

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF CHILDREN AFFECTED BY DOMESTIC ABUSE

Summary

The second evidence-gathering session for the Committee's review of Children affected by Domestic Abuse will feature contributions from the Stockton-on-Tees Domestic Abuse Steering Group and the commissioned support service, Harbour.

Detail

1. Reporting to the local Health and Wellbeing Board, the **Domestic Abuse Steering Group** is a multi-agency partnership between Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) and relevant organisations (e.g. police, health professionals, Harbour, etc.) which supports system-working to prevent, identify, intervene early, and respond to domestic abuse within the Borough. The Steering Group has been asked to provide a response to the following lines of enquiry:

- *Brief overview of the Steering Group*
- *Details of any previous / current work focusing on children (in particular those in their early years) affected by domestic abuse*
- *Details of any intended future work focusing on children (in particular those in their early years) affected by domestic abuse*
- *Involvement in any communications around this issue (e.g. raising awareness of domestic abuse, impact on children, reporting / referral routes, promotion of support services, etc.)*
- *Is the Steering Group effective (how is this measured)? Are there any areas in which it could be strengthened moving forward?*

A presentation has been prepared and is included within these meeting papers. The SBC Director of Public Health (who is the Chair of the Steering Group) is scheduled to be in attendance to give a summary of this submission and address any Committee comments / questions.

2. As referenced during the Committee's first evidence-gathering session in June 2025, **Harbour** is commissioned by SBC as the local domestic abuse support service. Harbour's offer includes a GP Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA), a children's team and a Child IDVA (to ensure the voice of the child is heard), and the provision of safe accommodation (for further information, please see <https://www.myharbour.org.uk/are-you-a-child-or-young-person-affected-by-abuse>). For the purposes of this review, Harbour has been asked to provide a response to the following:

- *Brief overview of Harbour (purpose, structure, available resources (inc. how funded), etc.)*
- *Any data on the prevalence of children's exposure to domestic abuse across the Borough*
- *Harbour's current support offer for children affected by domestic abuse (has this changed over time – if so, why?)*
- *Capturing the voice of the child – how is this done; what themes have emerged over time; how does this inform support?*
- *Working with SBC and its partners – how does this operate; is this effective; is there anything that could strengthen current arrangements?*
- *Any views on key areas of future focus relating to this scrutiny topic (e.g. existing challenges that need to be addressed)*

A presentation has been prepared and is included within these meeting papers. The Manager of the Children and Young People (CYP) Team is scheduled to be in attendance to give a summary of this submission and address any Committee comments / questions.

3. In advance of this session, Members may again wish to familiarise themselves with some relevant background material in relation to this scrutiny topic:
 - Home Office: Domestic Abuse – Statutory Guidance (Jul 22)
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62c6df068fa8f54e855dfe31/Domestic_Abus_e_Act_2021_Statutory_Guidance.pdf (page 52: impact on child victims)
 - GOV.UK: Victims in their own right? Babies, children and young people's experiences of domestic abuse (part 3: opportunities to identify and intervene early)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/babies-children-and-young-peoples-experiences-of-domestic-abuse/victims-in-their-own-right-babies-children-and-young-peoples-experiences-of-domestic-abuse-accessible#part-3-opportunities-to-identify-and-intervene-early>
 - Stockton-on-Tees Domestic Abuse Strategy 2022-2028
https://www.stockton.gov.uk/media/3841/Domestic-Abuse-Strategy-2022-28-Accessible/pdf/Stockton-on-Tees_Domestic_Abuse_Strategy_2022-28_Final_Accessible.pdf?m=1674053753577
4. Attention is again drawn to the previous Scrutiny Review of Domestic Abuse and its Impact on Children undertaken in 2019-2020 by the SBC Children and Young People Select Committee (this included contributions from **Harbour**). The final report went to Cabinet in January 2020: see <https://moderngov.stockton.gov.uk/Data/Cabinet/202001231630/Agenda/att37946.pdf>.

The ensuing Action Plan in relation to the agreed recommendations (featuring references to both the **Domestic Abuse Steering Group** and **Harbour**) was presented and agreed by the Children and Young People Select Committee in August 2020 – this can be accessed via <https://moderngov.stockton.gov.uk/Data/Children%20and%20Young%20People%20Select%20Committee/202008261700/Agenda/att38920.pdf>.

5. A copy of the agreed scope and plan for this review is included for information.

Name of Contact Officer: Gary Woods

Post Title: Senior Scrutiny Officer

Telephone No: 01642 526187

Email Address: gary.woods@stockton.gov.uk