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ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND HEALTH SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Panel was held on Monday 23 February 2026.

PRESENT: Councillors J Kabuye (Chair), J Banks, D Branson, D Coupe (Vice-Chair), D Jackson, T Mohan and Z Uddin

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: T Brittain (OPCC)

OFFICERS: R Johansson, C Jones, C Moore and L Price

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillor S Platt

25/1 **WELCOME AND FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting and described the fire evacuation procedure.

25/2 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received at this point in the meeting.

25/3 **MINUTES- ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND HEALTH SCRUTINY - 12 JANUARY 2026**

The minutes of the Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny meeting held on 12 January 2026 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

25/4 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE**

The Chair provided an update on items discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 28 January 2026, which included:

- An update from the Executive Member for Public Health.
- Final Report of the Community Cohesion review.
- Artificial Intelligence Update

25/5 **CLEVELAND POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER - PRIORITIES FOR TACKLING VAWG**

At the request of the Panel, a Representative from the Cleveland Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) attended the meeting to provide an overview of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) as a key priority within the Police and Crime Plan.

The Panel heard that tackling VAWG was a central priority for the PCC and that this work was underpinned by a focus on prevention and education, improving justice outcomes for victims, and holding perpetrators to account. It was explained that this included working with Criminal Justice System partners through Local Criminal Justice Board arrangements to understand and address challenges relating to reporting, victim experience within the justice system, and limitations within policing powers, charging decisions, and judicial processes which affected conviction rates and outcomes for victims. Members were given an overview of the 10-year Tees-wide Tackling Domestic Abuse Perpetration Strategy

Members were advised that improving safety for women and girls was one of the core priorities within the Police and Crime Plan with the following measures noted:

- Use of preventative and protective orders
- Recorded VAWG offences.
- Use of disclosure schemes
- Arrest rates and positive outcome rates.

Performance information was presented which showed that VAWG offences accounted for a significant proportion of recorded crime in Cleveland (22.5% of total recorded crime, 12 months

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to September 2025) It was noted that overall VAWG offences had reduced over the reporting period (an 8.16% reduction, -1,402 offences compared to the previous year).

During the reporting period, VAWG crimes linked to domestic abuse decreased by 4.47% (-403 crimes), while sexual-violence-related VAWG offences increased by 16.22% (+282 crimes). Policing outcomes showed gradual improvement, with arrest rates increasing year-on-year between September 2023 and September 2025, including a 2.0-point rise in the most recent 12-month period.

In the 12 months to September 2025, the force received 2,566 Clare's Law applications, representing a 12% increase on the previous year. 35.5% of applications resulted in a disclosure, reflecting ongoing preventative activity.

Voluntary and community sector services continued to manage high demand and increasing case complexity. In the same 12-month period, services received:

- 723 referrals to the Independent Sexual Violence Advisor Service (5.5% increase)
- 8,518 referrals to the Independent Domestic Violence Advocate Service (0.2% increase)
- 34 referrals to the Independent Stalking Advocacy Service (3% increase)

Members were also provided with an overview of the PCC's commissioning activity to support victims and vulnerable people, including both Middlesbrough-specific and Cleveland-wide services. This included advocacy, crisis intervention, specialist support for different cohorts, and targeted services for children and young people affected by abuse and exploitation.

The Panel was further advised of work underway to tackle perpetrators, including the development of a Tees-wide multi-agency Tackling Domestic Abuse Perpetration Strategy. It was explained that this strategy focused on addressing harmful behaviours, strengthening accountability, and improving workforce capability through a number of key workstreams, including data and insights, communications and engagement, workforce literacy and practice, and 'intervene/disrupt/deter' activity.

The presentation prompted wide-ranging discussion, during which Members raised questions and comments on data, education, prevention and criminal justice responses.

A Member highlighted that Cleveland had the second highest rate of domestic abuse nationally, noted the reported reduction and asked whether this represented good progress. The representative advised that violence against women and girls was significantly under-reported, which remained a substantial issue to be addressed. It was further stated that perpetrators may use controlling or manipulative behaviours which act as a barrier to victims reporting incidents.

Members queried the figures relating to perpetrator engagement. The representative advised that engagement with lower-level perpetrator programmes was under-subscribed, as participation was voluntary. It was reported that there had been around 183 referrals, with around 18 individuals completing the programme. It was further noted that many men were reluctant to engage due to the stigma associated with the term 'perpetrator'.

Members were advised of instances of disguised compliance, most commonly arising through social work intervention where men were directed to engage in order to maintain contact with their children. It was explained that the starting point of the programme required an acknowledgement of behaviour, and that there was a number of systematic barriers which prevented progression to this stage.

A Member questioned whether custodial sentences could be used more widely as a deterrent for perpetrators. The PCC representative advised that the use of imprisonment was constrained by the current legislative framework, with custodial sentences generally reserved for offences involving serious violence. It was noted that sentences of less than 12 months were often served in the community, and that sustained behavioural change was more effectively addressed through longer-term interventions. The representative further advised that the effectiveness of responses was influenced by the scope of existing legislation.

A Member queried the provision and funding of residential accommodation. The Domestic Abuse Strategic Lead advised that funding was derived from a combination of council approved budget and government funding, which was used to commission safe accommodation. It was reported that Changing Lives provided 16 units of two- and three-bedroom properties, with a

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further 15 properties available for victims and their children. Members were advised that a procurement exercise was currently underway for a larger prevention, protect and support contract, with the aim of further increasing the availability of safe accommodation. It was also noted that Middlesbrough had the highest level of provision across the region, with detailed information available on the Council's website.

A Member reflected on the data presented and queried whether, as a society, progress was being made over time as data collection had improved. In response the PCC representative advised that understanding of domestic abuse had significantly developed over the past 10-20 years, supported by sustained awareness-raising campaigns and greater recognition of the nuanced behaviours associated with abuse. The Domestic Abuse Strategic Lead further advised that a data analyst was now in post within the Council and was supporting work on domestic abuse data. It was noted that work was ongoing to enable access to relevant Cleveland Police data, which would support improved analysis and understanding of local trends.

The Member asked what was considered to be the main underlying issue. The Domestic Abuse Strategic Lead commented that, in her view, addressing misogyny and the cultural acceptance of harmful attitudes remained central to tackling violence against women and girls. The Domestic Abuse Coordinator further advised that there were common misconceptions around domestic abuse, including assumptions relating to class, anger or substance and alcohol misuse. It was emphasised that domestic abuse was fundamentally about power and control and that empowering others to recognise and challenge such behaviour was critical. In this context, the importance of early intervention and work with young men and boys was highlighted, including national campaigns encouraging peers to challenge concerning behaviour.

A Member referred to generational cycles of domestic abuse within families and questioned the extent of current education on this issue within schools. The Domestic Abuse Strategic Lead advised that the Council funded provision to both primary and secondary schools, which was delivered by My Sister's Place. It was noted that the national strategy placed increased emphasis on education and early intervention. It was further noted that there was an intention to undertake targeted work with young men and boys identified as being at risk, including through Curve.

Agreed that:

- The information provided from the Office of the Cleveland Police and Crime Commissioner, be noted.

25/6

WHITE RIBBON - OVERVIEW

At the request of the Panel at its previous meeting, the Panel received a presentation from the Council's Domestic Abuse Strategic Lead, who provided an overview of White Ribbon and the requirements for White Ribbon accreditation.

Members were advised that the White Ribbon was an international prevention campaign focussed on engaging men and boys to challenge attitudes, behaviours and systems that underpinned violence against women and girls. The presentation outlined the preventive and intersectional ethos of the White Ribbon, emphasising cultural change, allyship and shared responsibility in addressing harmful gender norms and expressions of masculinity.

The Panel heard that White Ribbon accreditation would demonstrate the Council's commitment to preventing violence against women and girls through transformational culture change across its workforce, systems and communities and would support alignment with the government's VAWG strategy. Members were advised that accreditation required the development and delivery of a three-year action plan, supported by senior leadership, a steering group and a network of trained ambassadors and champions.

The steps required prior to application were outlined, including the appointment of a lead contact and strategic lead, establishment of a steering group and registration of ambassadors and champions. It was stated that the Domestic Abuse Strategic Lead or the Domestic Abuse Coordinator would act as the lead contact for the accreditation process, and that the Chief Executive had recently expressed an interest in acting as the Strategic Lead.

Members were informed that White Ribbon provided a local authority action plan template covering strategic leadership, engaging men and boys, changing culture and raising awareness and that accreditation was intended to be a long-term commitment rather than a one-off exercise. Members were also advised that, subject to White Ribbon's approval of the local authority's action plan, accreditation would be awarded for a three-year period, the associated accreditation fee of £995 was also noted.

A member queried whether Middlesbrough Council had previously held White Ribbon accreditation. It was advised that the local authority had previously been accredited for a three-year period; however, the accreditation had lapsed due to capacity issues, including staff sickness, and the authority had not reapplied within the required timescales. The member further queried how progress had been measured previously. It was noted that evaluation arrangements had been limited and could have been stronger, and that consideration would be given to developing clearer key performance indicators as part of any new action plan submitted.

A member asked how many neighbouring local authorities currently held White Ribbon accreditation. The Domestic Abuse Strategic Lead advised that there were none locally and undertook to provide members with a list of accredited local authorities. The member further queried the relatively low uptake of accreditation, and it was suggested that this was likely linked to capacity constraints as not all local authorities had a dedicated Domestic Abuse Strategic Lead. It was noted that Middlesbrough now had an opportunity to progress this work further with a Domestic Abuse Coordinator in post.

A member commented that it was important for this work to "become the norm" and to be positively received by young men, including within schools, rather than being perceived as punitive. Reference was made to the need to promote positive role models and challenge harmful influences.

In response, the Domestic Abuse Strategic Lead advised that during the Council's previous period of White Ribbon accreditation, players from Middlesbrough Football Club had worn the White Ribbon during football matches, which had been a highly visible and impactful way of promoting the message and engaging men and boys. It was suggested that similar role model approaches, alongside trusted professionals such as teachers and youth workers, could again support cultural change.

This led to a discussion on education and prevention, including the role of schools and the potential use of welfare leads to support this agenda. It was agreed that further evidence should be sought at a future meeting from Children's Services, potentially at Director level, to provide an overview of current work with schools aligned to the national Violence Against Women and Girls strategy, including engagement with school welfare leads.

Members also discussed White Ribbon Day on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. While acknowledging the value of awareness-raising activity on the day itself, members emphasised the importance of full White Ribbon accreditation to ensure a sustained commitment to prevention and culture change, rather than reliance on a single annual event.

During the discussion, members expressed strong support for the Council becoming White Ribbon accredited. It was noted that members viewed accreditation as an important step in demonstrating organisational leadership on the prevention of violence against women and girls and in supporting wider cultural change. Members therefore requested that work to progress White Ribbon accreditation be taken forward.

Agreed that:

- The information provided on White Ribbon accreditation be noted.
- Officers proceed with the necessary steps to applying for accreditation.
- Further evidence be sought from Children's Services on work with schools relating to healthy relationships, education and prevention, in line with the national Violence Against Women and Girls strategy.

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It was agreed that, following consideration of the further evidence, members would now develop Terms of Reference for the Violence Against Women and Girls review, focussing on education, prevention and approaches to perpetrators. Suggested Terms of Reference should be submitted to the Democratic Services Officer, with formal consideration scheduled for the meeting on 13 April 2026.

25/8 **DRAFT FINAL SCRUTINY REPORT - HEALTHY PLACEMAKING WITH A FOCUS ON CHILDHOOD OBESITY**

The Final Draft Report of the Healthy Placemaking with a Focus on Childhood Obesity review was presented to the Panel.

Agreed that:

- Any additional comments or suggested amendments should be submitted to the Democratic Services Officer by no later than 7 March;
- The final report, incorporating any agreed amendments, would be authorised by the Chair; and
- The final report would be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting on 18 March.

25/9 **DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING - 13 APRIL 2026, 4.00PM**

The next meeting of the Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Panel had been scheduled for Monday, 13 April 2025 at 4.00 pm in the Mandela Room, Town Hall.

25/10 **ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.**

None.