

## Community Safety Select Committee

A meeting of the Community Safety Select Committee was held on Thursday 22 January 2026.

**Present:** Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy (Chair), Cllr Katie Weston (Vice-Chair), Cllr Bob Cook, Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Ray Godwin, Cllr Lynn Hall (sub for Cllr Jason French), Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Barbara Inman

**Officers:** Jane Edmonds, Julie Lathan, Mandy MacKinnon (A,H&W); Gary Woods (CS)

**Also in attendance:** Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE (SBC Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety); Majella McCarthy, Leanne Stockton (Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership); Fiona Heighton (Thirteen Housing Group)

**Apologies:** Cllr Jason French

### **CSS/43/25 Evacuation Procedure**

The evacuation procedure was noted.

### **CSS/44/25 Declarations of Interest**

There were no interests declared.

### **CSS/45/25 Minutes**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the Community Safety Select Committee meeting which was held on 18 December 2025 for approval and signature. Attention was drawn to the following item:

- Scrutiny Review of Children affected by Domestic Abuse: Members were reminded that responses from Cleveland Police to queries raised at the December 2025 meeting were relayed via email on 19 January 2026.

AGREED that the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 18 December 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **CSS/46/25 Scrutiny Review of Children affected by Domestic Abuse**

The sixth evidence-gathering session for the Committee's review of Children affected by Domestic Abuse considered submissions from the Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership, Thirteen Housing Group, and Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Housing Services.

## HARTLEPOOL AND STOCKTON-ON-TEES SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP (HSSCP)

Mindful of the need to understand overarching 'system' co-ordination and accountability around this scrutiny topic, HSSCP was asked to provide a response to several lines of enquiry. Presented by the HSSCP Chair and HSSCP Business Manager (it was noted that the HSSCP Independent Scrutineer was unable to be in attendance), a prepared briefing paper outlined the following:

- Introduction – An Overview of HSSCP: Established in April 2019, the HSSCP was a multi-agency arrangement made up of statutory and non-statutory partners from across Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees which had responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. The four lead safeguarding partners (LSPs) – Hartlepool Borough Council, SBC, the NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NENC ICB), and Cleveland Police (Chief Officer) – had an equal and joint responsibility for their local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements / partnership. They set the strategic direction, vision and culture of the partnership, including agreeing and reviewing shared priorities and the resource required to deliver services effectively.

To achieve the HSSCP vision (*'Every child in Hartlepool and Stockton feels safe, secure and protected from harm; enabling them to reach their full potential'*), a range of consultation and engagement was undertaken to unpick areas which required focus as part of a rolling programme. The HSSCP Independent Scrutineer also carried out annual deep-dive review work in line with Department of Education requirements.

- What data regarding the prevalence of children's (particularly those in their early years) exposure to domestic abuse across the Borough over the last five years does HSSCP hold?: HSSCP did not hold any data specifically in relation to the prevalence of children's exposure to domestic abuse. HSSCP received data on this from the Local Authority.

For the period of 2020-2024, HSSCPs Performance Management Framework (PMF) included two key performance indicators (KPIs) in respect of domestic abuse – the rate of domestic abuse incidents with a child present in the year-to-date, and the percentage of domestic abuse incidents with a child present within 12 months of a similar incident out of all domestic abuse incidents in the year-to-date. SBC collected and reported these KPIs on behalf of and to HSSCP on a quarterly basis.

In 2025, a new PMF was agreed which included five KPIs in respect of domestic abuse – Local Authority assessment factors (domestic abuse), children subject to repeat plans where domestic abuse was a factor, children subject to a Child Protection Plan longer than 12 months where domestic abuse was a factor, number of children referred to domestic abuse support services, and number of children supported by domestic abuse support services. Responsibility for collection and reporting of this data transferred over to Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council in 2025.

The domestic abuse data reported to HSSCP under the above indicators over the past five years was not broken down into age-ranges to enable HSSCP to specifically comment upon early years prevalence. However, data published within

the HSSCP annual report indicated a steady rise in the number of children witnessing a domestic abuse incident since 2020-2021, with only the 2022-2023 period seeing a fall when compared to the previous year (it was noted that data was just one element of intelligence and that relevant material from other sources was also considered).

- Does HSSCP highlight this issue and promote reporting routes / local support offers? If so, how / how often?: Despite domestic abuse not being one of the partnerships priorities over recent years, HSSCP monitored and responded to this issue by receiving and scrutinising KPIs regarding domestic abuse (tasking actions to existing groups where required), and by receiving minutes and assurance reports from the Domestic Abuse Partnership and updates from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) for Cleveland (i.e. Perpetrator Strategy). In addition, it undertook Rapid Reviews and Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews of serious child safeguarding cases, identifying where domestic abuse was a feature (highlighting key learning and responding to this learning through the HSSCP Engine Room, Training Sub-Group and Procedures Sub-Group), and regularly reviewed, updated and promoted training and guidance on domestic abuse across the multi-agency workforce.
- What previous / current / future planned work has been / will be undertaken by / involving HSSCP in relation to this scrutiny topic?: HSSCP agencies and representatives had been involved in the development, review and implementation of domestic abuse strategies (e.g. via the OPCC (Perpetrator Strategy) and the Domestic Abuse Partnership (Domestic Abuse Strategy)), and the Tees Procedures Group (a sub-group of both HSSCP and South Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership) undertook a review of the 'Assessing and Responding to the Impact of Domestic Abuse' in 2023 which was updated and uploaded to the Tees Procedures website.

In 2025, when the joint-targeted area inspection (JTAI) focus on domestic abuse was announced, the HSSCP Engine Room undertook a multi-agency audit on this theme. In addition to evidence of cross-cutting good practice, three subsequent recommendations were being progressed via the Engine Room's combined learning Action Plan – when a perpetrator was such high-risk, how could professionals be supported to work together to effectively engage; how to strengthen approaches to recognising risk, hold the perpetrator to account, partner with the victim, and keep the child at the centre; how to promote best practice principles across two Local Authority areas with differing domestic abuse approaches / models.

- Working with SBC and its partners – how does this operate; is this effective; is there anything that could strengthen current arrangements?: HSSCP received an annual assurance report from the Domestic Abuse Steering Group in September 2025 which provided strong confidence regarding the effectiveness of arrangements, demonstrating that agencies from across the system were working to prevent, intervene early, and respond to domestic abuse. As previous indicated above, the HSSCP domestic abuse themed audit identified where current arrangements could be further strengthened.

- Any organisation/s not regularly attending multi-agency meetings, actively participating in meetings / contributing to assessments and support plans? What assurance is there that the overall 'system' around domestic abuse is working (monitoring / evaluation)?: There was an indicator in the HSSCP PMF around attendance from each agency at multi-agency meetings, however, this was not broken down specifically to domestic abuse. There were partnership escalation processes in place that enabled any professional to challenge another agency should there be concerns regarding attendance at multi-agency meetings or around contributions to assessment and planning – no issues regarding this had been escalated to the HSSCP Executive.
- Any views on key areas of future focus relating to this scrutiny topic (e.g. existing challenges that need to be addressed; national / regional / local developments that will / are likely to have an impact)?: As per the HSSCP domestic abuse-themed audit, existing challenges and future areas of focus were on how professionals could be supported to work together to effectively engage when a perpetrator was high-risk, and how approaches could be strengthened to recognise risk, hold the perpetrator to account, partner with the victim, and keep the child at the centre.

Highlighting the review's focus on early years, the Committee noted that there were no references to specific age-ranges within the HSSCP submission. Members were reminded that the partnership did not hold data itself but did observe indicators – should a key line of enquiry emerge, subsequent deep-dive work may lead to requests for further information.

Continuing with this theme, the Committee queried how HSSCP could identify relevant questions to ask if it did not hold data. Members were assured that HSSCP did see data alongside other information sources (including the child's voice) and stated that its Performance Sub-Group could be approached regarding age-range-related considerations.

Members questioned why domestic abuse had not been a specific priority for HSSCP in recent years and asked what would make it such – in response, it was stated that the partnership's key ongoing priority around trauma included domestic abuse matters. The Committee welcomed this and emphasised the point that 'safeguarding was everyone's business'.

The effectiveness of perpetrator programmes was raised, and Members heard that whilst HSSCPs domestic abuse audit had demonstrated examples of success, areas for improvement were also identified (e.g. tools / models which could be used).

Questions concluded with a request for views on what single development / change in relation to this scrutiny topic HSSCP would like to see as a result of the Committee's review. Communication around this issue (e.g. highlighting the impact of domestic abuse on children and the support available for children, their families and perpetrators) was subsequently emphasised, along with a need to hold perpetrators to account and also focus on 'significant others' (including those who may be causing problems to a household even if not living there). That said, the HSSCP Chair felt both awareness and reporting of domestic abuse had improved (helped by changes in legislation which had increased focus on the child), and confirmed that there were no concerns around attendance and engagement in relation to those agencies who were involved in the partnership.

## THIRTEEN HOUSING GROUP

Housing services were identified during the scoping process for this review as an important area to consider regarding this scrutiny topic and, as the Borough's key housing association, Thirteen Housing Group was therefore approached for a contribution. Introduced by the organisation's Care and Support Manager, a presentation was given which included the following:

- Our role: Thirteen's responsibility was to provide safe homes and support for victims of domestic abuse. It recognised that children exposed to domestic abuse were victims in their own right and was therefore required to take immediate safeguarding action when a child was at risk (which may involve contacting the police, Local Authority, or specialist services). Safe accommodation was offered via direct lets and priority bandings (emergency lets would also be considered if someone was in immediate danger), with emergency repairs / target hardening arranged to enhance protection. Domestic abuse / safeguarding policies (reviewed every three years, or earlier if regulations changed) were in place to support customers and staff alike, and the organisation worked in partnership with Local Authorities and multi-agency forums to ensure co-ordinated support.

Thirteen complied with the Regulator of Social Housing standards on domestic abuse through several key actions outlined in the policy, including awareness and training for all staff (part of which involved going into properties), adopting a victim-centred approach, having clear reporting and referral processes (using the DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour-Based Violence) risk identification checklist), accessing specialist support and advice for customers, partnership-working, data-monitoring and continuous improvement, and compliance with consumer standards (neighbourhood, transparency, safety).

- Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA): Thirteen was in the process of re-accreditation of DAHA, a partnership comprising housing providers, Local Authorities and domestic abuse organisations which focused on how housing responded to domestic abuse. The alliance influenced government policy and was recognised as best practice by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and the UK Government.
- Importance of Thirteen-wide awareness: Domestic abuse affected Thirteen's workforce and its customers, and the organisation reinforced staff awareness of their safeguarding duties and the importance of promptly reporting any concerns or issues. Colleagues were encouraged to trust their instincts and reinforcement was given that their professional judgement was valid. Raising awareness of this issue empowered everyone to recognise the signs of abuse, respond safely, and provide support effectively.
- Reporting domestic abuse: Thirteen provided clear internal guidance and mandatory training for its near-1,500 workforce, with the latter tailored to the needs of an individual's respective role within the organisation (e.g. front-facing staff received more in-depth, face-to-face training, while back-office personnel completed e-learning modules to ensure they understood their responsibilities). One key principle was that victim disclosure alone triggered immediate support (staff did not need to investigate or prove anything) – if someone reported that they were experiencing domestic abuse, Thirteen acted quickly to provide help and signpost to specialist services. Additionally, there were designated domestic

abuse 'champions' in every service directorate to drive awareness, and reporting routes were widely promoted via the Thirteen website / social media platforms and through transparent policies.

- Tenancy support: In the last 12 months, 664 Thirteen customers were known to have experienced domestic abuse, with 139 tenancies sustained through its 'stay-at-home' (target hardening) scheme. Whilst these numbers were not increasing significantly, cases were becoming more complex (open longer and requiring more staff time).
- Working in partnership: There was a strong relationship between Thirteen's Domestic Abuse Team and SBC Housing and Homelessness Services, with regular collaboration on domestic abuse cases, and mirrored banding processes to prevent victim-survivors having to undergo two separate assessments. Thirteen was also an active participant in the Domestic Abuse Strategic (Steering) Group, was newly involved in the Teesside Perpetrator Strategic Group, and was exploring opportunities to link-in on target hardening provision in Stockton-on-Tees.
- Future focus and challenges: Key areas for future consideration around domestic abuse included the ongoing challenges posed by under-reporting due to stigma and fear among victims (particularly older customers), having to tackle complex needs (requiring multi-agency responses), and managing both funding and housing pressures (limited safe accommodation options could increase risk for victims). Digital abuse was an emerging issue, with perpetrators using technology for harassment and control, whilst national developments (e.g. Domestic Abuse Act 2021, the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, and upcoming Criminal Justice reforms) would shape the approach to this form of abuse. Moving forward, priorities should include improving early identification, enhancing role-specific training, better data-sharing between agencies, improved safeguarding for children affected by domestic abuse, and expanding perpetrator programmes to reduce repeat offending.

Responding to the presentation, the Committee began by asking whether Thirteen recorded how many of the 664 cases of customers experiencing domestic abuse in the last 12 months involved children / had children within the household. It was acknowledged that this data would need to be broken down for analysis (which would help target resources), and that a dashboard was being developed to assist in this regard. Stockton-on-Tees-specific numbers in relation to the tenancy support data provided could be sought after the meeting.

When reacting to a disclosure of domestic abuse, the Committee felt that there could be a conflict over decisions to move a family away from their household. Thirteen stated that it would not put barriers in place if such a disclosure was received, but that it was important to look at the wider circumstances (e.g. moving those who had experienced domestic abuse might not be the best solution if their children had made friends (at / outside school) who may be lost if they had to relocate). Confirmation was also given that Thirteen did take third-party referrals of domestic abuse into account (and would sensitively link-in with SBC Housing Services for further exploration), and that information around their experience of Domestic Abuse Protection Orders (DAPOs) could be provided after this meeting.

The Committee welcomed Thirteen's emphasis on providing training for its staff on this issue and sought assurance that confidentiality was maintained if someone reported a domestic abuse incident. Thirteen stated that any approach to its services would be recorded as a contact, but that if it was domestic abuse-related, the contact would be locked down in a sensitive area of their system (i.e. with restricted access). Replying to a subsequent Member query, it was confirmed that staff knew how to escalate any concerns around domestic abuse to a named individual (whose details were shared with the workforce).

Thirteen was asked for its views on what single issue was of most significance from their perspective in relation to this scrutiny topic – recognition that moving domestic abuse victims away from their existing residence was not always the best option and having access to robust data were both highlighted. The Committee thanked the Thirteen representative for their contribution and requested that praise be relayed to the organisation's patch managers who Members stated were very responsive when contacted.

## SBC HOUSING SERVICES

To ascertain the Council's housing-related role regarding this scrutiny topic, SBC Housing Services was also asked to contribute to this session. The SBC Assistant Director – Housing & A Fairer Stockton-on-Tees and the SBC Service Lead – Homelessness, Lettings & Nominations were in attendance and provided the following information:

- SBC Housing Services' role / responsibilities: The SBC Homelessness Service had direct contact with and provided support to individuals who were homeless because of domestic abuse, and / or supported individuals who had experienced domestic abuse. From a lettings and nominations perspective, Tees Valley Home Finder (TVHF) policy gave priority to those households fleeing domestic abuse (Thirteen Housing Group tenants were awarded a priority banding with TVHF). The wider SBC Housing Service also had officers visiting residents in their homes (including SBC Private Sector Housing and Disabled Facilities Grants Teams).

Any person who was offered short-term housing-related accommodation and who had disclosed either fleeing or experiencing domestic abuse was offered safety planning from a specialised Harbour worker (who works within the SBC Homelessness Service) that was funded via Public Health contracts. SBC Public Health and the SBC Homelessness Service also co-fund a specific post that manages all cases that approach the service either on homeless grounds or for safe-at-home works, ensuring follow-up support / contact after any practical works had been completed.

- For any SBC housing staff required to visit properties across the Borough, do they feel confident about spotting signs of domestic abuse, and do they know how to report it?: SBC aimed to ensure all team members received sufficient training so they felt confident in identifying signs of domestic abuse (levels of training varied depending on role), and staff were encouraged to trust their instincts when visiting properties (if something did not seem right, it probably was not). All new starters had to complete 'Introduction to Safeguarding' training and each team member was required to refresh this training every two years.

The service was currently reviewing its employee training and development plans. Rather than encouraging colleagues to attend Safeguarding Adult and Children's refresher training (every two years), it was intended to make this mandatory for all SBC Housing and A Fairer Stockton-on-Tees team members (regardless of role). Wider Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Board (TSAB) training courses were shared with Service Managers who reviewed and identified suitable training for staff.

- Data on the number of domestic abuse-related referrals made by housing services in the last three years: Whilst referrals were made, the service did not record the number.
- Working with local social housing partners regarding domestic abuse considerations – how does this operate; is this effective; is there anything that could strengthen current arrangements?: There was limited direct working with social housing providers regarding domestic abuse considerations. However, some engagement was undertaken, with the SBC Homelessness Service bringing together partners who were working / supporting those experiencing homelessness via a multi-agency forum (attended by social housing providers and organisations supporting those who were experiencing domestic abuse). The Council also engaged with tenants of Registered Providers and provided advice and support (via the SBC Homelessness Service and SBC Lettings & Nomination Service).
- Any SBC oversight of private sector housing in relation to domestic abuse (e.g. awareness-raising, promotion of reporting routes, etc.)?: All visiting officers completed a service 'Safeguarding Visit Form' when they attended a property – this also provided information on how to report abuse. A safeguarding referral would be triggered if a concern was raised.
- Any views on key areas of future focus relating to this scrutiny topic (e.g. existing challenges that need to be addressed; national / regional / local developments that will / are likely to have an impact: The Government had recently published 'A National Plan to End Homelessness', with section 3.4.7 including a specific reference to domestic abuse. A related toolkit was being developed – SBC would consider and respond to this once published.

The submission concluded with additional information pertinent to the Committee's review. During 2024-2025, there were 78 presentations to the SBC Homelessness Service from families fleeing domestic abuse (which included six presentations from families fleeing domestic abuse from an associated person). The service was looking to explore how it could support children who may be placed in temporary accommodation when a homelessness presentation was made (regardless of the reason for the presentation), and would be meeting with Family Action to see how this support could be facilitated (the Committee requested feedback on the outcome of these discussions). In addition, the SBC Homelessness Service Manager represented the wider service at the corporate Domestic Abuse Steering Group.

The Committee focused its initial response to the information provided on how those fleeing domestic abuse were prioritised, and why SBC Housing Services did not log the referrals it made in relation to this issue. SBC officers stated that those reporting experience of domestic abuse were not forced to respond to questions from service staff, though family / individual backgrounds would be investigated to ascertain relevant details. Regarding referrals, safeguarding concerns were escalated through a specific route, with staff trained to make referrals where appropriate. Service audits

identified if a referral should have been made or, if one had been made, whether it was done in a timely manner. Furthermore, any homelessness case was considered for safeguarding (this had to be documented).

Attention turned to the private housing sector, with Members querying how difficult it was to monitor domestic abuse within this domain. SBC officers noted the Selective Licensing areas across the Borough and the requirement under this scheme for landlords to reference all potential new tenants prior allocating a tenancy. Additionally, over the lifetime of the scheme, Selective Licensing Officers would undertake a home visit to each property. Under new legislation (Renters Rights Act) for private rented properties, there would be a requirement for landlords to complete mandatory registration of properties. Assurance was also given that staff working within the SBC Private Sector Housing Team had completed relevant training in relation to safeguarding / domestic abuse.

Noting previous backlogs for properties via the Tees Valley Home Finder platform, the Committee was informed that this had eased due to improvements in team capacity. In response, Members encouraged greater awareness of support services for those families / individuals moving into the Borough (a potential area which could be assisted through Family Action).

Empathising with the challenges faced by the service in terms of limited housing options and too many competing priority cases, the Committee was informed that homeless families were provided with temporary accommodation (hostel or self-contained dispersed), and that B&B accommodation was used only in exceptional circumstances. There may also be instances where out-of-Borough placements were made, but again these were exceptional circumstances or when it was not safe for the family to remain in the Borough. Domestic abuse cases were classified 'band 1' (highest priority) on Tees Valley Home Finder, though there may be others experiencing this type of abuse who were also trying to get the same available property.

As per the other contributors to this evidence-gathering session, SBC officers were asked what single change would make the biggest impact around this scrutiny topic from a housing perspective. Maximising the number of victims coming forward so that appropriate support could be provided, and to encourage all Registered Providers (with stock in the Borough) to let their properties by advertising via Tees Valley Home Finder, was encouraged.

## EARLY YEARS PROVIDERS

A brief update was provided to the Committee on the survey that was sent out to early years providers across Stockton-on-Tees in November 2025 seeking views around this scrutiny topic. There had now been 14 responses to the issued questions, with the final deadline for submissions being mid-February 2026.

AGREED that the information provided by the Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSSCP), Thirteen Housing Group, and Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Housing Services be noted, and further information be provided as requested.

**CSS/47/25 Chair's Update and Select Committee Work Programme 2025-2026**

CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair had no further updates.

WORK PROGRAMME 2025-2026

Consideration was given to the Committee's current work programme. The next meeting was due to take place on 26 February 2026 and, given that the evidence-gathering phase for the current Children affected by Domestic Abuse review had now concluded, it was proposed and then agreed to convert this to an informal session where a summary of the evidence received would be considered and draft recommendations formulated.

AGREED that the Chair's Update and Community Safety Select Committee Work Programme 2025-2026 be noted.

Chair: .....