

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF CHILDREN AFFECTED BY DOMESTIC ABUSE

CLEVELAND POLICE

What are Cleveland Police's main roles / responsibilities around domestic abuse (specifically cases involving children)?

Cleveland Police Core Responsibilities

- **Protect Life and Wellbeing**
The overriding duty is to protect victims, children, and any other household members from further harm. Children present during domestic abuse incidents are treated as victims in their own right, even if not physically harmed.
- **Investigate All Reports**
Every domestic abuse report must be investigated thoroughly, with officers following the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice (APP) guidance.
- **Hold Offenders Accountable**
Officers must take effective action against perpetrators through the criminal justice system, including using civil measures like Domestic Abuse Protection Notices and Orders (DAPN/DAPO) for longer-term safeguarding.
- **Adopt a Multi-Agency Approach**
Cleveland Police works closely with local safeguarding partnerships, schools, and social services. Initiatives like Operation Encompass ensure schools are informed within 24 hours when a child has been present at a domestic abuse incident, enabling immediate support.

Child-Centred Safeguarding

- **'Through the Eyes of a Child' Principle**
Officers are trained to consider the impact of domestic abuse on children, recognising Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). They are encouraged to record the child's environment and voice during risk assessments.
- **Child Strategy Commitments**
Cleveland Police's Child Strategy emphasises putting the child first in all decisions, recognising trauma and vulnerability, and ensuring dignity and respect.

Specialist Measures and Support

- **Early Identification and Referral**
Officers must identify at-risk children and refer cases to local safeguarding hubs (e.g., Stockton-on-Tees Children's Hub).
- **Protective Orders**
Use of DAPNs and DAPOs under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 provides flexible, longer-term protection for victims and their children.
- **Training and Awareness**
Staff receive training on spotting signs of domestic abuse and understanding reporting routes.

National Legal Framework

- **Domestic Abuse Act 2021**
Children who see, hear, or experience domestic abuse are legally recognised as victims. Police have a statutory duty under the Children Act 2004 and Working Together 2023 to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
- **Emergency Powers**
Officers can enter premises and remove children to safety if they believe a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm.

Key Takeaways

Cleveland Police's responsibilities combine protection, investigation, and prevention, underpinned by a child-first approach and strong multi-agency collaboration. Children are treated as victims, not bystanders, and safeguarding measures extend beyond immediate response to include school notifications, protective orders, and trauma-informed practices.

How do force personnel identify at-risk individuals / families? How confident do they feel about spotting signs of domestic abuse?

How At-Risk Individuals and Families Are Identified

Cleveland Police uses a multi-layered approach combining structured tools, professional judgement, and contextual indicators:

- **Risk Assessment Tools**
Officers apply the DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour-Based Violence) framework during initial contact. These tools guide structured professional judgement, focusing on factors like coercive control, previous incidents, and threats. Risk is graded as standard, medium, or high, but officers are trained not to rely solely on tick-box scoring.
- **Professional Judgement and Observation**
Officers are encouraged to look beyond physical injuries and consider behavioural cues, emotional state, and environmental factors. For example, signs of coercive behaviour, financial control, or isolation are flagged even if no physical harm is evident.
- **Multi-Agency Information Sharing**
Programmes like Operation Encompass ensure schools are notified when children are present at domestic incidents. Referrals to safeguarding hubs (e.g., Stockton-on-Tees Children's Hub) are mandatory for cases involving children.

Confidence in Spotting Signs of Domestic Abuse

- **Training Coverage**
Cleveland Police has rolled out Domestic Abuse Matters (DA Matters) training to all officers and staff. Developed with SafeLives and the College of Policing, this programme focuses on recognising coercive and controlling behaviour and improving cultural attitudes. Over 1,500 personnel have completed the training, and it continues.
- **Impact on Confidence**
The training aims to give staff "the confidence to recognise domestic abuse" and respond compassionately. Feedback from national surveys suggests most officers feel better equipped post-training, though challenges remain in consistently identifying subtle signs like psychological abuse.

Are force staff aware of how to report domestic abuse? How does the Trust promote reporting routes and local support services?

- Significant force wide emphasis is placed on DA training so that staff know how to address domestic abuse incidents, bearing in mind the majority of incidents are reported to us as opposed to reported by us.
- All officers and support staff receive Domestic Abuse Matters training placing emphasis on how domestic abuse presents itself, its insidiousness and also how officers must look beyond the obvious, i.e., once the emergency incident has ended upon police arrival the victim often denies, minimises and will not disclose due to fear and long term CCB.
- The Force domestic abuse policy deals with the responsibilities of each and every individual involved in the domestic abuse process from start to finish, including the handling of high risk domestic abuse cases, HBA and consideration of MARAC. NB this policy is regularly reviewed and updated and is currently in the process of being updated to emphasise no crime/no disclosure does not negate submission of PPN and other recent developments including the use of DAPO.
- PVP Hub and CAVA have delivered training inputs to Sgt's Development training and probationer training in terms of the importance of the full completion of the PPN.
- There are online guidance tools and cards to support officers in the completion of the domestic abuse PPN.
- There is full PPN guidance on the Safeguarding Sharepoint.
- There are compliance measures within PVP using Power Bi to determine those PPN's that are not submitted timely and immediate measures taken to identify and process those high risk incidents. Feedback is given to officers regarding this to improve future submission.
- Messages to all are sent out when there are themes identified in relation to domestic abuse matters, for example, tasking.
- PVP Makes it quite clear in all feedback that the office is available to offer advice and support regarding domestic abuse incidents.
- The PVP Hub has developed a decent working relationship with the Vulnerability Desk and provides advice and support in terms of how they handle domestic abuse risk assessments, particularly in light of the introduction of RVR.
- All shifts have been visited by PVP staff at least once and given support in the submission of a PPN.

How does Cleveland Police support its staff around dealing with the issue of domestic abuse (e.g. training course options and any available date on the uptake of these)?

Refer to Q2

Any data on the number of domestic abuse-related referrals made to the Stockton-on-Tees Children's Hub (CHUB) by Cleveland Police in the last three years?

- Children Services (CHUB) can provide this data.

Who / what is the responsible person / role within your organisation regarding written safeguarding policies / training / submitting referrals?

- The responsibilities for Domestic Abuse, and Child Safeguarding are overseen by Superintendent Strategic Leads (Supt Murphy-King and Supt Motson respectively) who as portfolio leads have overall responsibility for policy, training and referrals.

Working with SBC and its partners with regards domestic abuse – how does this operate; is this effective; is there anything that could strengthen current arrangements?

- In respect of children in Stockton we currently have the CHUB which manages the operational teams from the partnership working together. Staff are co-located to improve working relationships and the timeliness of the responses. This in turn leads to the better safeguarding of children.
- Shortly the front door arrangements are to split (Hartlepool and Stockton) however Police will still be co-located with partners.
- At a tactical level, the partnership is managed via the engine room. This includes all partners joining together to manage governance, performance, learning and development along side the operational business.
- The partnership arrangements are currently split across north and south Tees, however often cover the same themes and issues which occur across Tees. A central team structure would cut down on duplicity and make things more streamlined. This would also mean learning and good practice was shared Teeswide.

Awareness of any national / regional / local developments which will / are likely to impact upon this scrutiny topic and how will this affect services?

National Developments

Families First Initiative (Children's Social Care Reform)

- Embedding Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPTs) across local authority areas.
- Police will have a proactive role in Section 47 enquiries, strategy meetings, and child protection conferences.
- Emphasis on trauma-informed practice, contextual safeguarding, and restorative approaches to reduce care entries.

Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 – Section 20 Implementation

- From November 2025, police must notify schools if a child is suspected to be a victim of domestic abuse (new section 49A of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021).

Domestic Abuse Act 2021 – Continued Expansion

- Children remain legally recognised as victims when exposed to domestic abuse.

New Domestic Abuse Protection Orders (DAPOs)

- National pilot launched in 2025; Cleveland Police is a pilot force.
- DAPOs replace DVPOs, offering longer-term, flexible protection with criminal penalties for breaches. Positive requirements (e.g., behaviour change programmes) can be mandated.

Tees-Wide Domestic Abuse Perpetration Strategy (2025–2035)

- A 10-year plan to reduce repeat offending and improve multi-agency collaboration.
- Aligns with the government's commitment to halve violence against women and girls over the next decade.