ✓ Understanding the reasons that may lie behind an adult's self-neglecting behaviour and lack of engagement with services.
- ✓ Use of multi-agency meetings to coordinate a response and support effective communication and information sharing.
- ✓ Recognising the need to be clear about a person's mental capacity when assessing risks and decisions in relation to self-neglecting behaviour.
- ✓ Good practice in working creatively with the challenges of non-engagement.

Exemplary Case:

A Housing Officer raised a safeguarding concern regarding a family home in a chronic state of squalor and severe self-neglect. A 42-year-old woman with physical and mental health problems was living in a coercive and controlling relationship. She had four children, one of whom had caring responsibilities.

The auditors identified the following areas of good practice:

- ✓ Robust assessment to assess and address risks.
- ✓ A strengths-based and empowering approach, to improve the adult's confidence and support them to make changes to leave an abusive relationship.
- ✓ Professionals used communication skills and relationship-based practice to develop a good working relationship with the adult, balancing the adults' individual needs and wishes with the wider needs of the family.
- ✓ Detailed case recording, clearly setting out risks, proposed actions and progress.
- ✓ Excellent partnership working involving good communication and information sharing.
- ✓ The case evidenced understanding of the learning from SARs involving self-neglect, and good adherence to the self-neglect procedures.

Interface between self-neglect and safeguarding

Cases involving self-neglect may not prompt a Section 42 enquiry under the Care Act 2014. The [Care and Support Statutory Guidance](#) sets out that Section 42 enquiries are primarily aimed at adults who are experiencing abuse, harm, neglect or exploitation caused by a third party. A decision on whether a response is required under safeguarding should be made on a case by case basis and depend on the adult's ability to protect themselves by controlling their own behaviour. There may come a point when they are no longer able to do this, without external support.

In all cases, when a concern is raised regarding self-neglect, all agencies have a responsibility to consider the self-neglect procedures. This is regardless of whether the concern falls within the scope of a Section 42 enquiry or not.

The challenges of non-engagement

The audit reinforced the importance that approaches to self-neglect must be informed by a Making Safeguarding Personal approach and need to consider each adult's lived experience and history to understand what may lie behind the self-neglecting behaviour and lack of engagement with professional support. There is not one overarching explanatory model for why adults may self-neglect or hoard – rather it is a complex interplay of factors, that is likely to be the result of previous trauma.

Using a trauma-informed approach helps to gain an appreciation of the unique experience of each person and ensure a non-judgmental and compassionate approach. Demonstrating professional curiosity and using skills of patience and perseverance can help in gaining trust with an individual and achieving changes over time.

A previous [East Sussex SAB Learning Briefing on Complex Cases](#) provides good practice tips on key principles in working with adults who may find it difficult to engage with support.

Complexities in mental capacity practice

The audit highlighted a development area in relation to the application of the [Mental Capacity Act](#), including the need to ensure formal re-assessments of capacity are undertaken when there is a question over a person's capacity and risks remain, and that more detail is recorded of the decision making process used to assess capacity or any decisions to not to proceed with an assessment.

An adult should always be presumed to have capacity. However, there may be cases where an adult may lack understanding and insight into the impact of their self-neglecting behaviour on their or others' wellbeing. When an adult's behaviour or circumstances cast doubt as to whether they have capacity to make a decision, then a mental capacity assessment should be carried out. In cases of extreme self-neglect or hoarding, the very nature of the environment should lead professionals to question capacity.

Adults with fluctuating capacity is particularly common in situations of self-neglect. For adults who have ongoing fluctuating capacity it may be necessary to review the capacity assessments over a period of time.

Principle 3 of the Mental Capacity Act enshrines a person's right to their own values, beliefs, preferences and attitudes. However, this right does not absolve an agency from their duty of care, and anyone supporting an adult who is self-neglecting must ensure they have met their professional responsibility.

Where an adult has capacity and may be making what others consider to be an 'unwise decision' it does not mean that no further action regarding the self-neglect is required, particularly where the risk of harm is deemed to be serious or critical.

Think Family!

Whilst self-neglect is predominantly seen as affecting vulnerable individuals, it's important to recognise the detrimental impact of self-neglect on the person's family and wider support network. Where there are concerns for a child in the context of an adult experiencing self-neglect, Children's Services should be contacted – whether or not the concerns relate to child protection or a child being 'in need'. If child protection procedures apply refer to the [Sussex Child Protection and Safeguarding Procedures](#).

Managing risks, including fire safety

Given the complex nature of self-neglect, a shared responsibility across agencies for assessing and responding to risk is of crucial importance. Risk appraisals should focus on the desired outcomes of the adult and achieve a proportionate response which is appropriate to the level of risk is provided.

Cases of extreme self-neglect, involving excessive hoarding of items can pose significant risks to the person living in the property as well as others nearby, including fire risks. Appropriate fire safety advice should always be sought, and consideration made to requesting a [Home Fire Safety Check via East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service](#).

Legal remedies in relation to self-neglect

There will be times when the extent of severe self-neglect is impacting so significantly on a person's health and well-being, or that of others that practitioners need to consider other legal powers and duties to improve the situation where attempts taken to date to reduce the risks and engage the adult in support have failed. In such complex situations legal advice should always be sought.

The Sussex Safeguarding Adults Policy and Procedures contains a section on [legal remedies in relation to self-neglect](#).

Professional challenge and resolution

The audit highlighted the importance of practitioners having clarity and an appreciation of different roles and responsibilities across agencies, promoting transparency and accountability.

At times professionals across agencies may disagree on decisions made in response to safeguarding concerns or mental capacity assessments. All professionals should feel able to challenge decision making they may not agree with. The [SAB Resolution Protocol](#) sets out a process for managing disagreements between agencies, highlighting the importance of transparency, openness and cooperation in achieving effective partnership working.

Good practice in working with adults who self-neglect requires:

- ✓ Applying a Making Safeguarding Personal approach and balancing individual's needs and wishes with a duty of care.
- ✓ Multi-agency risk assessments outlining each area of risk, how they will be managed and by whom, and monitoring arrangements. The risks of not intervening should be explored and documented.
- ✓ Comprehensive recording with a rationale for actions and decisions clearly documented. Action plans should reflect measurable targets and clear timescales.
- ✓ Adherence to the Mental Capacity Act in planning responses to self-neglect and determining what action may or may not be taken.
- ✓ Use of multi-agency meetings to coordinate decision making about needs and risks and to support effective communication and information sharing.
- ✓ Finding creative solutions to meet the challenges of non-engagement, including adopting a flexible approach and supporting change over time.
- ✓ Involving specialist teams, even where the adult may not meet the service threshold, to gain advice and understanding around supporting an adult with complex needs.
- ✓ Understanding the triggers and any previous trauma that lie behind self-neglecting behaviour.
- ✓ Use of the SAB Resolution Protocol where there is disagreement about decisions in relation to safeguarding or mental capacity.

Team Discussion Points

Have you read the self-neglect procedures? Do you utilise the self-neglect resources available on the East Sussex SAB website, such as the learning briefings or Hoarding Framework?

Are you confident in dealing with situations where you may need to override the wishes of an adult assessed as having capacity where the risks are significant? How do you ensure you maintain a person-centred approach in such situations?

Do you have examples of how you have adapted services or support on offer in response to an adult declining to engage with the services you are offering? How easy was it to do that? What was the impact?

How would you go about involving specialist services to gain their expertise, if your client doesn't meet the threshold for their service?

How do you think you might change your practice in relation to self-neglect in future?

SAB Training Opportunities

The SAB offers a range of multi-agency training courses, which are currently being delivered virtually, including courses on self-neglect and the Mental Capacity Act. Forthcoming dates for self-neglect training in 2021 will be available in the near future.

Current virtual training opportunities can be booked via the [East Sussex Learning Portal](#)

Concerned about an adult in East Sussex?

Contact:

Health and Social Care Connect on 0345 60 80 191

Concerned about a child in East Sussex?

Contact:

Single Point of Advice on 01323 464 222

Further Information and Resources

[East Sussex Safeguarding Adults Board](#)

[Sussex Multi-Agency Procedures to Support Adults who Self-Neglect](#)

[East Sussex Mental Capacity Multi-Agency Policy and Procedures](#)

[Multi-Agency Hoarding Framework](#)

[Making Safeguarding Personal tools](#)

[SAB Resolution Protocol](#)

[Research in Practice: self-neglect](#)

SAB Learning Briefings

[Self-neglect](#)

[Best Interests Decision Making](#)

[Complex Cases](#)

[Professional Curiosity](#)

[Organisational Learning from SARs in Self-Neglect](#)

[Child T Serious Case Review](#)

For more information about this audit or learning briefing contact:

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