



SOUTH TEES
**Safeguarding Children
Partnership Annual Report**
2023/2024



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As Chair for the STSCP Chief Officers Group, the update in the STSCP Annual Report and the next steps gives me a regular insight into the issues, both from looking back at reviews, inspection findings and ongoing potential risks and concerns. This helps me to balance, at the Council level, the competing demands we have for funding and resources and gives me a line of oversight across the South Tees area.

It is positive that we have this joint partnership as this enhances opportunities for learning and improvement and that the work with HSSCP (Hartlepool and Stockton Safeguarding Children Partnership) has been and continues to be strengthened, for example with a joint training programme. This again enables greater learning and consistency.

It is also positive that we have arrangements that are in line with the new Working Together 2023 requirements ahead of them being published – in that we chair our own Executive meetings and have separate independent scrutiny – which works well from yourself as a constant and independent – I know Kathryn has chaired for past two years and Helen Barker – chief superintendent from police has now taken over – which I think brings partners further closer together with all the challenges we face

I hope that you will find this report informative and interesting.

John Sampson

Managing Director

(Head of Paid Service)

Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council

Foreword by the STSCP Chair Kathryn Boulton

Yet another year on and as the South Tees Safeguarding Children's Partnership Executive, we are pleased to share the progress made across our Partnership. Sadly this will be my last Annual Report as I am moving to pastures new so many thanks to the support from partners, agencies and the STSCP business unit in my two year tenure as chair. I do pass over the chair of the partnership with confidence to DSI Helen Barker from Cleveland Police.

This Annual Report covering the year 2023-2024 is published by the four statutory partners (Middlesbrough Council, Redcar & Cleveland Council, Cleveland Police and North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board) who are responsible for putting in place effective arrangements to support the co-ordination, quality assurance and continuous improvement of activity to safeguard children and young people.

Effective joint working has continued and has been further strengthened, in this report the statutory partners set out critical areas of development to further improve the effectiveness of the statutory partnership arrangements including a robust multi-agency quality assurance framework that uses the learning from serious safeguarding incidents and auditing to make a difference to practice and service provision.

During this period the STSCP has completed no rapid reviews therefore no Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews have been required, however we have signed off 2 CSPR from early 2023. The partnership has also completed a number of multi-agency audits including the Section 11 audit challenge of key partners.

This report also sets out the achievements and the work that has progressed at time of unprecedented pressures on services. These achievements are a reflection of the committed individuals who either work directly with children, young people and their families or those with a specialist role in safeguarding in partner agencies.

We are in a strong position to implement the revisions to national guidance as outlined in the recently published Working Together 2023. Our current partnership arrangement reflect that which is stipulated, as does our use of Independent Scrutiny which is separate to the role of Chair. Schools have been represented on the Executive at strategic level, and through events run in partnership with schools. The annual school safeguarding survey (Section 175) has a high rate of completion and the questions are adjusted annually to take into account local issues which have been identified.

On behalf of the four statutory safeguarding partners, I would like to again thank everyone involved across our Partnership for their work, dedication, care and passion over the last year and for their continued commitment to ongoing learning and improvement. Our success is through the strengths of our partners, working together to create a place where all children and young people across Middlesbrough and Redcar & Cleveland are safe, free from abuse, neglect and supported to live happy and healthy lives.

During the past year we have reviewed our priorities, our vision and values and this is what we are working towards.

Kathryn Boulton

Chair of the STSCP

Executive Director of Children

Services Redcar & Cleveland Council

A partnership committed to keeping children safe and working together to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and families.

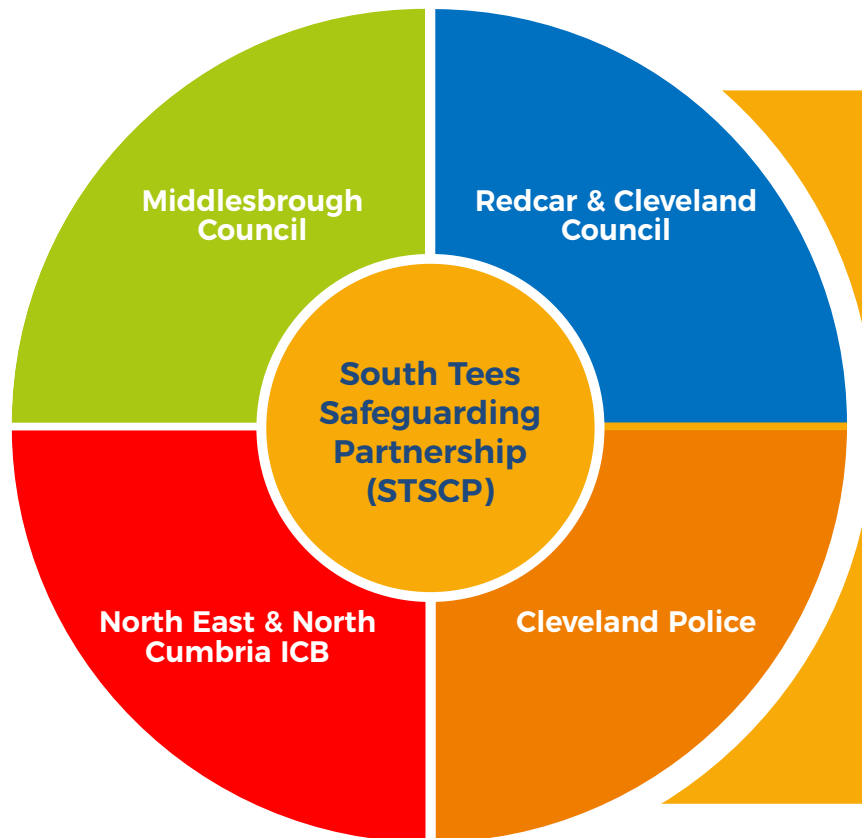


Who are the South Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership and what does it do?

Middlesbrough Council, Redcar & Cleveland Council, Cleveland Police and North East, North Cumbria Integrated Care Board have a statutory duty to put in place multi-agency safeguarding arrangements to protect and safeguard vulnerable children. This responsibility is driven by the South Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership which is funded, equally, by the four partners.

Membership of the partnership executive is drawn from:

- **Middlesbrough Council**
- **Redcar & Cleveland Council**
- **North East & North Cumbria ICB**
- **Cleveland Police**
- **Public Health**
- **South Tees Youth Justice Service**
- **Middlesbrough Education**
- **Redcar & Cleveland Education**



STSCP PRIORITY OBJECTIVES

Exploitation

The aim is for children/young people to be free from the risk and harm of exploitation, going missing or being trafficked.

Neglect

The aim is to reduce neglect, reduce the impact of neglect and ensure help & support is provided at the earliest opportunity.

Empowering Young People

The aim is to create a clear focus on the needs and experience of young people

Working Together

The aim is to achieve excellent partnership working across all areas.

With a focus on the Impact of Domestic Abuse on Children/Young People

Who are the South Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership and what does it do?



How the STSCP does things is as important as what it does. To shape how it delivers its role, the STSCP has adopted the following principles and values:

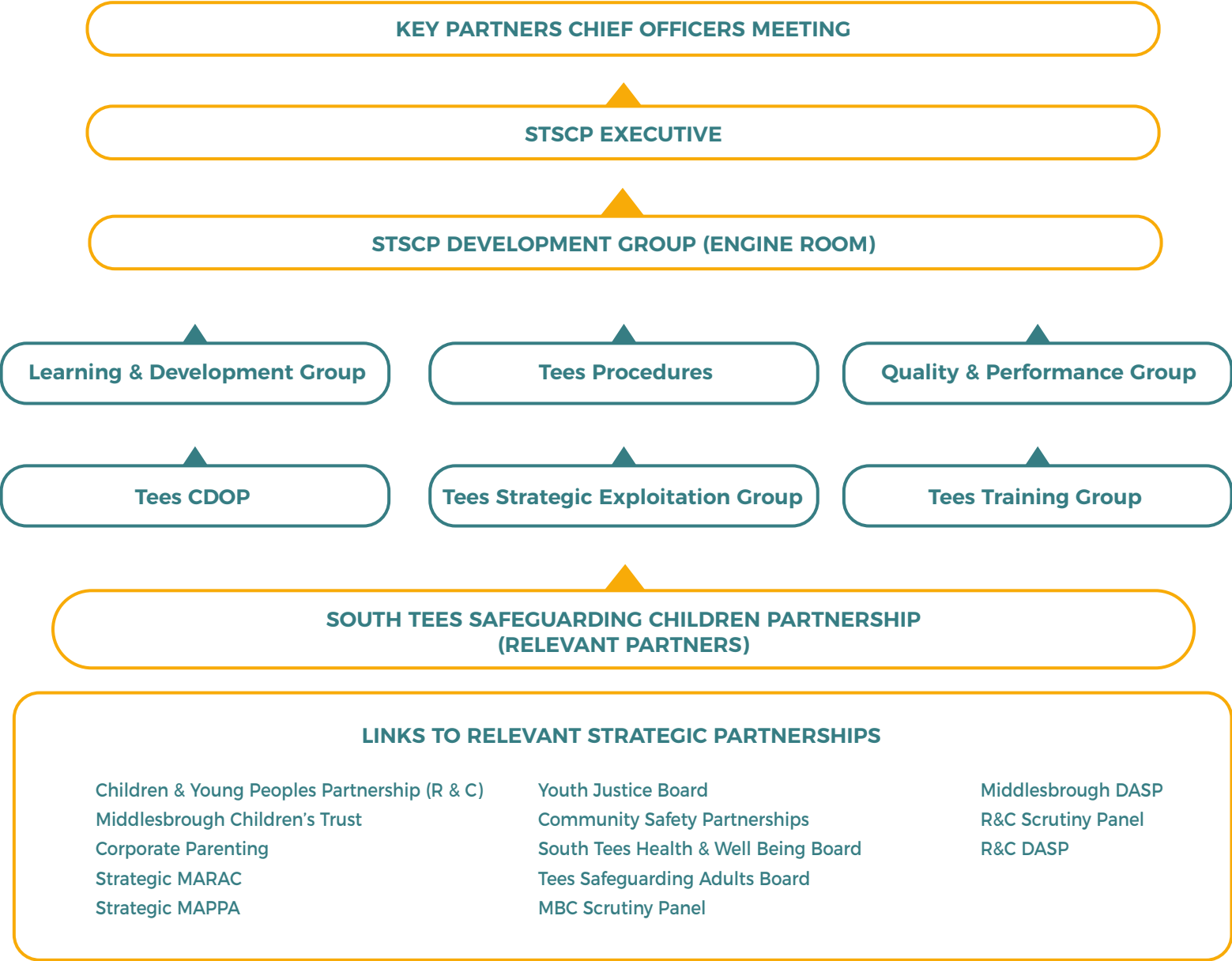
As the Safeguarding Statutory Partners, we will share equal responsibility for execution and oversight of the South Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership, enabling a common purpose and agreed behavioural values to reinforce shared priorities. We recognise that to be strong and effective, the Partnership must engage the right people and have worked collaboratively across South Tees to identify the organisations and agencies which need to be involved to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people across the South Tees.

The South Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership will promote appropriate support and challenge between partners; ensuring that leaders and staff within every organisation are held to account. We will also create the conditions to develop a transparent learning culture, driving best collaborative practice for good and outstanding outcomes for children and young people.

All our work will be underpinned by a consideration of the views and experiences of the children and young people across South Tees. We acknowledge that the new arrangements will only be effective if they make a difference to the wellbeing of children and young people and ask for help from professional partners and the community to make this a reality.

The partnership is chaired by a key partner on a two-year rotational basis agreed by the four statutory partners with the objective of providing oversight and governance. As part of our arrangements for external challenge, the Chair presents the board's annual report to both the Council's Scrutiny Panels for Children and Families and the South Tees Live Well Board. To drive delivery of its objectives, the partnership has a series of sub-groups as set out on the next page.

STSCP Governance Structure



South Tees the place

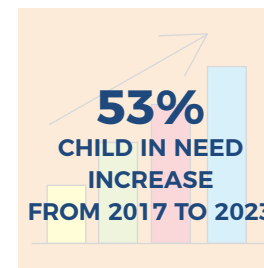
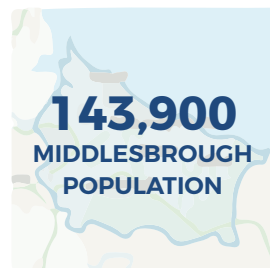
The area which the South Tees Safeguarding Partnership serves is a place of contrasts, Middlesbrough a densely populated town while Redcar & Cleveland covers a widespread seaside and countryside landscape.

The 2021 Census estimated the population of the South Tees to be 280,400 people. Approximately 23% (62,491 people) are aged 0 to 19. From the 2011 to 2021 Census, the South Tees's overall population increased by 3%. Many people who have come to live in the area have been attracted by the value for money housing offer, our schools, growing economy and our connectivity via road and rail into the Tees Valley conurbation and beyond.

“The Social Gradient in English Child Welfare Services”, a study by Kingston University academics and Ofsted analysts, said that children from the poorest neighbourhoods in England were almost fourteen times more likely to be referred to social care services than those from the richest areas. This impact can be seen on the demand for support from children social care across South Tees:

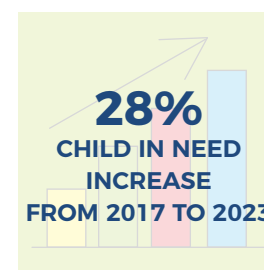


Middlesbrough



- 316 children on a child protection plan with a rate of per 10,000 population of 92.6 (March 2024) compared to the England rate of 43.2
- 525 looked after children with a rate of per 10,000 population of 153.8 (March 2024) compared to the England rate of 71.
- Over a thousand contacts for support each month, with 1619 recorded in March 2024.

Redcar & Cleveland



- 249 children on a child protection plan with a rate of per 10,000 population of 91.4 (March 2024) compared to the England rate of 43.2.
- 420 looked after children with a rate of per 10,000 population of 154.2 (March 2024) compared to the England rate of 73.
- Over a thousand contacts for support each month with 1143 recorded in March 2024.

South Tees the place

The South Tees is a very diverse area, with a large number of nationalities included in a minority ethnic population of 20%. The largest minority ethnic groups in the area are the Indian and Pakistani communities, but more recently there has also been a significant increase in economic migration, mainly from Eastern Europe.

Both Middlesbrough and Redcar & Cleveland local authorities have high aspirations for their children and young people. Equally, both areas have significant challenges to address, as can be seen from the following information.

Demand on Social Care

Demand for Children's Social Care is closely associated with key drivers which include deprivation, poor housing, high levels of unemployment, which are prevalent in the North East, and particularly Teesside.

- **The North East has the highest rate of social care demand in the country, for instance the Child Protection rate for the North East is 64.8 per 10,000 compared to an England rate of 41.4 per 10,000.**
- **Within the North East, Teesside has the highest rate of demand, and within Teesside, Both Middlesbrough and Redcar & Cleveland have a high rate of demand for social care. For instance, taking the example of child protection, Middlesbrough has the highest rate per 10,000 in the country at 140.2 with Redcar & Cleveland at 76.9.**
- **The latest DfE Children In Need census shows Middlesbrough has the 5th highest level of need for social care in the country and Redcar & Cleveland are ranked 8th.**



If Middlesbrough were a village of 100 children

32
(Almost a third) live in income Deprived Households

6
Open Case living in 5 most Deprived Wards

There are more boys than girls
51 boys
49 girls

Boys 0-4	13
Boys 5-12	24
Boys 13-17	14
Girls 0-4	13
Girls 5-12	23
Girls 13-17	13

7
Early Help

1
CP

2
Children looked after

3
CIN (all)

19
School Children have English as additional language

34
School Children from Ethnic Minorities

45
Pupil Premium

44
Access Free School Meals

15
Access SEN Support

5
Have an Education, Health & Care Plan

8
Children will not attend school today

Primary 1 or more fixed term exclusion	0
Secondary 1 or more fixed term exclusion	14
Special school 1 or more fixed term exclusion	6

7
Children are in Nursery

53
Children are in Primary School

36
Children are in Secondary School

3
Children are in Special School

1
Pupil Referral Unit



If Redcar & Cleveland were a village of 100 children





What have we achieved in the last 12 months?

An essential objective of this report is to demonstrate the impact of the partnership and the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements that it has put in place. The following part of the report takes a month by month look at the activity of the board and the safeguarding impact that this has had.



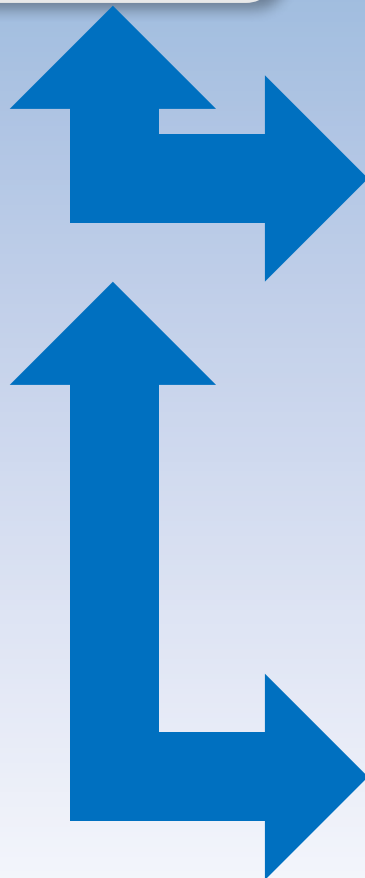
APRIL

Rapid Reviews and Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews which had been carried out during the previous year identified that non-accidental injuries in babies and children under the age of one was a key area of learning for professionals across Tees. In response, the Partnership organised a **Non-Accidental Injury in under 1's and Hidden Partners Tees-wide Learning Event** which was attended by approximately 100 professionals from across all partners to focus on key issues including process, findings from the National Panel, emerging local themes and to reinforce consistent professional curiosity.

Safeguarding impact: Professionals are better equipped to identify those children at greater risk and intervene at a much earlier stage to safeguard against non-accidental injuries and to be curious of partners in and around the households of young families.

The conference raised awareness of non-accidental injury in under 1's and hidden partners, while considering the learning from recent case reviews undertaken across the Tees area. The session included a drama production from Odd Arts and included lived experience speakers from Dads & Lads.

What have we achieved in the last 12 months?



May saw the first line of sight review undertaken into cases of neglect that had been referred to the Partnership for a detailed review. An independent reviewer was tasked with examining three separate cases involving a child and their siblings who were subject to a number of concerns including neglect, physical and sexual abuse, domestic abuse and poor home conditions over a prolonged period of time. The review was to identify learning and therefore enhance practice. This Review was completed and signed off by the board in June 2023.

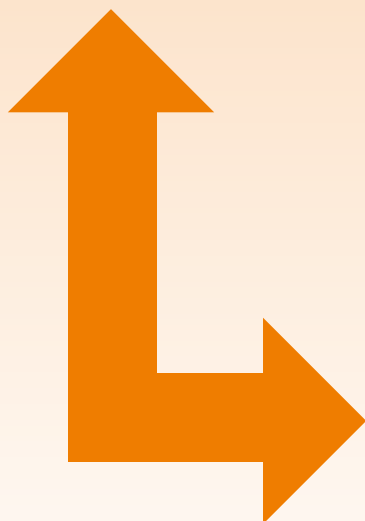
Safeguarding impact: Reviews of this type are vital to ensure that safeguarding practice within South Tees is continually evolving to provide independent feedback and challenge and to ensure protection is in place for children alongside support for their parents/carers. The review recommendations are informing the work of the Neglect task and finish group into the review of policies and procedures to support relevant families.

The review of the Tees Performance Management Framework started with a review of all data collected across the Tees, including quantitative and qualitative data. This review will also develop a multi-agency Performance and Management Framework, and data collection activity undertaken against performance indicators to enable agencies to make intelligence led decisions and focus resources in areas that are emerging as potential issues.

Safeguarding impact: The proactive review which will be completed in the first quarter of 2024/25 will allow partners to jointly assess performance, highlight areas of good practice alongside identifying areas which need more robust work to be undertaken. This will enable the partners to identify areas of work to investigate and seek out assurance to safeguard our children and young people.



What have we achieved in the last 12 months?



A Child Safeguarding Practice Review action plan Challenge model has been introduced, this model places more emphasis on demonstrating that the actions have taken place and that the impact on children and families has been understood. Each agency presents the information to a panel of peers, and the session is chaired by an independent scrutineer.

In this month the **CSPR Kingfisher** a thematic review involving Neglect was subject to this model, the outcome from the session was that further work was required on the understanding of escalation processes across agencies, the inclusion of Housing and Substance Misuse Services in the next section 11 audits.

In 2023-24 this model has continued to be used and continues to be well received by the practitioners and managers who have attended the events.

Safeguarding impact: The challenge events ensure the results of Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews are followed up and actions are fully implemented and monitored, while reinforcing the review recommendations and learning.

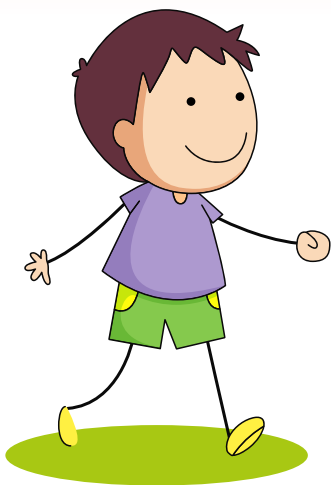
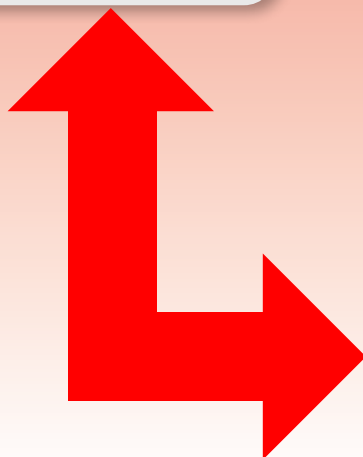
The Partnership published the **CSPR Angel** where it considered how professionals assess and safeguard children who have moved across local authority boundary area's and are or have been the subject of child protection plans and care proceedings in the past, and where the parent's first language is not English. Met with the National Panel regarding the case and received positive feedback.

The Quality & Performance group carried out an audit on children's cases where Domestic Abuse (DA) was present and confirmed that communication with partners was working well, along with professional challenge. Items that we were concerned about included embedding the Tees escalation process and direct work with the child(ren).

Safeguarding impact: Professionals need to focus on families that move across boundaries often and share information as these families can be especially vulnerable. Making use of an interpreter should be promoted, along with having a health visitor included in assessments and planning for the unborn babies. Schools could be more generally engaged in CSPR and learning processes.

The Learning & Development subgroup ensures that learning is disseminated across the partnership and reaches into all organisations to provide a consistent approach and knowledge base when undertaking their safeguarding duties.

What have we achieved in the last 12 months?



After reviewing performance information and a differential in the data, in May 2023 the Tees Strategic Exploitation Group (TSEG) made a recommendation for an observational audit of the arrangements across Teesside.

The TSEG agreed that the performance information warranted further investigation into systems, processes and thresholds, recommending an independent audit, to the South Tees Safeguarding Children's Partnership (STSCP) and the Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees Safeguarding Children's Partnership (HSSCP).

The South Tees Safeguarding Children's Partnership (STSCP) and the Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees Safeguarding Children's Partnership (HSSCP) subsequently agreed that an observational review of the Tees wide arrangements would be undertaken jointly, by the Independent Scrutineers for both Safeguarding Children's Partnerships.

Safeguarding impact: The observations of the processes provided the Independent Scrutineers with evidence of the knowledge, commitment and experience of those who attend the meetings.

All were extremely well chaired and well managed, with each addressing the key components required of the processes.

Live information was verbally shared, across agencies and based upon the information that was available to the meeting, the Scrutineers agreed with the assigned categories of risk.

The Independent Scrutineers report provided a number of recommendations and challenges which were accepted in full by the Executives. This included the importance of strategic agreement, as well as the capacity to achieve joined up, consistent Teesside arrangements.

The Independent Scrutineers findings supported the recommendations and learning from local Rapid Review Action Plans and LCSPRs. Recognising that exploitation continues to be a significant issue, a review of the arrangements for identifying and protecting individual children in each area will take place in April 2024. This was done jointly between HSSCP exec and STSCP exec.

What have we achieved in the last 12 months?



The Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) on the theme of **Exploitation** was signed off by the STSCP Executive, the review was commissioned to consider the multi-agency safeguarding response to child criminal exploitation (CCE) where serious youth violence featured. The review considered the systems and practice across the partnership with regards to CCE as a learning process.

Safeguarding impact: A 5-point learning brief has been developed and circulated following the thematic Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR) considering several young people who were subject to CCE. Its aim was to support professionals in identifying, responding, and managing situations where it is suspected or known that child criminal exploitation is happening and there are worries about extra-familial harm. There were two learning sessions which were attended by in excess of 100 professionals, the feedback from the sessions was very good.



What have we achieved in the last 12 months?



The STSCP Learning and Development group continued its work in overseeing the combined action plan for the recent reviews. Participating in learning reviews, the group continues to be well supported and attended from all agencies. There were no Rapid Reviews completed over this reporting period.

Safeguarding impact: All identified recommendations from reviews are implemented through changes to processes, focussed assurances and evidence being gathered from across the partnership and a variety of learning offers made to include the use of short '7 minute learning briefings', wider conferences (such as the Exploitation Learning events described earlier) all with the aim of aiding practitioner awareness, understanding and confidence across a variety of safeguarding topics.



What have we achieved in the last 12 months?



The Voice of the Child is crucial to the focus of the South Tees Safeguarding Children Board and as such work was started to explore how it can become more integrated into the work of the partnership over and above a representative attending.

The voice of young people was a critical part of the recent exploitation review with young person's feedback as below:

"There is a difference in what young people understand as gangs, for some it's not there but for some there is. It depends on what experiences you have had in your life".

"Say if you are stood, 1 or 2 of you and groups of older people come up to you and pressure you and that. That's what you need to be careful of. One of my mates was stood outside of his house, some man literally went up to him and just grabbed him by the neck and pinned him to the wall. That's what I mean it's just proper weird. Unexpected."

"It's a bit mad like. Say if you were little you wouldn't have expected to have seen the things that you have seen at this age in Redcar as its an off it place".

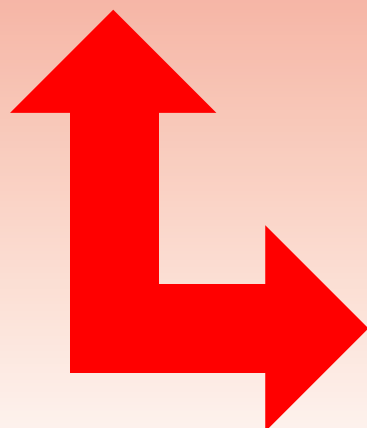
*"When I was at Boro park, some man had stabbed some man in the head in the town last year and then he came up to us and tried to sell us some cali's and get a taxi away and then we realised that we had just talked to someone who had just killed someone in town that was just weird". *Cali's is the street word for Californian weed.*

"All the stabbings going on, I only feel a bit unsafe in my community as its normal".

"You just need to be careful where you are. You might have lived somewhere your whole life, and you know everyone but now you have to keep a caution".

Safeguarding impact: Closer links between agencies and the children, young people and families they work with, embraces true partnership working to fully understand and respond to issues as they arise across the area. This creates a safeguarding culture which strives for improvement through cooperation and learning rather than enforcement. **Constantly evolving training** ensures **professionals are equipped** to respond to an ever-changing society and new risks.

What have we achieved in the last 12 months?



Understanding Contextualised Safeguarding & The Challenge of Exclusion Event: Following on from the STSCP's Safeguarding in Education Event held in September 2022 last year, the STSCP wanted to build on the awareness raising from this, with this year's event. All Head Teachers, Principals and CEO's from all schools across the Tees were invited to event plus other partner agencies.

The event included local and national guest speakers including those with lived experiences, as well as workshops on various elements linking to the challenges posed to children through exclusion from education and how best to manage the challenges within schools.

The event was a huge success with over 125 attendees. An example of feedback from the delegates:

"Excellent event with great speakers who share experiences which will help my practice moving forward. Thank you all who arranged and made the learning possible".

"I have found this event extremely useful and interesting, and it makes you think carefully about those vulnerable children in school".

Safeguarding impact: Following on from the event, the profile of exploitation and correlation with exclusion was raised, all professionals who attended were provided with a resource pack. Additionally, the experience gained from continuing to engage direct with education professionals will be used to plan future events. This will include engagement with them in respect of the changes emanating from Working Together 2023.



What have we achieved in the last 12 months?



As the year closed the focus on Neglect and the local strategy began with a task and finish group to look at a Strategy for South Tees, which will be aligned with the Tees Neglect Framework. The strategy will be ready to publish in the summer of 2024.

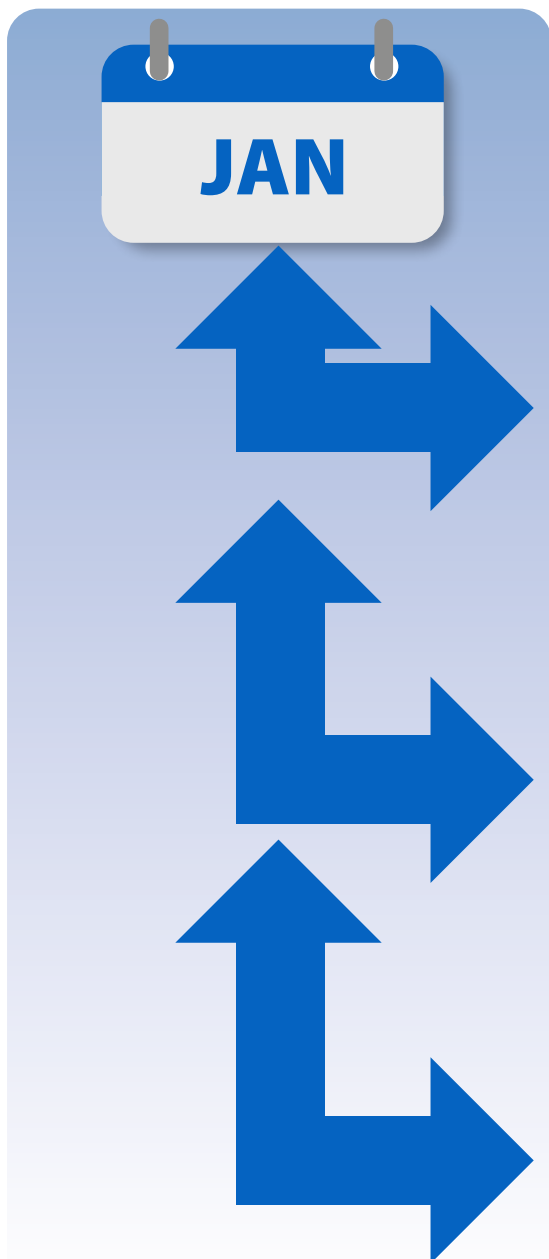
Also, the updated version of Working Together 2023 was released and the STSCP began work on implementing the revised guidance.

Safeguarding impact: The understanding of neglect and the importance of prevention and early help has been increased, as a result of the partnership work with training available to professionals working in Middlesbrough and Redcar & Cleveland. The Tees Safeguarding Procedures website is recognised by inspectorates as a reliable and useful source of information. The Tees Procedures group has reviewed and updated the Neglect section on the website as a result of the recent work undertaken.

Recently published CSPR review Kingfisher identified the “the risk and impact of drug using parents” and is covered in all relevant multi-agency training. Public Health have co-ordinated and delivered multi-agency training which includes the signs and symptoms in children of drug ingestion, and clarity about what professionals should do if they suspect this is happening.



What have we achieved in the last 12 months?



The start of the year saw Middlesbrough Council who were using a Threshold of Need document that did not mirror that of the other 3 Tees local authorities set up a working group and after deliberation agreed to implement the Tees-wide Children's Threshold of Need. Training on the Thresholds been commissioned for the multi-agency workforce.

Safeguarding impact: This alignment of Threshold document, allows multi-agency partners that have a wide geographical footprint to work to one set of guidelines for Redcar & Cleveland, Middlesbrough, Hartlepool & Stockton thereby, strengthening the knowledge and expertise of frontline professionals and providing a consistent response to families.

Audit on Serious Youth Violence was initiated. Work took place within the Quality & Performance sub-group to run a mock Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI). This allowed partners to evaluate their services provided to vulnerable children and young people and address any areas requiring action.

Safeguarding impact: Proactive approach to undertaking our own JTAI ahead of any inspection by Ofsted, Care Quality Commission (CQC), Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) has allowed for early learning around how the local authority, police, health, probation and youth offending services are working together to identify, support and protect vulnerable children and young people.

The CSPR Liam Challenge Event took place, this allowed partners involved in the case from 2022 to review and evaluate their action plans and changes to services provided to vulnerable children and young people and address any areas requiring further action.

Safeguarding impact: The multi-agency discussion and the information provided for the session demonstrated that agencies were making changes to practice because of the review and the impact on front line practice will continue to be monitored by STSCP.

What have we achieved in the last 12 months?



A number of planning meetings were initiated with the Department of Education's National leads for Local Authorities and Police leads with respect to the STSCP participating in the Multi-agency Partnership Maturity Health Check process. Sessions are scheduled for May 2024 chaired by the Independent Scrutineer.

Safeguarding impact: The STSCP will be able to identify any gaps and strengths in the way it does its safeguarding business and prepare for the changes introduced in Working Together 2023.



The STSCP training programme reflects the safeguarding priorities and is now aligned with the HSSCP training program reflecting a Tees approach to training. This includes training around child sexual abuse, domestic abuse, neglect including adolescent neglect. ELearning is now accessible to professionals working in both adults and children's services as well as the voluntary and community sector. Learning from audits and reviews is impacting on planning and service delivery by changing procedure and practice. The Tees Training and Events sub group (who meet bi-monthly to consider matters relating to multi-agency learning and the communication of key information across the partnership) had their first meeting of the year.

Safeguarding impact: The work of the Tees Training and Event group ensures that learning is disseminated across the Tees partnerships and reaches into all organisations to provide a consistent approach and knowledge base when undertaking their safeguarding duties.

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN

Fantastic training, very informative and a brilliant facilitator who kept us all on task.

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN

This course is very valuable to my role and I personally found it very good, I found the trainer's approach refreshing.

CSE Training:

Not just like any other CSE training i.e. signs, this was far more in depth and made us think out of the box, and always looking at the wider picture.



Partnership review - Maturity Health Check

As part of the process of ongoing review to ensure that local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements are robust and effective, a review of safeguarding arrangements was commissioned in February 2023 - this work was driven by the Department of Education and ongoing policy development by Government. The findings of the Maturity Health Check is to report in June 2024 STSCP exec meeting.

A heartfelt thank you to...

All the individuals and families who have taken the brave step to share their experiences and worked with us in pushing for change. The 100's of professionals up and down the South Tees and further who have continued to support the partnership and their colleagues.

To find out more about the South Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership and access resources please visit the STSCP website: <https://stscp.co.uk>

Independent Scrutiny Overview/Independent Scrutiny Annual Report

Purpose of the report

This report is written to provide assurance that Independent Scrutiny is being used as outlined in guidance. The relevant guidance is Working Together 2018 which covers all Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements, including the requirement that:

Safeguarding partners should also agree arrangements for Independent Scrutiny of the report they must publish at least once a year. (WT2018 35)

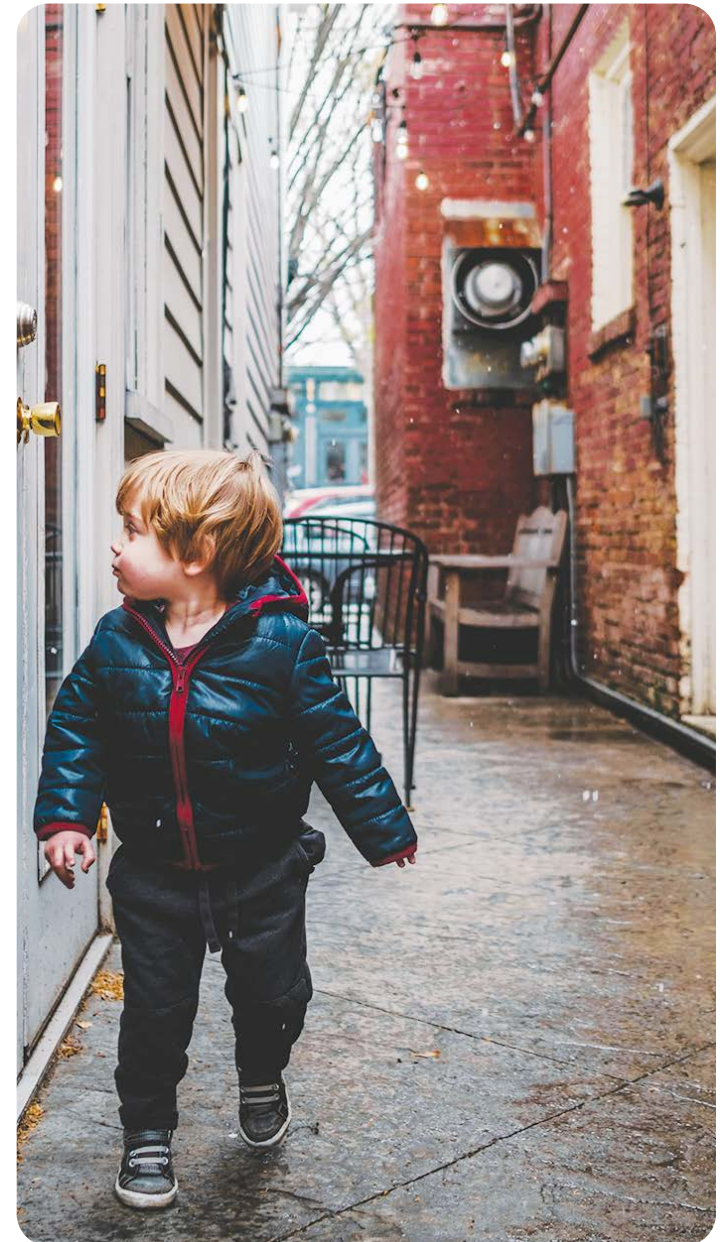
Although the guidance does not specify how this scrutiny should be undertaken, South Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership (STSCP) has agreed “Six Steps to Independent Scrutiny” as the model on which the scrutiny programme would be based.

Working Together 2018 was replaced in full in December 2023, half way through the time period for the report. Reference has been made to the changes where it is relevant.

How is Independent Scrutiny used in STSCP?

Throughout the past year, Independent Scrutiny has been used as follows:

- To comment on the Annual Report 2022-23.
- To chair challenge meetings on serious cases.
- To provide a report to the Chief Officers meeting on the safeguarding arrangements.
- Provide a report on the local arrangements for managing exploitation.
- Attend meetings with the Child Safeguarding Practice Review National Panel.
- To chair development/review of arrangements meetings of the Executive.
- Audit specific cases.
- Contribute to the development of a working protocol with Tees Safeguarding Adults Board.
- Review the 2022-23 Section 11.
- Provide reports to the STSCP Executive and attend the meetings.
- Attend joint meetings between STSCP and HSSCP.



What are the arrangements?

STSCP is relatively unusual among safeguarding arrangements in being a joint partnership which covers two local authority areas, Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland. Of the 139 Local Safeguarding Children Partnerships, only 17 are across two geographical areas.

The Governance arrangements are set out in a Legal Agreement which was drawn up at the start of the revised multi agency safeguarding arrangements in 2019. It is reviewed at least annually through Chief Executive level (Chief Officer) meetings. This is in line with Working Together 2018. The Agreement is being reviewed to reflect the changes in Working Together 2023.

The levels of governance and the escalation process are set out in the document. Commitment at the most senior levels is essential to ensure ownership of the effectiveness of the arrangements. During 2023-24 the Chief Officer meeting has been chaired by the Chief Executive of Redcar and Cleveland who has also provided the Foreword for the Annual Report. The Chief Executives of Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland have given their commitment to supporting these meetings in 2024-25. Political understanding of safeguarding is also important. In both areas there have been recent changes in local representation. The role of the Lead Member for Children is also important, and the Lead Members have given their commitment to the arrangements and confirmed their intention to be involved in the work of the partnership.

The responsibility for the implementation of the arrangements is delegated to the Executive and this is in line with guidance. The effectiveness of the safeguarding arrangements and the priorities for the partnership are reviewed at regular development sessions which are attended by the members of the Executive and the Chairs of the sub groups. The priorities from 2022-23 are outlined in the Annual Report and have been carried through to 2024-25, including increasing the understanding of the impact of the arrangements on children and families. The development sessions have been well attended with a good balance of challenge and support between partners.

The current arrangements for the Executive meet the requirements which are set out in Working Together 2023. Since 2022 the meeting has been chaired by the Executive Director of Children and Families for Redcar and Cleveland. It has been agreed that the role will rotate between partners, with Cleveland Police taking over in 2024. This avoids the potential for safeguarding children being seen as solely the responsibility of Children's Social Care.

There have been significant changes of membership of Executive level during the year, including a new Executive Director of Children's Services in Middlesbrough. The Integrated Care Board covers a geographical area which includes the Tees and Cumbria. There have been a number of changes since the ICB was established, and further recent changes following a headcount reduction. It will be important to understand

the impact of this reduction during the coming months. Representation from Cleveland Police has remained unchanged for a considerable period of time.

There is a well-established process for agreeing the budget and a summary financial report is provided to the Executive. The budget appears to be sufficient for the work which is planned in 2023-25. A three year plan could be useful to enable longer term planning and focus on the priorities.





Working Together 2023 emphasises the importance of representation from schools at strategic level meetings. The STSCP Executive already benefits from the presence of the Directors of Education and from their regular reports. The findings of the annual Section 175 surveys for schools have had response rates of over 90%. Attendance at some schools has not returned to the levels prior to the pandemic. The Executive has heard of the plans to encourage children back into the classroom as school is recognised as a protective factor for most children.

In the same way that distributed leadership is in evidence at the Executive level it is important that the responsibility for the arrangements at sub group level is also shared. The Quality and Performance group and the Child Death Overview Panel are chaired by Public Health, the Learning and Development group by the Integrated Care Board and the Tees Strategic Exploitation Group by Cleveland Police.

The Chairs of the sub groups report into the Executive in person. This provides the opportunity for them to make the connection with the priorities of the partnership and to escalate any issues to the Executive.

The multi-agency front line

Although the Executive members have strategic oversight of the arrangements, understanding the challenges and strengths of the work at the front line is an important part of their role. The sub groups provide a crucial link between the Executive and the front line and a route to making an impact on practice.

Throughout the year reports are received which provide insight into the front line. These include Early Help, Local Authority Designated Officer, Independent Reviewing Officer, Private Fostering and the Multi Agency Childrens Hubs (MACH) The authors of the report are invited to attend the Executive. This provides the opportunity for a good two way discussion and follow up of any issues not fully covered in the report.

The multi- agency case audit process provides the opportunity to look in detail at any concerns or to highlight good practice. The Quality and Performance group

identifies areas which may offer learning which could be shared and then works with partners to bring about change. During 2023-24 the sub groups work included the consistency of information at Accident and Emergency Units, initial health assessments and dental checks for cared for children.

One of the most influential routes to impacting on multi- agency front line practice is through the training programme. There has been good progress in aligning key aspects of the multi-agency training programme with that of Hartlepool and Stockton Safeguarding Children's Partnership. All participants are asked to complete an evaluation so that the impact on their practice can be reported to the Executive in the annual Training Report.

Feedback about the STSCP website has been positive. It is recognised that the main emphasis is on information for practitioners, and that there is a potential to include resources which could be useful for families and children.

A quarterly newsletter is circulated about the Executive meetings as well as other useful information for the multi-agency workforce. This matters because it is important that practitioners feel that their experience is understood at strategic level and that appropriate action is being taken.

Case challenges

In 2021 STSCP agreed a model at which agencies are challenged to provide evidence of what they have done to implement their actions following a Child Safeguarding Practice Review. In the past year I have chaired two of these events. Both were well attended by the appropriate agencies and the discussions were lively and well informed. The agency representatives had prepared well in advance provided relevant evidence and appeared to welcome the opportunity to share their experience and to join in constructive conversations with peers. A number of questions were circulated in advance, including:

"Have the actions had the impact that you intended and if not, what would you have done differently?"

These events provide the opportunity for front line practitioners and managers to share their experience of working in South Tees. As you will see from the STSCP Annual report, the area covered by the Partnership is among the most deprived in the country. This has an impact on families who are bringing up their children. It also has an impact on agencies which are seeking to recruit and retain experienced staff.



In the case challenge sessions in 2023-24 a number of issues were discussed and then followed up through the Learning and development group including:

- **Public Protection Notifications from Cleveland Police.**
- **Health Visitor caseloads for those on the Universal pathway.**
- **Some reluctance to escalate concerns to managers when there is a difference of opinion about the level of risk and threshold.**
- **Attendance at case conferences.**
- **Families in which the parents of the children have different GPs and particularly where the father might not tell the GP that they have children registered elsewhere.**
- **Demand for places in certain schools in certain areas means that siblings might not be placed in the same school. This led on to considering the pressure on parents, especially if there are several children and the family does not have transport.**

Voice of the child

STSCP members recognise the importance of hearing about what it is like to be a child growing up in South Tees. At an event with schools, a group of children acted out episodes from their own lives. The levels of daily violence which they described as a result of exploitation were shocking to hear about, so much more powerful coming directly from them and in their own words. It prompted a strengthening of the relationship with the Violence Reduction Partnership (the Curve) and a multi-agency self-assessment against the criteria outlined in the Joint Targeted Area Review on Serious Youth Violence.



Relationship with other partnerships

Although STSCP has primary responsibility for the safeguarding arrangements, other partnerships also have a key role to play in keeping children safe.

Reducing exploitation is a priority across the Tees and the Independent Scrutineers of HSSCP and STSCP worked together on observing the four local area multi agency meetings for managing the risk of exploitation. In the event, it was only possible to review three of the areas. Although this limited the opportunities for comparison across the meetings as originally intended, it nevertheless provided rich opportunities for learning.

The recommendations in the report were comprehensive and reflected those in recent local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRs) Partnership working requires patience, creativity and flexibility, particularly when four Local Authorities, a Police Force and an Integrated Care Board are involved.

It is a sign of the preparedness to accept challenge and scrutiny that the recommendations of the report were accepted by both Executives in January 2024 and are in the process of implementation.

Certain requirements are placed on all agencies who have contact with children. One way to find out whether they understand and are complying with these requirements is through Section 11 (Children Act 2004). Following the in-person event in February 2023 it was agreed that the action from that event would be reviewed in 2024. The process for the next

year will include different agencies, as the previous one only covered the agencies currently represented on the Executive.

Other partnerships which are relevant to safeguarding children include the Tees Safeguarding Adults Board, which covers the whole of the Tees area. Several meetings were held to identify areas of crossover, particularly around the transition to adulthood and exploitation. A joint protocol was agreed between the two Executives, followed by an action Plan which outlines the intended impact.

The Child Death arrangements are a joint responsibility between Children's Services and the Integrated Care Board, and there are areas which are relevant to STSCP. The Business Manager attends the Child Death Overview Panel to ensure that there is good communication between the partnerships.

Decision making on serious cases

As required in the guidance there is a process in place for the identification of serious cases and for decision making by the members of the Executive. Rapid reviews have taken place within the timescales required. There have not been any new CSPRs in 2023-24 although two have been completed. There is a process in place for direct involvement of practitioners in any review of a case, whether it subsequently meets the criteria for a full review or not.

Communication with the national Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel has continued to be timely and constructive. There was a request

from the Panel regional representative for a meeting to discuss certain aspects of one review. The issues which were discussed were reflected in others throughout the year, such as the turnover of staff and the availability of school places in certain schools. The Panel representative felt that the issues had been addressed. There was useful learning for the Executive about the sign off process following a review.



DfE Healthcheck

Although individual agencies are subject to their own inspections, there is currently no national framework for safeguarding partnerships. Members of the STSCP Executive welcomed the opportunity to use a self-assessment model which has been developed by the DfE using the criteria set out in Working Together 2023. The DfE Advisor for Children's Social Care introduced a meeting of the Executive to assist with the process. This was followed up by a multi-agency workshop early in May 2024. The aim was to reach out to agencies who may not be as aware about STSCP, and to give them the opportunity to say what more could be done to keep children safe across South Tees.

The feedback from the event was very positive and this will inform the focus of work for 2024-25. Another workshop will be held later in the year to reach out to other agencies. Although these events are very time consuming they do have a positive impact on the shared understanding of safeguarding, which is one of the key aims of the partnership.

Conclusion

As required I have read the STSCP Annual Report 2023-24. It recognises where there is further progress to be made and the need to respond to Working Together 2023 by reviewing the arrangements. The focus on the impact of the arrangements is welcome and is stronger than in previous years. Areas of greater focus include a better understanding of diverse communities and of the experience of children growing up in South Tees.

Independent Scrutiny is being used as outlined in Six Steps to Independent Scrutiny as evidenced by the list at the start of the report. The findings are used to bring about change and there is a forward plan about how it will be used in 2024-25. Additional scrutineers have been recruited with specific expertise and this will strengthen the focus on impact.

The Annual Report 2023-24 is an accurate reflection of the work of STSCP and the impact of the work.

Edwina Harrison

Independent Scrutineer, South Tees Safeguarding Children Board.

June 2024

