



# **A Strategy for Safeguarding Disabled Children**

**June 2011**

## **Bromley Safeguarding Children Board**

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# CONTENTS

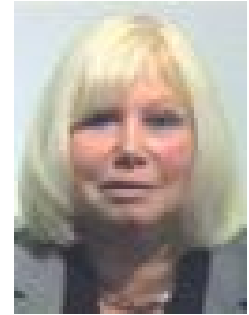
1	Introduction .....	1
2	Priorities for Improving the Safeguarding of Disabled Children in Bromley .....	2
3	Evaluation and Accountability .....	3
4	Appendix 1 - Contacts.....	4

## **BSCB Safeguarding Disabled Children Strategy Group**

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## Foreword

This multi-agency strategy has been developed to encourage all agencies in Bromley to meet the challenge of delivering their responsibilities to safeguard and promote the well-being of disabled children and young people. Bromley Safeguarding Children Board endorsed the government's practice guidance for safeguarding disabled children 2009, and a working group to develop the strategy drew substantially on the guidance to set out the priorities in this area for Bromley.



Our vision is for every child in Bromley to be safe from harm or to know that if they are harmed, those they turn to for support know what to do to protect them. Our aim is to assist agencies to ensure that disabled children have the same protection from harm as those without a disability.

Despite government's attempts to develop definitive statistical analysis of children and young people in general and the services they access, there remains a lack of consistent definition of disability. This is complicated by further categorisations and age limits for service provision.

We know from research that in general disabled children face an increased risk of abuse or neglect. Working Together to Safeguard Children states that; "The available evidence on the extent of abuse among disabled children suggests that disabled children are at increased risk of abuse and that the presence of multiple disabilities appears to increase risk of abuse and neglect." (WT 2010 para 6.44)

There are many day to day actions that support the well being of most children which may be denied to a child with profound disabilities. Such children arguably are more in need of:

- regular communication between carers
- close monitoring of the effect of various sorts of provision on the emotional well being of the child
- being able to enjoy the same activities as their non-disabled peers
- individualised provision

Risks such as bullying and physical assault cannot be ignored, however the BSCB challenges the partnership to consider how to address developing a balance between fostering independence of a disabled child and ensuring they are safe not only from abuse, but also bullying from their peers.

The strategy provides a blue print for workers and agencies in meeting their responsibilities to protect and promote the well-being of disabled children. Ensuring the strategy is operationally successful will be the responsibility of the Partnership Board's Disability Strategy Group, who will support the commitment to safeguard disabled children of the representative agencies. We hope that the strategy will be useful to all professionals who work with disabled children and young people

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jenny Dibsda".

Jenny Dibsda  
Chair, Bromley Safeguarding Children Board

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Context

This multi-agency strategy for safeguarding disabled children in Bromley draws on the government's non-statutory *Safeguarding Disabled Children Practice Guidance*, July 2009, DCSF. The practice guidance provides a framework within which local safeguarding children boards, agencies and professionals from all agencies at local level, individually and jointly, develop and agree detailed ways of working together to safeguard disabled children. It is addressed to all agencies providing universal, targeted and specialist services to children.

## 1.2 Vision

Bromley Safeguarding Children Board believes that disabled children have the same rights to be safe from abuse and neglect and to be protected from harm as non-disabled children. This means that professionals have to do a little more because disabled children experience greater vulnerability as a result of attitudes, access to resources or their additional needs. We expect all agencies working with disabled children to make reference to the national practice guidance in their work and to recognise the need for sharing information and for collaboration.

## 1.3 Disabled Children in Bromley

In Bromley there is no disability register that would enable partners to be sure of the numbers of disabled children resident in the borough. We can only therefore apply several estimates to use as a basis for identifying the number of disabled children.

- Projections based on the child population of Bromley can be used to establish the number of disabled children. If 7% of children are disabled and the population is 69,000 then we would expect there to be 4830 disabled children in Bromley.
- The short break service was used by 507 children in 2010-2011. The disability team approximate 30% of children who attend one of the Borough's special schools do not access short breaks. This could be used to estimate that, of the disabled children population, some 70% of children have significant disabilities, which suggests that approximately 725 children in Bromley would have significant disabilities.
- Schools' special educational needs data indicates that the number of children in Bromley schools with a statement of educational need or at school action plus is 5330 (7.7% of the child population). However, not all these children would be considered disabled.

In Bromley a multi-agency disability strategy group has been established to ensure that the needs of children and young people are addressed. Its focus is on service planning and provision. It has developed a multi-agency strategy entitled *Improving Lives Supporting Families*, which aims to deliver services for disabled children and young people and their families and carers. The recently reconfigured Specialist Support and Disability Service within the Access and Inclusion Division of the Children and Young People's Directorate has also confirmed an integrated approach to assessment, family support and service planning and delivery for disabled children in the borough.

#### 1.4 Roles and Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of all agencies, not only Local Authorities, Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) and NHS trusts to ensure that:

*"LSCBs have a system in place to ensure that all disabled children are safeguarded from emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect and the specific needs of disabled children are addressed in safeguarding children protocols in line with Working Together to Safeguard Children and their families."*<sup>1</sup>

#### Risks

*"The available evidence on the extent of abuse among disabled children suggests that disabled children are at increased risk of abuse, and that the presence of multiple disabilities appears to increase the risks of both abuse and neglect."*<sup>2</sup>

In addition, disabled children experience greater vulnerability as a result of:

- negative attitudes and unequal access to services and resources;
- additional needs relating to physical, sensory, cognitive and/ or communication impairments;
- reliance on a large number of service providers;
- time away from families during short breaks, including overnight care in family based or residential settings;
- additional demands on parents/carers due to the extra needs of disabled children.

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<sup>1</sup> Standard 8 of the National Service Framework for Children and Young People and Maternity Services

<sup>2</sup> Working together to Safeguard Children, 2010

## 1.5 Definition

For the purposes of this strategy, a disabled child is someone who has:

*“a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 (DDA)



## 2 Priorities for Improving the Safeguarding of Disabled Children in Bromley

The priorities for safeguarding disabled children in Bromley draw directly on the Government's *Safeguarding Disabled Children Practice Guidance* and are set out below. This strategy focuses on the areas where continued or further work could be undertaken to strengthen safeguarding arrangements across all agencies.

It is apparent that there is insufficient information about the definitive number of disabled children in Bromley and the population for whom there is a safeguarding concern. This should be addressed in taking forward the following priorities.

As a minimum standard, **all agencies** should:

- Ensure all policies and procedures of service providers reflect best practice in safeguarding disabled children. This includes provision in universal settings as well as specialist settings for children with disabilities.

**Accountability structures** should be reviewed, in particular:

- The safeguarding of disabled children across services, which should be subject to regular review.,
- Clarifying the responsibilities and systems and bring processes up to an agreed structure:
  - i. as disabled children transfer to adulthood
  - ii. for disabled children living away from home

**Training needs** should be kept under review.

- The BSCB should ensure that the local Safeguarding Training Strategy and its own training provision appropriately address the safeguarding of disabled children and young people and their particular vulnerability and is applicable to universal as well as specialist services.
- Agencies should consider training/resources to increase the skills of professionals who work directly with disabled children and young people who are non-verbal.

**Commissioners** should ensure that:

- Commissioning arrangements should conform to agreed safeguarding standards and ensure that provision provides safe and appropriate care. This will include placements, direct payments and short break services for disabled children but this list is not exhaustive.

All agencies should prioritise **communication and engagement**, in particular:

- Communication and awareness-raising around the particular need to safeguard disabled children and young people.
- Consultation with and engagement of disabled children and young people and their families in service planning, commissioning and evaluation, to minimise risks of abuse and to ensure services meet their additional needs.
- Communication with disabled children by staff working with them, or for staff to be able to access appropriate support to communicate with them. This may include interpreting services and specialist communication services.
- To highlight bullying of disabled children in schools as a priority area to address in each schools' anti-bullying strategy.

### **3 Evaluation and Accountability**

As set out in *Working Together to Safeguard Children DCSF 2010*, safeguarding boards have a duty to monitor and evaluate safeguarding arrangements.

BSCB will keep the implementation of the strategy by agencies under review including through the Section 11 arrangements audit process, where specific reference is to be made to this area of safeguarding.

All agencies have a responsibility to address inclusion and diversity issues in their safeguarding practice and to audit their practice. The BSCB will from time to time, wish to review agency policies, procedures and training plans to ensure that this aspect of safeguarding is being addressed.

The strategy will be reviewed in 3 years. The action plan will be developed and monitored by the Disability Strategy Group on a regular basis..

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## **4 Appendix 1 - Contacts**

### **Referral & Assessment Team (East & West Districts)**

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