

**1. Purpose**

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide the Community Safety Select Committee with a HSSCP response to the key questions raised as part of the 'Review of Children affected by Domestic Abuse'.

**2. Introduction – An Overview of HSSCP**

- 2.1 The Hartlepool and Stockton on Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSSCP) was first established in April 2019. It is a multi-agency partnership made up of statutory and non statutory partner agencies from across Hartlepool and Stockton that have responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.
- 2.2 The statutory safeguarding partner agencies, as defined under the Children Act 2004 (amended by the Children and Social Work Act, 2017) and in accordance with Working Together 2023, include the following:
- a) Hartlepool Borough Council
  - b) Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
  - c) North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board
  - d) Chief Officer of Cleveland Police
- 2.3 The four lead safeguarding partners (LSPs) have 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.
- 2.4 HSSCP's vision is to ensure: *"Every child in Hartlepool and Stockton feels safe, secure and protected from harm; enabling them to reach their full potential."*

**3. Key Questions Posed by the Children's Community Safety Select Committee as part of its review into 'Children Affected by Domestic Abuse' and HSSCP's response to them**

- 3.1 **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?**
- 3.1.1 HSSCP do not hold any data specifically in relation to prevalence of children's exposure to domestic abuse. HSSCP receive data on this from the Local Authority.
- 3.1.2 Over the past 5 years, for the period of 2020-2024 HSSCP's Performance Management Framework (PMF) included two key performance indicators in respect of domestic abuse, namely:

- The rate of domestic abuse incident with a child present in the year-to-date.
- 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.

Stockton Borough Council collected and reported these indicators on behalf of and to HSSCP on a quarterly basis.

3.1.3 In 2025 a new Performance Framework was agreed which included five key performance indicators in respect of domestic abuse, namely:

- Local Authority Assessment Factors (Domestic Abuse)
- Children subject to repeat plans where Domestic Abuse is a factor
- Children subject to a Child Protection plan longer than 12 months where Domestic Abuse is a factor
- Number of children referred to Domestic Abuse support services
- Number of children supported Domestic Abuse support services

Responsibility for collection and reporting of this data transferred over to Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council in 2025.

3.1.4 The domestic abuse data reported to HSSCP under the above indicators over the past 5 years was not broken down into age ranges to enable HSSCP to specifically comment upon early years prevalence.

3.1.5 The domestic abuse data reported in the HSSCP annual report over the past 5 years (at year end), including direction on travel, is as follows:

- 2020-21: 2003 children witnessing a domestic abuse incident ↑
- 2021-22: 2153 children witnessing a domestic abuse incident ↑
- 2022-23: 2058 children witnessing a domestic abuse incident ↓
- 2023-24: 2121 children present during a domestic abuse incident ↑
- 2024-25: 2305 children present during a domestic abuse incident ↑

3.2 **Does HSSCP highlight this issue and promote reporting routes / local support offers? If so, how / how often?**

3.2.1 Between 2021 and 2024, Neglect was HSSCP's key priority. From 2024 to date the key priorities are Harm Outside the Home and Trauma. The vast majority of work undertaken by HSSCP during this time period is in relation to its key priorities.

3.2.2 Despite domestic abuse not being one of the partnerships priorities over recent years, HSSCP monitor and respond to this issue in a number of ways:

- Receiving and scrutinising key performance indicators regarding domestic abuse and tasking actions to existing groups where required.
- Receiving minutes and assurance reports from Domestic Abuse Partnership and updates from OPCC re Perpetrator Strategy
- When undertaking Rapid Reviews and Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews of serious child safeguarding cases, identifying where domestic abuse is a feature, highlighting key learning and responding to this learning through the HSSCP Engine Room, Training Sub-group and Procedures sub-group
- Regularly reviewing, updating and promoting training and guidance on domestic abuse across the multi-agency work force

**3.3 What previous / current / future planned work has been / will be undertaken by / involving HSSCP in relation to this scrutiny topic?**

- 3.3.1 HSSCP Partner agencies and partner representatives have been involved in development, review and implementation of domestic abuse strategies such as via the OPCC (Perpetrator strategy) or the Domestic Abuse Partnership (Domestic Abuse Strategy).
- 3.3.2 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.
- 3.3.3 In 2025, when the Domestic Abuse JTAI theme was announced, the HSSCP Engine Room undertook a multi-agency audit on domestic abuse. Key findings were:
- Evidence of Cross-Cutting Good Practice:**
- Multi-agency commitment, passion and dedication in seeing the child as a victim and striving for best outcomes for the child.
  - Good communication between multi-agency professionals involved
  - Children seen as victims and were able to access therapeutic sessions / support

**When it Works Well, Best Practice is:**

- When a perpetrator is held to account by all agencies
- Partnering with the victim
- Strong relational approaches

**What are the Barriers?**

- When a perpetrator is such high risk and professionals are fearful - how do we still hold the perpetrator to account, partner with the victim and effectively engage?

The three recommendations are being progressed via the Engine Room's combined learning action plan. They are to explore:

- When a perpetrator is such high risk, how can we support professionals 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 DA approaches / models

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

- 3.4.1 HSSCP received an annual assurance report from the Domestic Abuse Steering Group in September 2025 which provided strong assurance regarding the effectiveness of arrangements, demonstrating that agencies from across the system are working to prevent, intervene early and respond to domestic abuse.

- 3.4.2 As per the HSSCP domestic abuse themed audit, current arrangements could be further strengthened by considering:
- When a perpetrator is such high risk, how can we support professionals 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?
- 3.5 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)?**
- 3.5.1 There was and is an indicator in the HSSCP performance framework around attendance from each agency at multi-agency meetings (strategy / ICPC for example) however this is not broken down specifically to domestic abuse.
- 3.5.2 There are partnership escalation processes in place that enables any professional to challenge another agency should there be concerns regarding attendance at multi-agency meetings or their contribution to assessment and planning. No issues regarding this has been escalated to the HSSCP Executive.
- 3.6 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)?**
- 3.6.1 As per the HSSCP domestic abuse themed audit, Existing challenges and future areas of focus are:
- When a perpetrator is such high risk, how can we support professionals 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?

#### **4. Key Officers**

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