



## Pan Berkshire Safeguarding Adult' Multiagency Guidance

### Self-Neglect

#### Version History

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#### Contents

1. Introduction .....	2
2. Legal and Statutory Framework .....	3
3. Principles and Values .....	4
4. Definitions and Key Concepts .....	5
5. Roles and Responsibilities .....	6
6. Identification and Assessment .....	7
7. Planning and Intervention .....	7
8. Escalation, and Learning .....	7
9. Training and Competency .....	7
10. References and Further Information .....	7
11. Useful Resources .....	8

## 1. Introduction

The Care Act (2014) and associated statutory guidance recognises self-neglect as a category of abuse and emphasises the importance of working with the adult to take preventative actions to minimise risk. It is viewed as a form of abuse or neglect that may require a safeguarding response, depending on the person's ability to protect themselves. Self-neglect may not prompt a Section 42 enquiry, and an assessment should be made on a case-by-case basis.

It is one of the responsibilities of Safeguarding Adults Boards to ensure that all partner agencies work together to establish systems and processes to minimise risk and harm to adults.

This document has been written to provide guidance to multi-agency safeguarding partner agencies, working in Berkshire, to assist in identifying, assessing and responding to self-neglect for adults aged 18+ who may be:<sup>1</sup>

- Neglecting of personal care (hygiene, nutrition, hydration), health, or environment.
- Neglect of one's environment, including hoarding behaviours or living in squalor

In the Care and Support Statutory Guidance (October 2018) self-neglect is defined as: *"A wide range of behaviour neglecting to care for one's personal hygiene, health or surroundings and includes behaviour such as hoarding."* [Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK](#) (14: 17) <sup>2</sup>

This guidance aims to further support multi-agency professionals to:

- fulfil duties under the Care Act 2014, including when to raise a safeguarding concern or use alternative frameworks, as outlined above
- balance protection duties with an adult's right to autonomy and choice
- to ensure responses are proportionate, person-centred, and legally compliant, including consideration of the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and the Human Rights Act 1998

### When to Raise a Safeguarding Concern (Self-neglect concerns)

- i. A safeguarding adult concern should be raised when:
- ii. The adult has care and support needs
- iii. They are experiencing or at risk of abuse or neglect and
- iv. As a result of their care and support needs, is unable to protect themselves from either the risk of, or experience of abuse or neglect. (This decision is the responsibility of the local authority).

For more information refer to : [Berkshire Safeguarding Adults – Pan Berkshire Policies & Procedures for Safeguarding Adults](#)

Concerns which meet the requirement for reporting via safeguarding must be reported to the relevant local authority in Berkshire. As outlined, not all self-neglect is a safeguarding concern. If in doubt call your local safeguarding team for advice

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this guidance, the term "adult" refers to an adult at risk as defined under Section 42 of the Care Act 2014. This means a person aged 18 or over who has needs for care and support, is experiencing or is at risk of self-neglect, and who, because of those needs, is unable to protect themselves from the risk of harm.

<sup>2</sup> National evidence highlights the prominence of self-neglect within Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs). The Analysis of Safeguarding Adult Reviews: April 2017–March 2019 found that 45% of SARs (231 cases) focused on self-neglect, while the Second national analysis of Safeguarding Adult Reviews: April 2019–March 2023 reported that self-neglect featured in 60% of cases within a larger sample of 652 SARs

## Section 42 Safeguarding Enquiry

The Care and Support statutory guidance gives discretion as to whether concerns regarding self-neglect and hoarding should lead to an adult safeguarding enquiry under section 42 of the Care Act. This will be a matter for professional judgment on a case-by-case basis.

Where a situation is presented as a matter of self-neglect, consideration should be given as to whether or not there is also a concern about some other form of abuse or neglect occurring.

If there is, then the situation may meet the section 42 Care Act safeguarding enquiry on the basis of those other issues alone. Factors which sometimes can occur alongside self-neglect include:

- There is a concern that there have been failures by agencies or professionals to work together to assess and manage risks effectively
- The person is at risk/self-neglecting because care or access to facilities/resources is being prevented by another person

In cases, where an adult self neglects (including hoarding) and where the section 42 enquiry process may not be a proportionate response, the local authority will determine what is required including consideration of:

- i) Care Act Assessment of Need (Section 9) ([Care Act 2014, Section 9](#)) or Section 11 (2b), where the person may be declining assessment.
- ii) referral to multi-agency risk framework pathways, such as MART (multi-agency risk tool), MARM (multi-agency risk management), self-neglect panels or through multi-disciplinary team (MDTs) meetings, which focuses on reducing or removing risk and improving outcomes for the individual.
- iii) signposting to alternative services or community resources (Care Act 2014, Section 4).
- iv) arranging for mental health services or support; or contact with GP.
- v) If risks remain high, despite intervention, escalate to Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB) or a Multi-Agency High-Risk Panel (as applicable) Refer to escalation policy for this pathway in your area.

As cited above, this approach may not represent the most effective response to a safeguarding concern.

## 2. Legal and Statutory Framework.

There may be times when practitioners must consider the use of legal interventions to safeguard a person, if the impact of their self-neglect puts them at serious risk of harm. This may be the case where persistent efforts to engage with someone have failed and the concern is still very high, or where all other actions taken to improve the situation have been exhausted, as outlined above, self-neglect is explicitly included in the Care Act 2014, as a form of abuse and neglect.

Self-neglect references can also be found within the intersection with other key legal frameworks, including: The Human Rights Act 1998, Mental Capacity Act 2005, and the Mental Health Act 2007. Relevant public health authorities have legislation which gives them legal powers to carry out actions to prevent or address self-neglect in certain circumstances, such as Environmental Health, Police, Fire Service, Animal Welfare, Mental Health and Housing legislation.

The numerous legal frameworks provide a good foundation to support multi-agency working for agencies to contribute their knowledge of legal literacy to support the adult.

## Relevant legislation

- **The Care Act (2014) statutory guidance** – self-neglect is included as a category under adult safeguarding.
- **Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998** gives us a right to respect for private and family life. However, this is not an absolute right and there may be justification to override it, for example, protection of health, prevention of crime, protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

- **Mental Health Act (2007) s.135** – if a person is believed to have a mental disorder and they are living alone and unable to care for themselves, a magistrate’s court can authorise entry to remove them to a place of safety.
- **Mental Capacity Act (2005) s.16(2)(a)** – the Court of Protection has the power to make an order regarding a decision on behalf of an individual. The court’s decision about the welfare of an individual who is self-neglecting may include allowing access to assess capacity.
- **Public Health Act (1984) s.31-32** – local authority environmental health could use powers to clean and disinfect premises but only for the prevention of infectious diseases.
- **The Housing Act 1988** – a landlord may have grounds to evict a tenant due to breaches of the tenancy agreement.

### 3. Principles and Values

The Wellbeing Principle: The Care and Support Statutory guidance cites the following: “... the concept of wellbeing is very important when responding to someone who self-neglects, where it will be crucial to work alongside the person, understanding how their past experiences influence current behaviour. The duty to promote wellbeing applies equally to those who, for a variety of reasons, may be difficult to engage.” [Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK](#)

The Care Act sets out six key safeguarding principles which need to be applied, including when supporting adults who self-neglect.

Empowerment	People are supported and encouraged to make their own decisions and give informed consent. Practice should be person-led, outcome-focused and responsive to the adult’s views, wishes and feelings.
Prevention	It is better to take action before harm occurs. Early identification of risk, effective engagement and timely intervention can help prevent the escalation of safeguarding concerns.
Proportionality	Responses should be the least intrusive and restrictive appropriate to the level of risk. Practice should balance the adult’s right to choice and control with the need to manage risk of harm.
Protection	Support and representation are provided to those adults most at risk to help them stay safe. This includes access to advocacy where required and taking action to reduce harm.
Partnership	Local authorities and their partners work together with communities to prevent, identify and respond to safeguarding concerns. Information is shared appropriately, recognising that safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility
Accountability	Safeguarding practice is transparent and outcomes-focused. Roles and responsibilities are clear, and practitioners and organisations are accountable for their actions and decisions.

Making Safeguarding Personal (MSP): this strengths-based approach is vital when working with adults who self-neglect. It can make a difference to the health, wellbeing and safety of people who are self-neglecting. The focus, together with the adults is what matters to the individual and ensuring their voice is central.

The approach should be grounded in respectful, trust-building engagement, that prioritises what matters most to the adult. Strengths, preferences, and personal goals should shape all planning<sup>3</sup>.

**Trauma-Informed approach:** the impact of trauma, should be considered when supporting adults who self-neglect, as this type of abuse often has complex causes, including mental or physical illness, trauma, cognitive impairment, substance misuse, or fear of losing control.

Self-neglect is complex and requires thoughtful, skilled and coordinated safeguarding practice. Practitioners must carefully evaluate and balance the adult's right to autonomy with the duty to protect them from abuse or neglect.

By applying the principles and values, such as those outlined above, the adult can be supported in balancing choice and risk to achieve better outcomes, while ensuring or enhancing their safety and wellbeing.

#### 4. Definitions and Key Concepts

Definitions and key concepts when working with adults who self-neglect, include:

##### Care and Support Needs

SCIE guidance in its "Adult safeguarding practice questions"<sup>4</sup> (March 2015) SCIE defined the concept of "An adult with care and support needs may be. The guidance outlined that the impact of the need should be considered and provides a list of the outcomes.

For more information refer to [Pan Berkshire Multi-Agency Safeguarding Adults Policies, Procedures & Guidance](#)

In the context of adult safeguarding, any impact on these outcomes may be relevant. There is no threshold of it being a significant impact.

It must be noted that an adult does not have to be eligible for care and support under the Care and Support Eligibility Regulations<sup>5</sup>

##### Hoarding

Hoarding is a specific form of self-neglect, requiring a person-centred, trauma-informed and multi-agency approach that balances autonomy with proactive risk management.

Hoarding is characterised by a persistent difficulty in discarding or parting with possessions, regardless of their perceived value. This can result in the accumulation of items to an extent that it may impact the safe use of living spaces and increase risks to the adult's health, safety, and wellbeing, including fire and environmental hazards. Hoarding behaviours may affect an adult's ability to achieve personal outcomes, maintain wellbeing, and manage day-to-day activities.

Hoarding behaviour may be considered a form of self-neglect where it results in a significant deterioration in personal care, health, safety, or living conditions, and the individual is unable or unwilling to address these risks.

According to Professor Michael Preston-Shoot<sup>6</sup> self-neglect encompasses both personal and environmental neglect, stating it involves:

- Lack of self-care: neglecting hygiene, nutrition, hydration, or health.
- Lack of care for one's surroundings, explicitly including squalor and hoarding.
- Refusal of services that could mitigate risk.

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<sup>3</sup> [Making Safeguarding Personal in self-neglect workbook | Local Government Association](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Adult safeguarding practice questions - SCIE](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Professor Michael Preston-Shoot, Professor Emeritus - beds.ac.uk | University of Bedfordshire](#)

Adults who self-neglect or hoard may face underlying issues such as trauma, mental or physical ill-health, social isolation, or difficulties engaging with services, and these behaviours are often not a “lifestyle choice.” Effective practice includes building trust, understanding the meaning and function the behaviour may hold for the person, using tools such as clutter rating scales<sup>7</sup>, and coordinating responses through structured multi-agency frameworks to reduce harm and promote wellbeing.

**Mental Capacity:** The adult’s mental capacity should always be considered. Practitioners must assess or review mental capacity where concerns exist, including executive functioning and fluctuating capacity. A person is not to be treated as lacking capacity merely because they make an unwise decision. (*Mental Capacity Act 2005, s.1(4)*). Where it is deemed that an adult is making an unwise decision it is still, not in itself, a safeguarding concern, but it may still require a professional response, proportionate risk management, and multi-agency working.

**Multi-agency working:** Effective practice is best supported when agencies share an understanding of self-neglect, there is clear and timely inter-agency coordination and shared risk management. Multi-agency working needs facilitation through clear understood referral routes, effective communication, timely and appropriate information-sharing and use of shared decision-making systems, including multi-agency risk management meetings.

Agencies should be mindful of the “Making Safeguarding Personal” (MSP) approach, convene multi-agency meetings to coordinate activity, create agreed action plans with accountability, timescales, and agreed risk mitigation steps. Review of the action plan where risk remains needs to be established as well as the need to escalate where risks remain or increase.

**Multiple Exclusion Homelessness:** is used to describe people who are homeless and are also facing several overlapping difficulties, such as poor health, trauma, substance use, exploitation or contact with the criminal justice system. These combined challenges can make people more vulnerable to harm, neglect or self-neglect. Where someone has care and support needs, adult safeguarding responsibilities apply and a coordinated, multi-agency response is often needed to help keep them safe

**Professional curiosity:** is important when working with someone you suspect is self-neglecting. The individual who is self-neglecting may not want others to know what they are experiencing or may find it challenging to admit they are self-neglecting or share the circumstances of the self-neglect, due to shame or stigma. Practicing compassionate or concerned curiosity helps to prevent abuse and neglect from happening or worsening. Professional curiosity alongside, transparency and clear communication between agencies improve safeguarding outcomes for the adult.

## 5. Roles and Responsibilities

Local authorities have a duty, under the Care Act 2014 to coordinate safeguarding responses and decide if a Section 42 enquiry is required in relation to a self-neglect concern. Where a Section 42 enquiry is not required in relation to the concern raised and an alternative multi-agency response is more appropriate, then the agency identifying the risks should lead in setting up a multi-agency meeting to address the high-risk concerns.

**Information sharing:** needs to be timely, necessary, purposeful and proportionate. Partners must share relevant information lawfully to develop a full understanding of risks and needs.

Information sharing needs to be aligned with statutory duties and adhere to the Care Act 2014, Mental Capacity Act 2005 and relevant data protection legislation. Agencies should share information when it is necessary to prevent serious harm, manage fire or environmental risks, or support the adult’s wellbeing, even where the adult is reluctant to engage.

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<sup>7</sup> [Clutter Rating Scale](#)

## 6. Identification and Assessment

Effective safeguarding depends on robust risk assessment which explores both the likelihood of different risks arising and their potential significance.

There are tools that can support identification and risk assessment. In relation to hoarding:

- Clutter Index [Clutter Rating Scale](#) is a nationally recognised assessment tool used to support the identification and assessment of hoarding behaviours and associated risk
- Multi-Agency Self-Neglect Risk Assessment
- Hoarding frameworks

Refer to your local authority to identify tools used to risk assess hoarding.

## 7. Planning and Intervention

Self-neglect may present challenges for practitioners due to varied presentation that may be influenced by a complex mix of personal, mental, physical and social and environmental factors in addition to possible challenges with engagement, consideration of mental capacity and the ethical dilemmas of balancing choice and risk, respecting autonomy and fulfilling a duty of care. Hence the need for a focus on coordinated interventions from a range of agencies.

Engagement with people who self-neglect is more effective where practitioners and workers build rapport and trust, by showing respect, empathy, persistence and being non-judgmental. Look to understand the meaning and significance of self-neglect in the person's life and consider the individual's life experience.

Co-ordinated multi-agency working is vital in ensuring effective responses to self-neglect, where it is acknowledged that no single agency holds all the information needed to understand the full picture of risk.

Safeguarding Adult Reviews show evidence self-neglect often involves complex interplays of health needs, mental capacity, social isolation, trauma, housing conditions, fire risks and disengagement, hence showing that risks can only be accurately and holistically assessed when agencies share information lawfully, proactively and in a timely manner.

Multi-agency frameworks should therefore be actioned, either via the Section 42 or other multi-agency risk frameworks, as outlined above, when required.

Multi-Agency Coordination is vital to working with adults who self-neglect. Key Partners may include professionals from Adult Social Care, Health, police, Housing, substance misuse services, fire service and additional voluntary sector services.

## 8. Escalation, and Learning

There may be situations where there is a need to convene multi-agency meetings for high-risk cases, where risk assessments from each agency are reviewed as well as for cases to be escalated, where risks can't be reduced and remain high. Every agency should have an escalation pathway to support practitioners in reducing risk, where possible.

## 9. Training and Competency

Individual agencies are responsible for ensuring that their staff have up-to-date and relevant training in relation to self-neglect. Multi-agency training could also be considered as good practice

## 10. References and Further Information

- Adult safeguarding and homelessness: experience informed practice [Adult safeguarding and homelessness: experience informed practice | Local Government Association](#)
- Care Act 2014 [Care Act 2014](#)
- Care & Support Statutory Guidance [Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK](#)
- Human Rights Act 1998 [Human Rights Act 1998](#)

- Mental Capacity Act Code of Practice 2007 [Mental-capacity-act-code-of-practice.pdf](#)
- Bracknell Forest Safeguarding Board: Supporting adults who self-neglect: Multi agency Protocol and practice guidance [supporting adults who self-neglect.pdf](#)

#### 11. Useful Resources

- Adult safeguarding and homelessness: experience informed practice (August 2021) [Adult safeguarding and homelessness: experience informed practice | Local Government Association](#)
- Meaning in hoarding: perspectives of people who hoard on clutter, culture and agency', Anthropology & Medicine Orr, D.M.R., Preston-Shoot, M. and Braye, S. (2019) *Anthropology & Medicine*, 26(3), pp. 263–279. doi:10.1080/13648470.2017.1391171. [Selected publications : Suzy Braye : ... : School of Education and Social Work : Schools and services : University of Sussex](#)
- Self-Neglect at a glance (March 2024) [Self-neglect at a glance - SCIE](#)
- Types and indicators of abuse (last reviewed December 2020) [Types and indicators of abuse: Safeguarding adults - SCIE](#)
- Working with people who self-neglect (Research in Practice Tool) (December 2020) [Working with people who self-neglect: Practice Tool \(2020\) | Research in Practice](#)
- 4LSAB Multi-Agency Guidance on Responding to Self-Neglect (June 2024) [4LSAB-Guidance-on-Responding-to-Self-Neglect-June-2024.pdf1421](#)

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