

Community Safety Select Committee

A meeting of the Community Safety Select Committee was held on Thursday 18 December 2025.

Present: Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy (Chair), Cllr Katie Weston (Vice-Chair), Cllr Bob Cook, Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Jason French, Cllr Ray Godwin, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Alan Watson

Officers: Mandy MacKinnon (A,H&W); Louise Hollick (ChS); Aishah Waithe, Gary Woods (CS)

Also in attendance: Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE (SBC Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety); Alan O'Donoghue (Cleveland Police)

Apologies: None

CSS/37/25 Evacuation Procedure

The evacuation procedure was noted.

CSS/38/25 Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

CSS/39/25 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the Community Safety Select Committee meeting which was held on 27 November 2025 for approval and signature.

AGREED that the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 27 November 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

CSS/40/25 Scrutiny Review of Children affected by Domestic Abuse

The fifth evidence-gathering session for the Committee's review of Children affected by Domestic Abuse focused on a submission from Cleveland Police and an update on the survey recently issued to the Borough's early years providers.

CLEVELAND POLICE

As a key partner in relation to this scrutiny topic, Cleveland Police was approached for a contribution to this review. The force had provided a response to the Committee's lines of enquiry, and this was presented by the Stockton District Commander as follows:

- What are Cleveland Police's main roles / responsibilities around domestic abuse (specifically cases involving children)?: The force's core responsibilities were protecting life and wellbeing, investigating all reports, holding offenders

accountable, and adopting a multi-agency approach. Safeguarding was child-centred (via a 'through the eyes of a child' principle and a specific Child Strategy commitment), with specialist measures and support in place around early intervention and referral, protective orders (Cleveland Police was one of a few forces using Domestic Abuse Protection Notices (DAPNs) and Orders (DAPOs) for longer-term safeguarding), and training and awareness. This was all within the context of a national legal framework (Domestic Abuse Act 2021, Children Act 2004, Working Together 2023), including emergency powers where officers could enter premises and remove children to safety if they believed a child was suffering, or was likely to suffer, significant harm.

In summary, Cleveland Police's responsibilities combined protection, investigation and prevention, underpinned by a child-first approach and strong multi-agency collaboration. Children were treated as victims, not bystanders, and safeguarding measures extended 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?: Cleveland Police used a multi-layered approach, combining structured tools (officers applied the DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour-Based Violence) framework during initial contact, with risk graded as standard, medium or high (though officers were trained not to rely solely on tick-box scoring)), professional judgement and contextual indicators (looking beyond physical injuries and considering behavioural cues, emotional state, and environmental factors), and information-sharing with other agencies (e.g. *Operation Encompass*, where schools were notified when children were present at domestic incidents).

Skills in relation to this issue were enhanced by the roll-out of Domestic Abuse Matters (DA Matters) training to all officers and staff. Developed with SafeLives and the College of Policing, this programme focused on recognising coercive / controlling behaviour and improving cultural attitudes. Over 1,500 personnel had completed the training thus far which aimed to give staff the confidence to recognise domestic abuse and respond compassionately (though it was acknowledged that challenges remained 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 was placed on domestic abuse training so that staff knew how to address incidents (bearing in mind the majority of incidents were reported to Cleveland Police as opposed to reported by it). The force's domestic abuse policy dealt with the responsibilities of each and every individual involved in the domestic abuse process from start to finish – this was regularly reviewed and was currently in the process of being updated to emphasise no crime / no disclosure did not negate submission of a Public Protection Notice (PPN) and other recent developments including the use of DAPOs.

The Cleveland Police Protecting Vulnerable People (PVP) Hub had developed a decent working relationship with the Vulnerability Desk, and provided advice and support in terms of how they handled domestic abuse risk assessments, particularly in light of the introduction of rapid video response (RVR). All shifts had been visited by PVP staff at least once (giving support in the submission of a

PPN), and made it quite clear in all feedback that the office was available to offer advice and support regarding domestic abuse incidents. There were compliance measures within PVP using Power Bi to determine those PPNs that were not submitted timely, with immediate measures taken to identify and process those high-risk incidents. Feedback was given to officers regarding this to improve future submission.

- 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)?: See previous comments.
- 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?: The CHUB would be able to 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 were overseen by Superintendent Strategic Leads (Supt Murphy-King and Supt Motson respectively) who, as portfolio leads, had 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?: Locally, the CHUB managed the operational teams from the partnership working together. Staff were co-located to improve working relationships and the timeliness of the responses – this in turn led to the improved safeguarding of children. Shortly, the 'front door' arrangements were to split (Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees), however, Cleveland Police would still be co-located with partners.

At a tactical level, the partnership was managed via the engine room – this included all partners joining together to manage governance, performance, and learning and development, alongside the operational business. The partnership arrangements were currently split across north and south Tees, however, they often covered the same themes and issues which occurred across Tees. Looking ahead, a central team structure would cut down on duplicity and make things more streamlined – this would also mean learning and good practice was shared on a Tees-wide basis.

- Awareness of any national / regional / local developments which will / are likely to impact upon this scrutiny topic and how will this affect services?: Several developments were highlighted, including the Families First (Children's Social Care Reform) initiative, the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 – Section 20 implementation (police must notify schools if a child was suspected to be a victim of domestic abuse), and the continued expansion of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. This was in addition to the new DAPOs (Cleveland Police was a pilot force for this 2025 national scheme), as well as the Tees-wide Domestic Abuse Perpetration Strategy (a 10-year plan to reduce repeat offending and improve multi-agency collaboration, it aligned with the Government's commitment to halve violence against women and girls over the next decade).

Welcoming the informative report, the Committee initiated a discussion around *Operation Encompass*. In response to concerns about the timeframe for informing schools when a child had been present at a domestic abuse incident, Members were notified that a case would be reported to an educational provider on the morning of the next day (even if the incident took place late on the previous evening). A further query confirmed that pre-schools / nurseries were not part of this operation and would instead be picked up through the local Children's Hub (CHUB) where staff would contact a relevant early years setting / health provider / GP after a referral.

Continuing this theme, the Committee asked about safeguards around data when liaising with other agencies. Members heard that the force adhered to the established data protection rules and also had information-sharing protocols in place – it was therefore confident that sensitive details were not being passed around. Further updates in terms of the current situation with *Operation Encompass* could be provided by the force's strategic lead for domestic abuse after the meeting.

Regarding identification of at-risk individuals, the force stressed with its officers the importance of looking for signs of domestic abuse even if attending a property for other reasons. When dealing with a case involving a child, the Committee asked if ages were recorded by officers and, if so, requested a breakdown of age-ranges for incidents across the Borough. Members were informed that ages were logged and that officers were expected to physically attend a property to assess and record a situation (this report was then checked by other force personnel as part of internal quality control / assurance). It was also confirmed that Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) were included in the roll-out of domestic abuse-related training.

The Committee enquired about the prevalence of domestic abuse-related cases across the Borough and heard that around 18% of all recorded incidents involved this type of abuse (it was also noted that there was an average of 30-40 domestic incidents across the Cleveland footprint per day). There had been a slight increase in cases over the past year, though comparisons to national data would need to be sought after this meeting.

Conscious of previous cuts to police budgets over the past decade and more, Members questioned whether the force could deal with this rise in identified domestic abuse. The Stockton District Commander expressed confidence that Cleveland Police was managing demand and gave assurance that domestic abuse was a force priority – this involved ensuring the right resources were available at the right times, with highly-skilled call-handlers an integral part in identifying and categorising issues which could then be acted on promptly. There were also flexible options to meet with domestic abuse victims when it suited them. The key message was that an individual would get an effective response if contacting Cleveland Police, with the force doing what was right for the victim and their family. Mindful of upcoming decisions around the latest police precept, Members felt it was important for the public to understand that it had to pay for good quality services and that this was a relatively small price to prevent much more significant issues arising.

A Committee query was raised around whether domestic abuse tended to happen more in certain areas (e.g. deprived locations). It was acknowledged that poor socio-economic factors could be a driver, though it was stressed that this type of abuse happened within all settings and that it would not be appropriate to target one particular group / community. Members also referenced the ongoing national priority on violence against women and girls (VAWG), along with past concerns around

victims withdrawing complaints due to the fear of repercussions from their abuser. Whilst it was acknowledged that some did not want to proceed through the criminal justice system, the force did not need the support of victims to go through this route.

Noting discussions at previous evidence-gathering sessions for this review, the Committee asked about the force's relations with Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs). Members heard that these were strong and that IDVAs played an invaluable support role outside criminal investigations (indeed, one was embedded within the Cleveland Police control room).

Questions were then directed at the benefits of DAPOs and what these brought over and above the court system. The Committee was informed that these orders had been extremely effective thus far and did not require perpetrators to be charged with a criminal offence (a DAPN could be served whilst a criminal investigation was ongoing). A significant number of orders had been applied for and served within the Cleveland Police footprint this year, and these provided an extra layer of protection for victims and their families. DAPOs could cover zones (not just individual properties) and be indefinite – should an order be breached, the offender would be put before the next court. Importantly, third parties could also apply for an order to be served (e.g. family member, neighbour, social worker) which also included potential positive requirements such as behavioural change programmes.

The Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety stated that Cleveland Police had been highly criticised for its poor response to domestic abuse in the past, but that there was now confidence in the work of the force and its partners around this issue. Clarity was then sought on whether the force's call-handlers were trained to listen to background noise for any clues of domestic abuse (as ambulance staff were reportedly skilled in doing) – this would be confirmed after the meeting, though it was pointed out that the force had the facility to listen back to a call so any signs of abuse could be retrospectively identified.

Concluding the item, the Committee queried what single development would make the biggest difference in terms of local domestic abuse matters from a police perspective. Increasing awareness of applying for a DAPO so this was not always a force-led process (particularly given not everyone reported abuse to the police) was identified as a key aim moving forward – this was another avenue of support for victims which all organisations could better utilise.

EARLY YEARS PROVIDERS

The Committee was informed that the survey sent out to early years providers across Stockton-on-Tees in November 2025 had elicited only one response. As such, the survey deadline had been extended to February 2026, and SBC Children's Services staff were now supporting efforts to get feedback from this important sector.

AGREED that the information provided by Cleveland Police and the update on the early years provider survey be noted, and further information be provided as requested.

CSS/41/25 Safer Stockton Partnership (SSP) – Previous Minutes (October 2025)

Consideration was given to the minutes of the Safer Stockton Partnership (SSP) meeting which took place in October 2025. Attention was drawn to the following:

- Recorded Crime & Disorder Report: Whilst some of the recorded crime and disorder statistics had risen over the August 2024 to August 2025 period, the Committee was encouraged by the stated increase in active policing and the sense of greater trust between victims and the force which had resulted in more cases being reported.

Members also highlighted the attendance of some police cadets at recent Councillor ward surgeries and praised them for being a credit to the force. The Committee asked if they were recognised by Cleveland Police and heard that the force internally acknowledged the work they undertook within the community. In addition, although the cadets were not usually involved at the SSP, they could be invited to the public element of a future meeting to have the opportunity to be part of discussions.

AGREED that the minutes of the Safer Stockton Partnership (SSP) meeting which took place in October 2025 be noted.

CSS/42/25 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 22 January 2026 and would involve the sixth evidence-gathering session for the ongoing Scrutiny Review of Children affected by Domestic Abuse featuring contributions from housing services (Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and Thirteen Housing Group) and the Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership.

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

Chair: