

Community Safety Select Committee
Review of Children affected by Domestic Abuse
Outline Scope

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Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?

The review will contribute to the following Stockton-on-Tees Plan 2024-2028 priorities:

- *Priority 1: The best start in life to achieve big ambitions:* We will support all children to have the best possible start in life, within a safe and inclusive community where everyone can thrive.
- *Priority 2: Healthy & Resilient Communities:* We will continue to work with our partners through the Safer Stockton Partnership to make Stockton-on-Tees a safer place, where people are protected from serious harm and live in communities that are safe and welcoming (Building safe and connected communities).

The outputs from this review will also contribute to the SBC *Powering Our Future* transformation review of 'Early Intervention and Prevention'.

What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?

In December 2023, Foundations (the national What Works Centre for Children & Families) reported figures which revealed that at least 827,000 children in England and Wales may have suffered domestic abuse by the end of 2023. Amid concerns that the numbers of children affected by domestic abuse had escalated, the organisation called for an urgent focus on testing the most promising approaches to strengthen support for children.

The impact of domestic abuse is felt by children regardless of their age, and this is now recognised in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. Children exposed to domestic abuse or experiencing domestic abuse in their own relationships are regarded as victim-survivors in their own right.

Domestic abuse can seriously affect families and the physical, mental and emotional health, wellbeing and development of children and young people. Children and young people can develop emotional, behavioural and developmental issues such as anxiety, challenging and aggressive behaviour or withdrawal, delayed speech, language and communication and low self-esteem, affecting their ability to form healthy relationships and educational attainment. In 2020-2021, the local domestic abuse service found that children were exposed to three-quarters of domestic abuse incidents, whilst a third of referrals to Children's Services were related to domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse can be experienced by anyone and disproportionately affects children and young people. Domestic abuse can be one of the factors resulting in child exploitation and can contribute and exacerbate multiple disadvantage. In 2020-2021, services in Stockton-on-Tees reported that 17% of homeless presentations were related to domestic abuse and 20% of substance misuse service users had experienced domestic abuse.

The Domestic Abuse Strategy 2022-2028 for Stockton-on-Tees highlights the importance of intervening early to minimise the impact of domestic abuse on children. As such, the main aims for this review will be to:

- Understand the impact of domestic abuse on children, the extent of this issue across the Borough, and the ways in which those who experience this are identified. In particular, explore how domestic abuse impacts children in their early years, and the extent of the lasting impact as they grow older.
- Articulate the current local offer for children and young people affected by domestic abuse, providing clarity for frontline professionals, families and children / young people.
- Explore opportunities for early intervention (focusing on those services engaging with children / families with children in their early years) to protect children from the enduring impacts of domestic abuse.

The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:

When children experience domestic abuse in their early years, how does this then impact them throughout their lives (immediate and longer-term)? Are there variations in terms of a child's experience / impact of domestic abuse across different cultures?

What local data exists in relation to children experiencing domestic abuse and / or the subsequent impact of this?

How are children at risk of / experiencing domestic abuse identified locally? What are the reporting routes for professionals and how are these reinforced with staff?

What is the Local Authority's offer for children affected by domestic abuse in Stockton-on-Tees? Has this evolved over time and is it effective? How are support services promoted?

What is in place across local partners (particularly those engaging with children / families with children aged 0-5) to identify and mitigate the effects of domestic abuse on children in the Borough (including involvement in multi-agency arrangements)?

How does the Council and its partners capture the voice of children themselves when considering / reflecting upon their service offer?

Does the existing service offer from individual organisations contribute effectively to a whole 'system' approach to the provision of domestic abuse support for children? What evidence-based practice exists to tackle and reduce the impact of domestic abuse on children who have been exposed to or experienced this in their early years? What national / regional / local developments will / are likely to impact upon this scrutiny topic and how will this affect services?	
Who will the Committee be trying to influence as part of its work? Council, Cabinet, health sector, police, schools, early years providers, families and young people.	
Expected duration of review and key milestones: 8 months (report to Cabinet in March 2026)	
What information do we need? Existing information (background information, existing reports, legislation, central government documents, etc.): • Home Office: Domestic Abuse – Statutory Guidance (Jul 22) • 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) • SBC Children and Young People Select Committee: Scrutiny Review of Domestic Abuse and its Impact on Children – Final Report (Jan 20)	
<i>Who can provide us with further relevant evidence? (Cabinet Member, officer, service user, general public, expert witness, etc.)</i> Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council • Children's Services (Early Help, Safeguarding and CIOC) • Public Health Domestic Abuse Steering Group Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSSCP) Cleveland Police Early Years Providers	<i>What specific areas do we want them to cover when they give evidence?</i> ➤ What domestic abuse is and how it involves / can involve children ➤ Known impact of domestic abuse on children ➤ Identification / reporting routes / local data ➤ Local Authority support offer / future plans ➤ Capturing the voice of the child ➤ Evidence-based practice to tackle this issue ➤ Previous / current / future work re. this topic ➤ Previous / current / future work re. this topic ➤ 'System' co-ordination / accountability ➤ Identification of at-risk individuals / families ➤ Working with partners ➤ Identification of at-risk individuals / families ➤ Awareness / promotion of reporting routes

North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NENC ICB)	➤ 'System' considerations around this topic ➤ National / regional developments re. this topic
Primary Care Networks (PCNs)	➤ Identification of at-risk individuals / families ➤ Awareness / promotion of reporting routes ➤ Working with the Council / NHS partners
North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust (Maternity)	
Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust (Health Visitors)	
Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust	➤ Mental health impact of domestic abuse
Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office (Regional Lead)	➤ National / regional developments re. this topic ➤ Views on local offer / strategies
Harbour	➤ Local data / support offer ➤ Capturing the voice of the child ➤ Working with partners
Housing Services (SBC / Thirteen)	➤ Identification of at-risk individuals / families ➤ Awareness / promotion of reporting routes
How will this information be gathered? (eg. financial baselining and analysis, benchmarking, site visits, face-to-face questioning, telephone survey, survey)	
Committee meetings, reports, research, case studies.	
How will key partners and the public be involved in the review?	
Committee meetings, information submissions.	
How will the review help the Council meet the Public Sector Equality Duty?	
The Public Sector Equality Duty requires that public bodies have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities. This review will be mindful of these factors.	
How will the review contribute towards the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, or the implementation of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy?	
<u>Stockton Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)</u> : The current Stockton JSNA includes a (now dated) section on 'Domestic abuse victims' – references to children are incorporated throughout.	
<u>Stockton-on-Tees Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025-2030</u> : <i>All children and families have the best start in life</i> – Commitments (Safe from harm): Children and young people are safe from harm and safe in their communities, protected from bullying, neglect and abuse in the home, online and in the community. <i>Everyone lives in healthy and sustainable places and communities</i> – Commitments (Domestic Abuse): We want everyone living or working in Stockton-on-Tees to feel safe, supported and protected from domestic abuse, regardless of their age, sex, gender, sexuality, disability, socio-economic status, faith or background.	

Provide an initial view as to how this review could lead to efficiencies, improvements and / or transformation:

This review will seek to make recommendations which contribute to the provision of an effective multi-agency approach towards supporting children and young people who experience domestic abuse in Stockton-on-Tees.

With a focus on early intervention, reducing the impact of domestic abuse on individuals may reduce the need (demand) for services. This review will contribute to greater understanding of interventions and approaches which are effective at protecting children and young people from harm. The review will also identify where services and practice can be improved.

Project Plan

Key Task	Details/Activities	Date	Responsibility
Scoping of Review	Information gathering	May 2025	Scrutiny Officer Link Officer
Tri-Partite Meeting	Meeting to discuss aims and objectives of review	07.05.25	Select Committee Chair and Vice Chair, Cabinet Member(s), Director(s), Scrutiny Officer, Link Officer
Agree Project Plan	Scope and Project Plan agreed by Committee	22.05.25	Select Committee
Publicity of Review	Determine whether Communications Plan needed	TBC	Link Officer, Scrutiny Officer
Obtaining Evidence	SBC • Children's Services • Public Health DA Steering Group Harbour NTHFT (Maternity) HDFT (Health Visitors) TEWV (CAMHS) NENC ICB Primary Care Networks Cleveland Police Early Years Providers HSSCP Housing Services	26.06.25 31.07.25 25.09.25 30.10.25 18.12.25 22.01.26	Select Committee

Members decide recommendations and findings	Review summary of findings and formulate draft recommendations	26.02.26	Select Committee
Circulate Draft Report to Stakeholders	Circulation of Report	March 2026	Scrutiny Officer
Tri-Partite Meeting	Meeting to discuss findings of review and draft recommendations	TBC	Select Committee Chair and Vice Chair, Cabinet Member(s), Director(s), Scrutiny Officer, Link Officer
Final Agreement of Report	Approval of final report by Committee	26.03.26	Select Committee, Cabinet Member, Director
Consideration of Report by Executive Scrutiny Committee	Consideration of report	[19.05.26]	Executive Scrutiny Committee
Report to Cabinet / Approving Body	Presentation of final report with recommendations for approval to Cabinet	16.04.26	Cabinet / Approving Body