



# YEARLY REPORT 2024-2025

Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership

# Foreword

It is with great pleasure that I introduce our annual report for the period **from April 2024 to March 2025**. This report covers a full twelve months and aligns with the updated statutory guidance 'Working Together to Safeguard Children.' This guidance stipulates that the reporting period must conclude on March 31 each year, with the report published by the end of September 2025.

The report is structured to emphasise the areas identified in last year's findings that required additional multi-agency focus. It outlines the efforts made by our partners to address these areas, the impact of those efforts, and identifies where further action is still needed. A central theme throughout the report is our ongoing commitment to learning and improving how we help, support and protect children and young people in Stoke-on-Trent.

This reporting period has presented challenges for everyone working within the partnership. Safeguarding children and young people are a complex and demanding task. However, the progress we have made and our collective response to these challenges highlight the professionalism of our practitioners in Stoke-on-Trent, as well as the partnership's provision of oversight, consistency, and improved engagement, which have improved the strength of our partnership arrangements.

On behalf of the Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all our colleagues across various agencies who continue to demonstrate their commitment to supporting children and families in Stoke-on-Trent.

**Neil Macdonald**

**Victoria Lee**

**Heather Johnstone**

**Delegated Safeguarding Partner**

**Delegated Safeguarding Partner**

**Delegated Safeguarding Partner**

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## Executive Summary

### Executive Summary

The Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership (SoTSCP) Annual Report for 2024–2025 reflects a year of significant progress, innovation, and collaborative leadership in safeguarding children and young people across the city. Guided by the principles of *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)*, the Partnership has focused on strengthening multi-agency arrangements, improving practice, and responding to the evolving needs of children, families, and communities.

### Key Achievements and Developments:

#### Strategic Leadership and Governance

The Partnership has embedded a culture of collaborative leadership, with strong engagement from statutory partners and the introduction of three independent

scrutineers. These scrutineers, appointed from outside the partnership, play a crucial role in enhancing accountability and challenge by providing an independent perspective on our work. A full review of Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) is planned for 2025–26.

### Quality Assurance and Scrutiny

A robust quality assurance framework has driven continuous improvement through multi-agency audits, thematic reviews, and performance monitoring. Scrutiny activities have focused on child exploitation, neglect, and governance, for instance, partnership findings from these activities have informed strategic priorities such as enhancing early intervention for neglected children through the Family Hubs and strengthening coordination in responding to child exploitation investing in the public protection resources within the police.

### Learning and Development

Over 1,800 professionals attended 98 multi-agency training sessions, with strong representation from education, health, police, and the voluntary sector. Training evaluations show increased practitioner confidence and knowledge. We are also monitoring the long-term impact of these sessions, to effect changes in practice whilst monitoring the long-term impact, to ensure the continuous improvement of practitioners.

### Youth Participation and Engagement

SoTSCP have met with partnership colleagues across the country to understand how they have successfully improved how they capture the voice of the child and how these impacts upon the quality of practice. Having learned from colleagues at Devon and Cornwall, the introduction of young scrutineers will further embed youth voice in our strategic decision-making, reaffirming and strengthening our unwavering commitment to ensuring their views are at the heart of our work.

### Early Help and Family Hubs

The introduction of the Family Hubs has brought about a positive change, enabling the implementation of a local multi-agency risk meeting, known as the Family Forum. This forum has contributed to the reduction in the number of inappropriate referrals to statutory services, marking a significant step forward.

### Child Exploitation and Serious Youth Violence

Our collaborative efforts to support vulnerable children have been significant. The Violence Reduction Team, Youth Offending Service, and Catalyst project, work together seamlessly, ensuring that no child is invisible and that all receive the support they need when they need it.

### Neglect and Domestic Abuse

The implementation of the Graded Care Profile 2 (GCP2) tool and targeted training continue to enhance our response to neglect. Operation DARE has led to improved

triage and referral processes for domestic abuse cases, reducing risk and strengthening early intervention. Operation Encompass continues to be embedded within our response to Domestic Abuse within the city.

#### Safeguarding Children Aged 0–2

ICON training revised pre-birth pathways, and awareness campaigns on safe sleeping and water safety have enhanced infant safeguarding. A simulated Multi Agency practitioner learning SUDI event strengthened practitioner learning. The partnership will support the event in 2025/26

#### Child Death Review and Modifiable Factors

Of twenty-eight child deaths reviewed, twelve involved modifiable factors (which are lifestyle choices that a family can change to reduce the safeguarding risk). The Partnership continues to target key issues such as maternal health, unsafe sleep environments, and suicide prevention.

### **Key Challenges Faced by SoTSCP (2024–2025)**

This executive summary outlines the key challenges encountered by the Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership (SoTSCP) during the 2024–2025 reporting period. These challenges reflect the complex landscape of safeguarding and the shared commitment needed for ongoing multi-agency collaboration and strategic improvement.

#### Socioeconomic Vulnerability

Stoke-on-Trent is grappling with a pressing issue of high levels of deprivation, with over 37% of children receiving free school meals and elevated infant mortality rates. These conditions significantly heighten safeguarding risks, demanding urgent and intensive support.

#### Improving Multi-Agency Practice

Audits revealed improvements in information sharing, professional challenge and healthy scepticism. A collaborative approach to safeguarding with the children at the centre of decision-making. Improvements are being made in planning, documentation, and engagement, particularly in cases involving missing children and child exploitation. The Partnership are focused on reducing duplication in risk management and inconsistent use of tools, such as Graded Care Profile (GCP2), hindered effectiveness.

#### Embedding Learning into Practice

It is crucial that we emphasize the importance of embedding learning into practice. Despite high training attendance, the long-term application of learning remains under review. Practitioners translating training into practice is monitored closely, which will continue the sustained improvement we strive for.

## Limited Family and Youth Voice Integration

Youth engagement initiatives were launched, feedback from children and families have begun to service design or strategic planning.

## Domestic Abuse Response Gaps

Operation DARE identified that many families flagged through Police Protection Notices (PPNs) did not receive timely support. Risk assessments were often conducted in isolation by single agency, leading to missed opportunities for coordinated intervention. Positive multi-agency problem-solving and a strong multi-agency review and triage process has significantly improved decision-making

## Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

A 32% increase in teenage deaths due to suicide and road traffic collisions was reported. Gaps in digital infrastructure, service transitions, and early intervention capacity hindered mental health support.

## Data Sharing and Strategic Oversight

While appropriate standards for information sharing were met, further development is needed to improve coordination, visibility, and strategic decision-making—the absence of a safeguarding dashboard limits real-time oversight.

## Funding and Resources

Lead Safeguarding Partners agreed a total funding of £264,650 to support Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) delivery, including business support, training, independent scrutiny, and safeguarding reviews.

This report demonstrates the Partnership's unwavering commitment to safeguarding children through evidence-based practice, inclusive leadership, and continuous improvement. The work undertaken in 2024–2025 lays a strong foundation for future progress and innovation in 2025–2026.

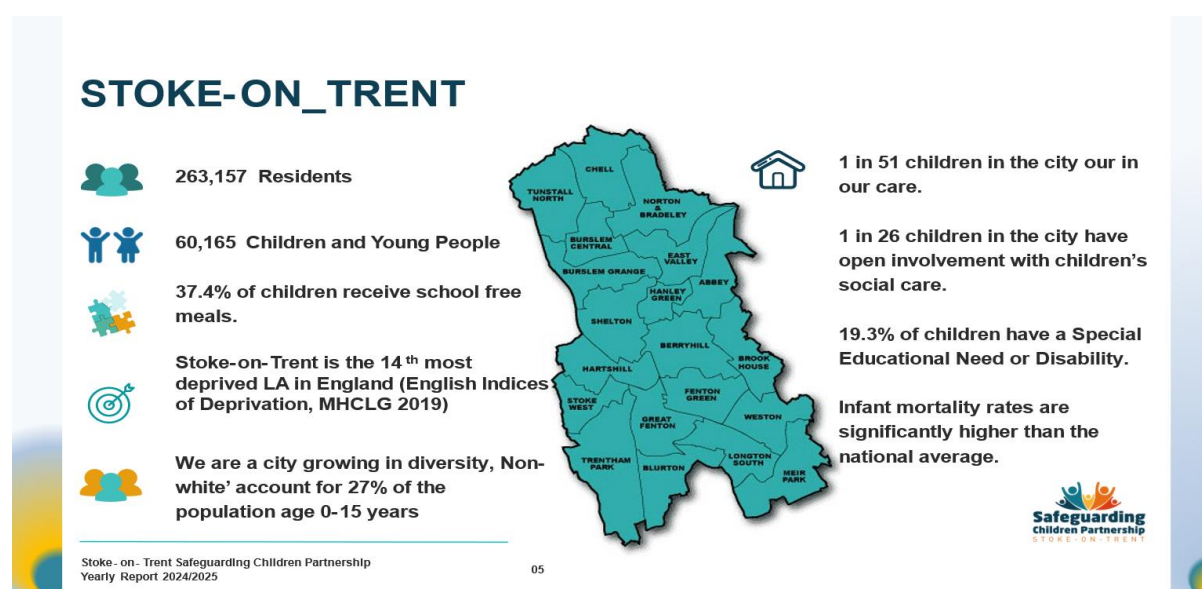
# Introduction

Stoke-on-Trent officially became a city on June 6, 1925. This honour was granted by King George V in recognition of the city's significant contributions to the pottery industry. The city was formed from the confederation of six towns: Tunstall, Burslem, Hanley, Stoke, Fenton, and Longton. This year, we celebrate 100 years as a city and reflect on the fantastic contributions we have made to the country. The city's population currently exceeds 250,000 residents, with over 60,000 of them being children. Due to the challenging economic situation in Stoke-on-Trent, more than 37% of children receive free school meals. The 2019 English Indices of Deprivation report ranked Stoke-on-Trent as the 14th most deprived local authority in England. Stoke-on-Trent's population is diverse, with the non-white community accounting for 27% of the children aged 0-15 years. The Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership (SoTSCP) is

responsible for the care of 1 in 51 children in the city, while 1 in 26 children have open involvement with children's social care. Nearly 20% of children in Stoke-on-Trent have a special educational need or disability, and sadly, our infant mortality rates are significantly higher than the national average. The upcoming report will highlight how we have proactively addressed these issues during the year 2024-2025.

The below graphic provides a demographic and safeguarding overview of Stoke-on-Trent, highlighting key indicators that shape the city's child welfare landscape. It presents essential data on population, deprivation, diversity, and the prevalence of Partnership involvement, offering a snapshot of the challenges and opportunities facing children and young people in the area. These insights inform strategic planning and multi-agency efforts to improve outcomes and ensure that every child is protected, supported and empowered.

Figure 1. Safeguarding Data in Stoke-on-Trent



## A Shared Responsibility

### How Effective is SoTSCP Leadership



Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 outlines the responsibilities and functions of Local Safeguarding Partnerships by nominating Lead Safeguarding Partners.

The Lead Safeguarding Partners—representing the **Local Authority**, **Police**, and **Health**—are collectively responsible for:


- Strategic Oversight:** Setting the direction and priorities for safeguarding across Stoke-on-Trent.
- Governance and Accountability:** Ensuring robust multi-agency arrangements are in place and holding agencies accountable for safeguarding performance.

3. **Resource Allocation:** Securing and approving funding and resources to support safeguarding initiatives.
4. **Review and Approval:** Endorsing key documents such as independent scrutiny plans and safeguarding practice reviews.
5. **Collaborative Leadership:** Promoting a unified approach to safeguarding through regular strategic meetings and cross-agency coordination.

They delegate operational responsibilities to Delegated Safeguarding Partners (DSPs), who lead day-to-day implementation and coordination.

Name	Role	Photograph
Jon Rouse	CEO of Stoke-on-Trent City Council	
Rebecca Riggs	Acting Chief Constable of Staffordshire Police	



Name	Role	Photograph
Dr Paul Edmondson-Jones	Acting Chief Executive of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent ICB	




### The Delegated Safeguarding Partners:

Delegated Safeguarding Partners (DSPs) are senior representatives appointed by each Lead Safeguarding Partner—Local Authority, Police, and Health—to act on their behalf in the day-to-day delivery of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.

Their Core Responsibilities include:

- **Operational Oversight:** Leading the implementation of safeguarding priorities, ensuring compliance with agreed procedures, and embedding learning from reviews.
- **Strategic Leadership:** Representing their agency with authority to make decisions and holding partners to account for safeguarding performance.
- **Partnership Coordination:** Facilitating collaboration across agencies, promoting shared responsibility, and ensuring effective data sharing.
- **Governance:** Participating in regular DSP meetings to monitor progress, review arrangements, and provide assurance to Lead Safeguarding Partners.
- **Workforce Development:** Supporting the delivery of multi-agency training and continuous improvement in safeguarding practice.

DSPs play a critical role in ensuring that safeguarding arrangements are robust, responsive, and effectively coordinated across the partnership.

Name	Role	Photograph
Neil Macdonald	Director of Children's Services Stoke-on-Trent	
Victoria Lee	Temporary Chief Superintendent Staffordshire Police	
Heather Johnstone	Chief Nurse and Therapies Officer Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent ICB	

Leaders within their organisations have contributed effectively to safeguarding arrangements. They have made certain that resources were available to support the Partnership efforts and that everyone understood their respective roles.

These leaders have provided the necessary governance for safeguarding measures and have been held accountable to the communities of Stoke-on-Trent. They have reviewed and approved key documents, including the plans for independent scrutiny and child safeguarding practice reviews. The strategic leadership group have overseen the implementation of training and learning, focused on how these initiatives improved practices which lead to positive outcomes for children in Stoke-on-Trent.

Vision and Values

The Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership has committed to improving services collaboratively. This commitment, coupled with strong communication within the governance processes, and at the Lead Safeguarding Partnership (LSP) level, reassured our stakeholders of our collective capability to improve services. The Police, Children Services, Health Services and Education are represented at the Executive level, further strengthening our commitment.

Recent Inspections of the police by (HMICFRS) and Child Services (Ofsted) have been discussed at length at the Executive level. We are committed to a multi-agency approach to listen to the findings and improve practice. This commitment ensures that our stakeholders are not only informed but also involved in our improvement efforts.

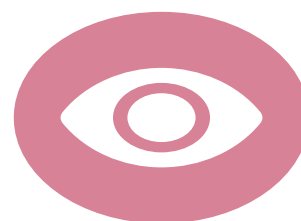
### Vision Statement

Children should be safe, healthy, nurtured and loved. All our partners are committed to working together so that every child in Stoke-on-Trent children and young people are protected from abuse, neglect or harm and are equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to keep themselves safe as they grow older.

Children are at the heart of everything we do, and we will ensure that we listen to children, understand their lived experience and needs, risks are minimised and protective factors supported.

We will learn from each other, promote scrutiny and supportive conversations that have a sharp focus on keeping children safe.

Our strategy, plans and practice will be informed by evidence, performance and evaluation.



As leaders, we have recognised that safeguarding our children cannot be achieved in isolation from other partnerships, or our communities. Further, that by working together to ensure that information about children and their families has been shared effectively, risk of harm has been correctly identified and understood, and children have received targeted services that met their needs in a coordinated way.

Partners in Stoke-on-Trent have worked effectively and collaboratively towards shared priorities that have improved safeguarding outcomes for all children.

### Strategic Priorities 2022-2025

"Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023" clearly defines the responsibilities of Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements within local areas. In Stoke-on-Trent, we have identified our priorities and have developed a robust plan to meet local needs.

The Partnership is committed to strengthening its approach to Quality Assurance, ensuring we have shown a precise understanding of where to prioritise our resources and how effectively our activities contributed to improving outcomes for children and young people.

To guarantee the quality and effectiveness of multi-agency practices and systems, the Partnership developed a comprehensive quality assurance and scrutiny framework that has driven continuous improvement in outcomes for children and families. This framework has incorporated essential methods, including safeguarding practice reviews, safeguarding audits with partners and schools, multi-agency practice audits, and rigorous performance monitoring.

In the last reporting period, the Partnership took decisive action to review its independent scrutiny model, by adopting a new structure with three independent scrutineers who were assigned specific tasks that aligned directly with our priorities. This proactive approach has enhanced our accountability and effectiveness in safeguarding children.

Having three scrutineers has strengthened resilience and provided additional challenge to the Partnership by providing a diverse pool of people with different areas of expertise.

Multi-agency thematic audits have been conducted every six weeks, resulting in valuable insights from the rich discussions within the group. This learning has informed the Learning and Development Subgroup business planning.

One key area of feedback for the Partnership's development in the coming year is to enhance our approach to obtaining direct feedback from families. We aim to use this feedback to inform our service design and delivery.

## Figure 2: Stoke-on-Trent Core Safeguarding Priorities

The below graphic presents the core safeguarding priorities for children in Stoke-on-Trent, structured across three key domains: Strategic, Practice, and Assurance. These priorities reflect a coordinated multi-agency approach to improving outcomes for children and young people. By focusing on leadership, quality assurance, and targeted areas such as child exploitation, neglect, and mental health, the Partnership aims to strengthen protection, promote wellbeing, and ensure accountability.

<b>Strategic priorities:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lead and embed effective Partnership arrangements to safeguard children.</li><li>• Develop and implement a Quality Assurance and Scrutiny Framework</li></ul>
<b>Practice priorities:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Child Exploitation</li><li>• Neglect including the Graded Care Profile 2</li><li>• Safeguarding young children aged 0-2 years</li></ul>
<b>Assurance Priorities:</b>	
Assurance Area 1: Missing Children	
Assurance Area 2: Serious Youth Violence	
Assurance Area 3: Child Mental Health	

## Governance Groups in MASA

Effective safeguarding requires more than frontline action—it demands structured oversight, strategic coordination, and continuous improvement. Within SoTSCP, the governance groups embedded in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) play a critical role in ensuring that safeguarding efforts are coherent, accountable, and responsive to local needs.

These governance groups—comprising the Executive Lead, Strategic Lead, and Operational Subgroups—provide a tiered framework that enables clear decision-making, robust quality assurance, and inclusive leadership. They ensure that safeguarding priorities are not only identified but actively monitored and evaluated through mechanisms such as audits, reviews, and performance tracking.

By fostering collaboration across agencies, promoting shared responsibility, and embedding learning into practice, the governance groups serve as the backbone of MASA. Their work strengthens the partnership's ability to respond to emerging risks, uphold statutory duties, and deliver improved outcomes for children and families in Stoke-on-Trent. Next there is summary of the ambition of the SoTSCP governance groups:

## Quality Assurance Group – Turning Strategic Plans into Operational Delivery

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements of the Partnership are implemented through subgroups.

To enhance the Partnership, the inclusion of Education within the Delegated Safeguarding Partnership (DSP) in 2025, plus the introduction of an Education Safeguarding subgroup have both encouraged their active participation.

The Quality Assurance Group is essential to the Partnership, ensuring the operational efficiency of its activities. This group oversees the business plans for the Learning and Development Group, the Practice Review Group and Education Group and in 2025, the Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership launched the Child Exploitation and Missing persons subgroup.

Members of the Quality Assurance Group are actively involved in different quality assurance activities, including multi-agency audits and self-assessments. The graphic below identifies the spans of control for each governance group.

Figure 3: Governance Structure of the Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Partnership

This graphic presents the governance structure of the Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership, outlining the key leadership and operational components that drive its safeguarding agenda. It highlights the three-tiered framework, Executive Lead, Strategic Lead, and Operational Sub-groups, demonstrating how oversight, quality assurance, and frontline practice are coordinated across the Partnership. This structure ensures accountability, promotes collaboration, and supports continuous improvement in safeguarding outcomes for children and young people.

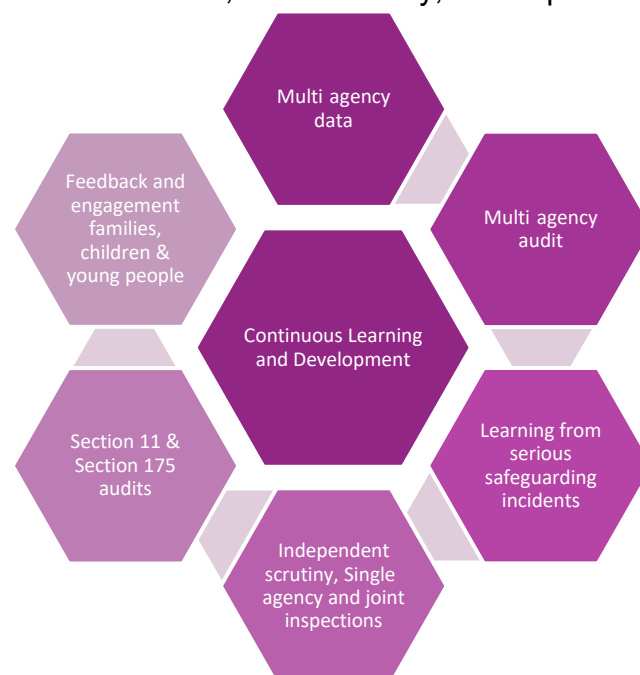


## Quality Assurance Framework

The partnership quality assurance framework uses several methods to ensure effective multi-agency practices aimed at improving outcomes for children and families. This includes Child Safeguarding Reviews, rapid reviews and audits (on a six-weekly basis), Section 11 and 175 audits and local reviews. Recently, the model was updated to incorporate three independent scrutineers to enhance resilience and provide meaningful challenge, with each scrutineer focusing on specific scrutiny tasks that have been identified through the strategic and operation plans:

### Figure 4: Multi-Agency Approach to Continuous Improvement

The below graphic presents the core components of a multi-agency approach to continuous learning and development in safeguarding practice. At the centre is a commitment to ongoing improvement, supported by six interconnected elements: data analysis, auditing, feedback, scrutiny, and engagement. Together, these mechanisms ensure that learning is embedded across agencies, informed by evidence, and shaped by the voices of children, families, and professionals. This framework underpins the Partnership's drive for excellence, accountability, and impact in safeguarding children.



### Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements - Accountability

Robust accountability is essential to the effectiveness of Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA). In Stoke-on-Trent, the Safeguarding Children Partnership ensures that agencies are not only working collaboratively but are also held to high standards in safeguarding practice. Through statutory audits, independent scrutiny, and structured governance, partners are accountable to one another—and crucially, to the children, young people, families, and communities they serve. These mechanisms

foster transparency, drive improvement, and reinforce a shared commitment to child welfare.

The Children Act (2004) mandates collaboration among specific agencies and individuals to safeguard children and promote their welfare, as outlined in Section 11. This section requires that all functions prioritise the welfare of children.

A Section 11 audit is conducted every two years and is key to rigorously assessing seven key standards: leadership, policies, recruitment, staff training, and communication. A report detailing the findings from various local agencies was presented to the Executive Board in February 2024. This report underwent thorough scrutiny during a challenge event facilitated by the independent scrutineer and involving all contributing organisations. The findings from the Section 11 audit have been instrumental in shaping the partnership's strategic and operational business plans.

The next Section 11 audit is scheduled for April 2026, providing an opportunity to enhance the process by incorporating CAFCASS, the National Probation Service, and engaging with other relevant agencies.

#### Headline Findings:

1. All minimum standards were met across the board.
2. Leadership, management, safer recruitment, complaints handling, and whistleblowing procedures exceeded minimum standards.
3. All agencies had established written policies.
4. Multi-agency information-sharing arrangements are being further developed, meeting the minimum standards.
5. There is a need to strengthen the voices of communities, families, young people, and children to influence strategic and operational activities.

The S175 audit is scheduled for September 2025. There will be a continued focus on developing involvement with children and families, and young scrutineers will play a vital role in the assessment.

#### Independent Scrutiny

The purpose of Independent Scrutiny is to provide safeguarding partners and relevant agencies with independent, rigorous, and practical support and challenge, both operationally and strategically. The scrutineer is tasked with ensuring the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements through various agreed-upon methods, outlined in a 12-month scrutiny plan that reports to the Delegated Safeguarding Partners Committee of the Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership (SoTSCP).

#### Local Approach to Scrutiny

The SoTSCP have adopted a model that includes multiple scrutineers, each allocated to specific areas. The partnership has recruited three individuals (scrutiny associates)



to carry out this function. Scrutiny associates will be selected for their diverse knowledge and experience, incorporating backgrounds in health, social care, policing, and insights from experts by experience. We have a scrutineer with extensive history of each statutory partner.

Each year, the Delegated Safeguarding Partners Board will agree on a plan for scrutiny activities, and suitable scrutiny associates will be appointed to undertake and report on these activities.

The following areas of scrutiny were agreed during the time of April 2023-March 2024:

1. Effectiveness of arrangements to identify and respond to child exploitation
2. Effectiveness of the multi-agency response to childhood neglect including the use of the GCP2 assessment tool in practice.

#### Effectiveness of Arrangements to Identify and Respond to Child Exploitation

The proposal was finalised at the DSP meeting on January 8, 2025. The independent scrutineer confirmed the interviewees and their dates and will attend relevant meetings to access notes and actions. They will gather qualitative and quantitative data through questionnaires and focus groups. The findings from the scrutineer have assisted the partnership in identifying positive multi-agency practices that are effectively dealing with child exploitation. The relationships between police, health and social care are strong and encourage professional scrutiny and challenge. They have also identified duplication in risk management processes, such as the weekly meeting that is often missed. They have also asked for a structured review of how Multi-Agency Child Exploitation meeting (MACE) is managed within Stoke-on-Trent due to several children being named within the child exploitation cohort without an action plan to reduce the risk. The final report is expected to be reviewed by governance groups in April 2025.

#### Effectiveness of the multi-agency response to Childhood Neglect Including the use of the GCP2 Assessment Tool in Practice

The independent scrutineer reported that the proposal was finalised at the DSP meeting on January 8, 2025, using findings on childhood neglect and the GCP2 tool to establish a scrutiny baseline in Stoke-on-Trent. The Terms of Reference (ToR) specified how your role and contributions in the scrutiny activities are crucial in developing the Stoke-on-Trent neglect strategy, which was also finalised in January 2025.

In February 2025, the scrutineer reviewed data from various agencies regarding usage, coverage, and outcomes, which was communicated to the Partnership Executive team. The final phase, which is currently ongoing, involves collecting qualitative and quantitative data from stakeholders through a questionnaire and focus groups. The initial findings indicate that child social care is effectively utilising the GCP2 tool in some form. The other multi-agencies are more sporadic in their completion. There are examples of the police and health colleagues assisting in the completion of the GCP2 but not taking accountability for its completion. A finalisation date has been set for April 2025, with the review expected to be completed by June 2025.

## **Update from Helen Bannister Independent Scrutineer**

Last year, we witnessed a significant shift in Independent Scrutiny, a change of great importance aligned with Working Together 2023. The Partnership's strategic move to recruit three scrutineers from health, police, and social care was a pivotal step in enhancing scrutiny and driving improvement. The early appointment of a scrutineer to focus on governance and the impact of section 11 audits, viewed as opportunities for learning rather than mere compliance checks, further underscored the importance of this shift. The decision to conduct these audits every two years with an emphasis on actionable outcomes was a clear indication of our commitment to this new approach.

By July, all scrutineers were in place, allowing the development of a scrutiny program. One began reviewing Neglect through the Graded Care Profile 2 to improve assessments and timely support for children. The work programme, designed with flexibility in mind, is ready to adapt to changing priorities, ensuring that we can always focus on what's most important. This adaptability has already led to the proposed scrutiny of the Annual Report data on children for next year, demonstrating the effectiveness of our flexible approach.

A significant challenge we are addressing is amplifying the voice of the child in scrutiny. To tackle this, we have engaged with participation officers to connect with young people and incorporate their feedback. This collaborative effort, involving both our team and the young people we serve, is a testament to our commitment to inclusivity. Young people will assist in training staff, and we encourage the use of their stories in training sessions to achieve a greater impact. Lastly, we are exploring best practices from other Partnerships to create a sustainable model for Stoke-on-Trent, a process that we hope will further enhance our inclusive approach.

Next Steps in 2025:

1. Review the impact of Domestic Abuse on children. Are they victims in their own right?
2. Review the partnership approach to intrafamilial sexual abuse
3. Support the development of the young scrutineers.
4. The impact of Operation Encompass

## **Multi-Agency Case Audits**

Multi-Agency Case Audits are a cornerstone of effective safeguarding governance. They provide a structured opportunity for agencies to reflect on real cases, identify strengths and weaknesses in practice, and drive continuous improvement across the safeguarding system.

Within the Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership (SoTSCP), these audits enable professionals from different sectors, such as health, education, police, and

social care—to collaboratively review complex cases. This shared learning environment fosters transparency, promotes professional curiosity, and strengthens accountability.

The audits are not simply retrospective exercises; they are proactive tools for change. By identifying recurring themes, gaps in communication, and inconsistencies in planning, they inform policy updates, training priorities, and service redesign. The resulting actions, such as revised escalation policies and improved planning quality demonstrate the tangible impact of audit findings on frontline practice.

Ultimately, Multi-Agency Case Audits ensure that safeguarding arrangements remain responsive, evidence-informed, and child-centred. They help build a culture of reflection and learning, where safeguarding partners work together to protect children more effectively.

#### Multi-Agency Case audits

Two multi-agency case audits were undertaken during the period of the annual report.

1. Step down multi-agency report – (Integrated Front Door IFD)
2. Strategy discussions in relation to missing Children (Out of Area)

The findings have been shared with the Practice Review Subgroup of the Safeguarding Partnership in Stoke-on-Trent, leading to improved multi-agency collaboration. Each agency shared lessons learned to enhance practice. A tracker monitors progress on actions reviewed by the Learning & Development Subgroup.

Positive changes include a revised multi agency Escalation Policy more consistent lateral checks, and updates to the RFM. Further improvements in “planning quality” are scheduled for 2025/2026.

Impact of the Audits - Step down multi-agency report:

#### **Case Review Summary: Multiagency Response – Requires Improvement**

The case was rated "Requires Improvement" regarding the multiagency response, highlighting several areas needing development for better safeguarding:

1. Child-Centred Focus: The older sibling's behaviour was overemphasised, overshadowing the impact on Child O1, with reports often reflecting parental concerns rather than verified evidence.
2. Parental Engagement: The mother's historical distrust of services was noted, but recent efforts to rebuild trust through transparent engagement showed promise.
3. Voice of the Child: While there was some direct engagement with the children, it was inconsistent and poorly documented, limiting understanding of their experiences and family dynamics.

4. **Timeliness and Documentation:** Delays between the referral and strategy meeting weakened the response, and the minutes lacked clarity on objectives and outcomes.
5. **Agency Contributions:** Educational input was minimal, and the father's role was largely unexplored, creating gaps in the family assessment.

The report emphasised the need for improved information management as identified by the Delegated Safeguarding Partnership. In response, the Assistant Director of Child Services formed a working group to conduct a review, resulting in a proposal approved for implementation in April 2025.

#### Missing Children (Out of Area) - Audit Overview March 2025

This audit examined three complex cases involving children with safeguarding concerns linked to multiple local authorities, focusing on the effectiveness of multiagency strategy meetings and interventions.

#### Cross-Cutting Themes Identified

Limited assessment of non-resident fathers and unclear strategy meeting minutes.

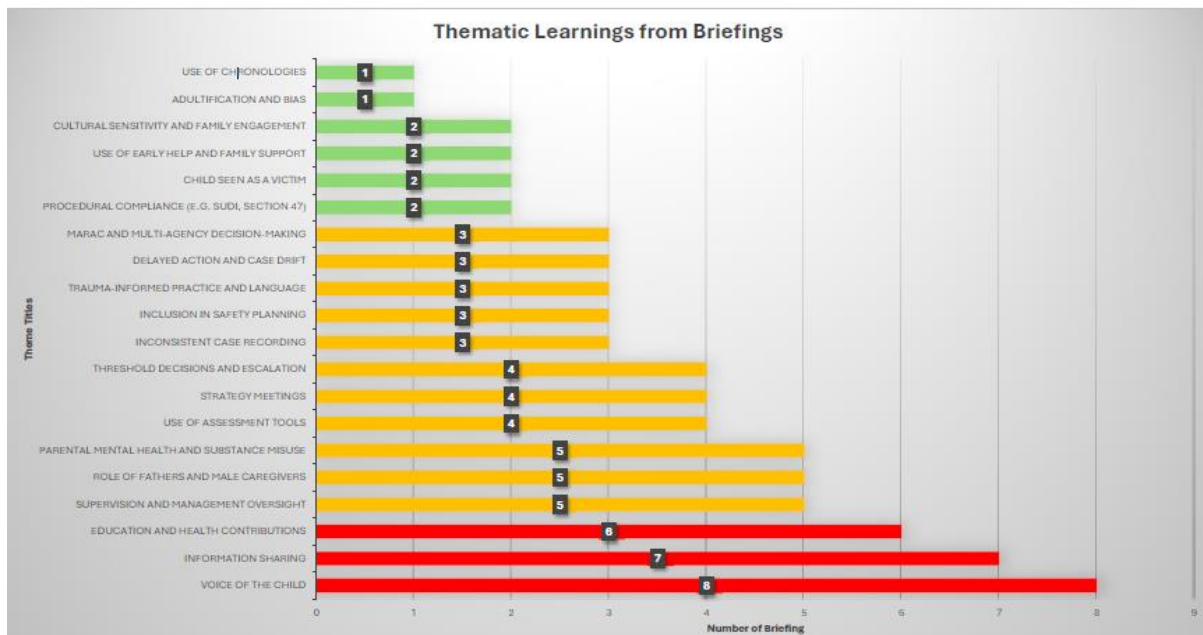
Poor documentation of educational pathways for care leavers and risks associated with planning for young parents.

The report highlighted challenges in managing the risks of children frequently missing from home, especially when involved with multiple local authorities. The executive team acknowledged the complexity of the risk management process. An independent review focused on child exploitation management will be presented in April 2025.

Several themes have been identified through the multi-agency audit process. They can be seen below.

#### Figure 5: Thematic Learning from Audits

The below graphic presents thematic learning drawn from safeguarding briefings across Stoke-on-Trent. It highlights 20 key themes identified through multi-agency reviews, ranging from procedural compliance and trauma-informed practice to the role of fathers and the voice of the child. The frequency of each theme reflects its prominence in learning discussions, offering valuable insight into areas requiring continued focus, improvement, and training. This thematic overview supports the Partnership's commitment to reflective practice and continuous learning to strengthen safeguarding outcomes.



Themes:

1. The child's voice and impact on MA planning
2. Timeliness of information sharing
3. The influence of health and education on safeguarding.

Good Practice:

1. MA working in Stoke-on-Trent is built on good experience and healthy working relationships
2. Healthy scepticism and professional curiosity challenges assumptions in Stoke-on-Trent and identifies hidden risks. Gaining information from different sources paints a comprehensive picture of the child and family life.
3. Encouraging collaboration and challenge facilitates open communication and challenge between multi-agency partners. Fostering restorative learning and an environment where individuals feel safe to raise concerns and challenge decisions or practices that may endanger the safety of a child.
4. Equality, diversity and inclusion is checked within every MA policy, procedure or audit within Stoke-on-Trent fostering a more equitable and inclusive safeguarding system that ensures accountability and fairness.

### **Positive Impact of Multi-Agency Case Audits for MASA Professionals**

A positive impact of Multi-Agency (MA) Case Audits for MASA professionals is the strengthening of collaborative practice and shared accountability.

Through these audits, professionals from different agencies, such as health, education, police, and social care, come together to review real cases in a structured and reflective environment. This process:

1. Promoted professional curiosity and healthy challenge across agencies.
2. Identified gaps and strengths in safeguarding responses.
3. Improved consistency in planning and decision-making.
4. Foster a culture of learning, where practitioners feel safe reflecting and improve.
5. Leads to tangible changes, such as revised escalation policies and improved documentation standards.

Ultimately, MA audits empower MASA professionals to deliver more coordinated, child-centred safeguarding interventions, enhancing outcomes for children and families.

### Next steps

The Partnership has planned bi-monthly meetings with statutory representatives to share single agency learning and recognise excellent practice, while addressing the pressures of independent scrutiny and potential vicarious trauma on frontline teams. A review of the welfare and well-being support for these teams is underway. Records will be shared at the learning conference in November 2025.

## Learning and Development Group - Introduction

The Learning and Development Group continues to be a driving force behind professional growth and safeguarding excellence across Stoke-on-Trent. In 2024–2025, the group delivered a dynamic and inclusive training programme that successfully engaged professionals from education, health, police, and the voluntary sector.

By adopting a blended learning approach, combining online self-directed modules, virtual sessions, and in-person experiences, the Partnership ensured that training was accessible, flexible, and responsive to the needs of practitioners. This commitment to workforce development has not only strengthened safeguarding knowledge and confidence but also fostered a culture of continuous improvement.

Supported by expert partners and guided by robust evaluation methods, the group's work has had a tangible impact on practice. Feedback from participants highlights the value of the training in enhancing real-world safeguarding responses, reinforcing the importance of investing in learning as a cornerstone of effective multi-agency collaboration.

The Learning and Development Group has overseen a comprehensive training and development program, successfully engaging partners in education and the voluntary sector. For 2024-25, the programme will use a blended approach, combining online self-directed learning, online training sessions, and in-person experiences.

### **Introduction: Strengthening Practice Through Training**

Training is the foundation of confident, informed, and effective safeguarding practice. The Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership has invested in a diverse and

comprehensive training programme that equips professionals with the knowledge and skills needed to protect children and young people across the city.

Covering both foundational and specialist topics, from domestic abuse and parental substance misuse to modern slavery and mental health, the training modules reflect a commitment to workforce development that is inclusive, responsive, and evidence informed. These opportunities not only build practitioner confidence but also promote consistency in safeguarding responses, ensuring that children receive the right support at the right time.

### Update from Claire Myatt, our Partnership Training Support Officer

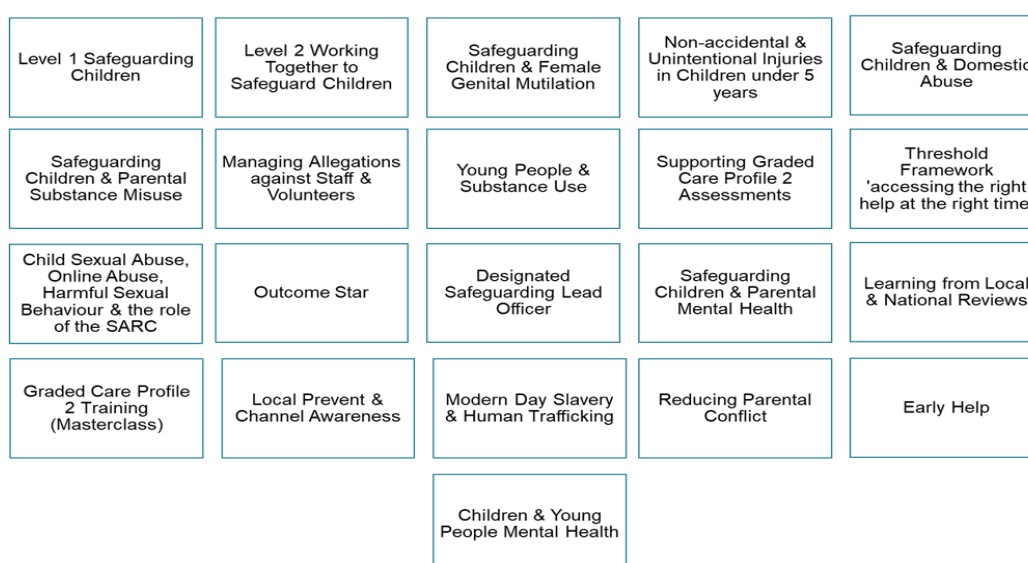
The Partnership multi-agency training included pre- and post-course evaluations to assess improvements in participants' knowledge and confidence. Three months later, feedback on changes in practice has helped to evaluate the long-term impact.

The evaluations indicated that SOTSCP training boosts practitioners' confidence and knowledge, although there is a slight decline in long-term expertise and enthusiasm, likely due to some practitioners not applying their training in real-life situations.

Overall, practitioners are satisfied with the variety of courses and believe the training positively impacts their practice. With support from expert partners, we have offered a range of courses and conducted various sessions over the past 12 months.

Figure 6: SoTSCP Training 2024-2025

The below graphic demonstrates the breadth of safeguarding training available to professionals working with children and young people across Stoke-on-Trent. Covering foundational knowledge and specialist topics—from domestic abuse and parental substance misuse to modern slavery and mental health—the modules reflect a comprehensive approach to workforce development. These training opportunities are designed to strengthen practitioner confidence, promote consistent safeguarding practice, and ensure that children receive the right support at the right time.

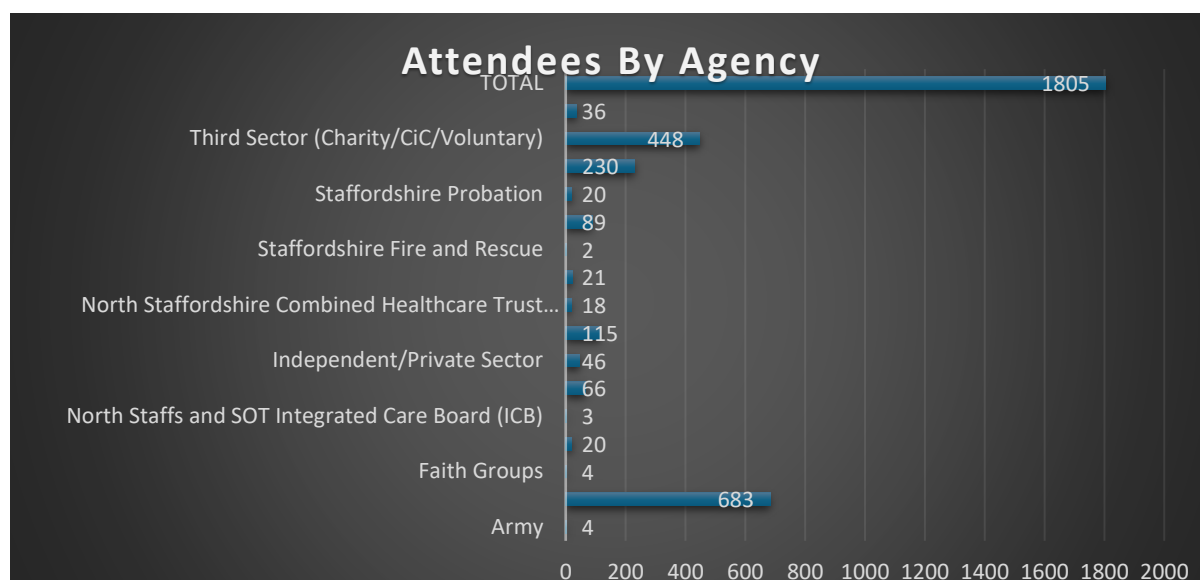


The 2024-2025 annual training programme features a blended approach with face-to-face learning, online sessions, and e-learning.

A total of 29 multi-agency courses were delivered over 98 sessions, attracting 1,805 attendees. Additionally, a Learning Conference on recent Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews was held in October 2024 at Stoke Town Hall, with 92 attendees. Thirty-five agencies downloaded the Level 1 Core Slide package, and 192 people registered for the Level 1 eLearning course. Attendance by each agency can be seen here.

Figure 7: Agency Engagement with MASA Training

The below graphic illustrates agency engagement in safeguarding-related training and events, highlighting attendance figures across a range of sectors. It provides a clear overview of participation levels from statutory, voluntary, and community organisations, reflecting the breadth of multi-agency involvement. The data supports ongoing efforts to strengthen collaboration, ensure diverse representation, and build capacity across the safeguarding workforce.



The police have made significant efforts to boost attendance at our multi-agency safeguarding training, and eighty-nine participants attended, the highest we've recorded to date. The DSP is eager to maintain this positive trend.

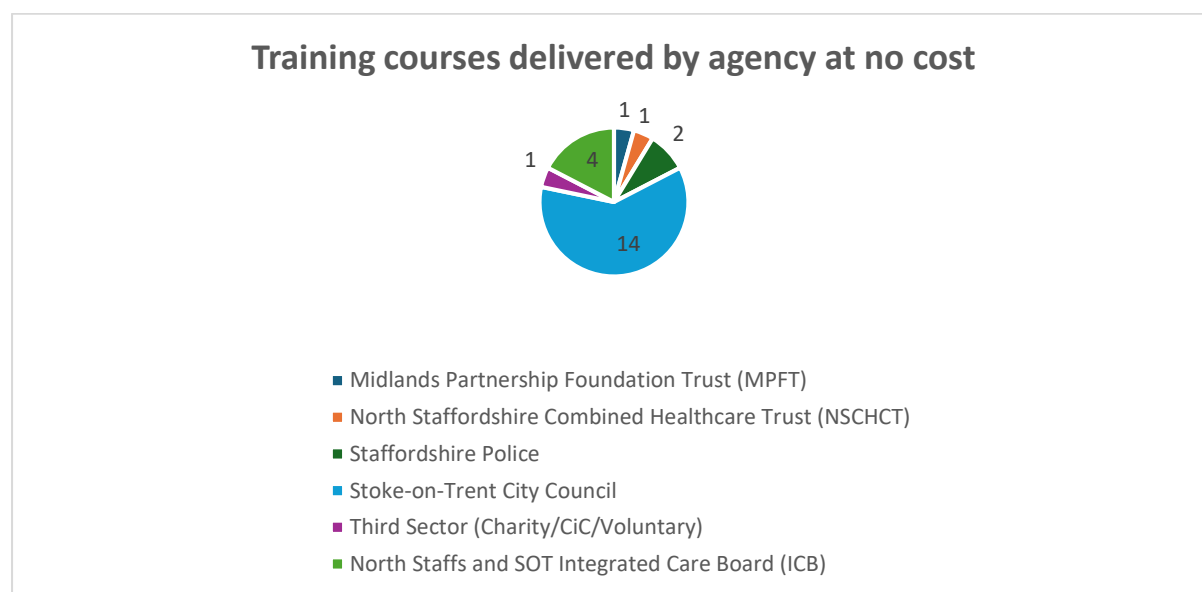
Each statutory agency has dedicated time and resources to secure appropriately skilled personnel for delivering training in the most cost-effective way possible. Below is a breakdown of the voluntary contributions made by partnership members and their trusted local organisations.

Figure 8: Distribution of the Free MASA Training

The below graphic presents the distribution of free safeguarding training courses delivered by partner agencies across Stoke-on-Trent. It highlights the collective contribution of organisations such as Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust (MPFT), North



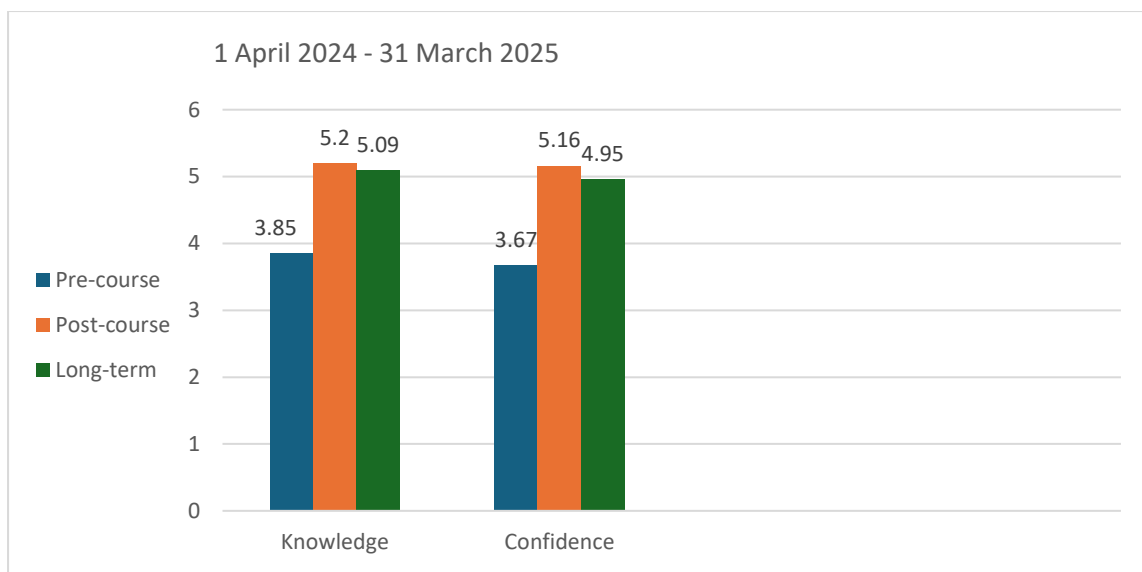
Staffordshire Combined Healthcare Trust (NSCHCT), Staffordshire Police, and Stoke-on-Trent City Council. The data reflects the commitment of these agencies to workforce development and multi-agency collaboration, with MPFT emerging as the leading provider of no-cost training opportunities.



To evaluate our multi-agency training, we distributed two questionnaires to each participant: the first right after the training and the second three months later. This allowed attendees to provide feedback on the training's value. Here's an example of the evaluation following the safeguarding children and domestic abuse training:

## Figure 9: Measuring Impact of Safeguarding Training

The below graphic presents the measured impact of safeguarding training on participants' knowledge and confidence levels over time. It compares pre-course, post-course, and long-term self-assessments collected between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025. The data demonstrates a clear improvement following training, with sustained gains in both knowledge and confidence, reinforcing the value of ongoing professional development in safeguarding practice.



## Participation Quotes

### Safeguarding Children and Domestic Abuse:

#### Post-course:

“There is a particular issue that we discussed in the training that I now know I can refer for an appropriate intervention to support the family.”

“This training has provided me with the right skills and knowledge in order for me to successfully help the students in my school; it has also made me aware of other signs to look out for.”

#### Long-term:

“I have been able to have the right conversations with families that we support, to ensure that information is both collected.”

### Early Help:

#### Post-course:

“Now I feel confident in opening an early help for a family needing support and this will help to prevent more complex issues arising.”

“By addressing each family’s specific needs and thresholds as well as being able to refer people to the appropriate agencies / charities.”

#### Long-term:

“Better understanding and knowledge to host Early helps. More aware of support available in the city, to be able to give better.”

“My confidence has improved after seeing how Stoke complete early helps. I believe that improved confidence in turn improves practice and outcomes.”

#### Safeguarding Children and Parental Mental Health:

##### Post-course:

“This was a really good course, and I took away a lot of good information.”

“Developed knowledge of mental health illness and treatment. Knowing what red flags to look out for. Understanding of local support available for mental health. Understanding of other social support and how to access services.”

##### Long-term:

“The training was one of the best training courses I have attended. Prior to the course I was aware of different mental health conditions but did not know the symptoms/triggers/treatment.”

“It has allowed me to consider a parents mental health and the impact this can have on the family home.”

#### Supporting GCP2 Assessments:

##### Post-course:

“Will find the tools provided useful in everyday practice.”

“Deeper knowledge of the graded care profile assessments.”

##### Long-term:

“I feel I have gained more confidence to now put into practice and have a clearer understanding.”

### **Introduction to Multi-Agency Learning Conference**

Multi-Agency Learning Conferences are a powerful platform for reflection, collaboration, and professional growth. They bring together practitioners from across the safeguarding system—education, health, police, social care, and the voluntary sector—to share insights, learn from serious case reviews, and strengthen collective understanding of complex safeguarding issues.

The Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership’s annual conference exemplified this approach. By focusing on real-life cases and emerging themes such as neglect, domestic abuse, and equality, diversity and inclusion, the conference fostered a culture of openness and shared responsibility. It enabled professionals to challenge

assumptions, explore best practices, and embed learning into everyday safeguarding work.

These events not only enhance practitioner confidence and competence but also reinforce the importance of working together to protect children and young people. They are a cornerstone of continuous improvement and a testament to the Partnership's commitment to learning-led safeguarding.

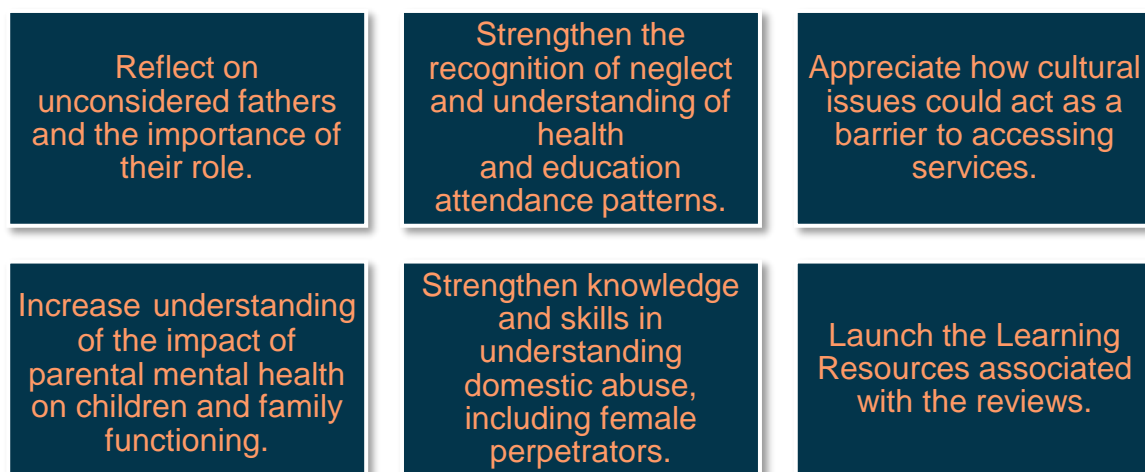
#### Multi-Agency Conference October 2024

The conference focussed on the learning from two child safeguarding practice reviews, focusing on themes such as neglect, domestic abuse, and equality, diversity, and inclusion. The author presented findings on "Child B" and "Child C&D" to over one hundred attendees who contributed to the discussion of these critical issues.

#### Figure 10: Learning Outcomes

The below graphic presents a summary of participant feedback following a series of safeguarding training courses delivered across Stoke-on-Trent. The quotes reflect both immediate post-course impressions and longer-term impacts on professional practice.

These insights demonstrate how training has empowered professionals to better support children and families, and how learning resources linked to reviews have been effectively launched and embedded into practice.



## The Safeguarding Child Practice Review Group

The Safeguarding Child Practice Review Group plays a vital role in ensuring that serious safeguarding incidents lead to meaningful learning and system-wide improvement. Through its rigorous review processes, including Rapid Reviews and Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, the group provides a structured and reflective approach to understanding what happened, why, and how future harm can be prevented. In 2024–2025, the group responded to two deeply concerning incidents with

professionalism and urgency, ensuring that lessons learned were swiftly integrated into practice. Their work not only strengthens accountability but also reinforces the Partnership's commitment to transparency, learning, and child-centred safeguarding.

By working closely with the Learning and Development Subgroup and under the governance of the Quality Assurance Group, the Review Group ensures that findings translate into improved frontline practice, better decision-making, and safer outcomes for children and families across Stoke-on-Trent.

## Safeguarding Child Practice Review Group

The Safeguarding Child Practice Review Group has conducted rapid and Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews during 2024/2025, following two serious incidents: the poisoning of a child by parents with substance misuse issues and the murder of two children in a domestic abuse setting. These led to two Rapid Reviews and two commissioned Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. In Stoke-on-Trent, lessons learned from these reviews have been effectively integrated into practice. The Learning and Development Subgroup communicated this commitment, while the Partnership Quality and Assurance Group has overseen the governance of these activities.

## Safeguarding Learning Objectives by Theme

The below graphic presents a structured overview of key safeguarding learning objectives categorised by theme. It is designed to support practitioners in enhancing their understanding and application of safeguarding principles across complex family contexts.

Figure 11: Safeguarding Learning Objectives

### Safeguarding Learning Objectives by Theme

Theme	Learning Objectives
Neglect and Complex Family Needs	Identify and assess neglect in families with complex Embed and disseminate learning about neglect into Strengthen practitioner skills for critical thinking and
Learning from CSPRs	Improve dissemination of CSPR learning across the Ensure CSPR learning informs universal services ar
Bias and Barriers	Recognise and understand gender bias in assessme Address cultural bias as a barrier to ac-cessing servi
Family Engagement and Mental Health	Engage fathers and male caregivers in assessment Understand the impact of parental mental health on Ensure regular review of mental health medications
Parental Conflict and Emotional Abuse	Understand risk behaviours in parental conflict Identify children as victims of emotional abuse where
Pre-Birth and Historical Impact	Safeguard the unborn child and strength-en pre-birth Understand the impact of parents' history on current Promote professional curiosity and chal-lenge with p

Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews published during the year are readily available on the partnership website, ensuring that stakeholders are well-informed and included in the process. [here](#).

## Learning from Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

Learning from serious incidents and reviews is an ongoing process. During this time, the partnership explored innovative ways to collaborate as a multi-agency effort to enhance practices.

# Education Subgroup

## Strengthening Strategic Engagement with Education Providers

Safeguarding partners have a statutory duty to collaborate with education and child-care providers, as outlined in the Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023) guidance. This guidance emphasizes the critical role of education professionals in protecting children's welfare and their importance within local safeguarding partnerships.

Lead safeguarding partners must create an inclusive environment for schools and education providers in safeguarding discussions, ensuring their input in strategic decisions. In Stoke-on-Trent, the Safeguarding Children Partnership actively involves education providers through a dedicated Education Subgroup, supported by a Department for Education facilitator, to enhance safeguarding strategies.

From April 2024 to March 2025, the Education Subgroup will focus on strengthening safeguarding practices through strategic dialogue and collaboration among education providers and safeguarding partners.

## Key Safeguarding Focus Areas

Figure 12: Key Areas of Focus

The table below summarises the key areas of focus and associated notes for safeguarding initiatives, suitable for inclusion in an annual report.

Key Area of Focus	Notes
Early Years Safeguarding Arrangements	Working with Family Hubs
Section 175 Audit	Digital system being implemented
Current safeguarding priorities and emerg-ing themes in the city	Identified through audit
Member feedback on local issues and concerns	Youth council feedback
Allegations against staff and volunteers	Themes identified – Behaviour Manage-ment
Operation Encompass – supporting chil-dren experiencing domestic abuse	Encompass referrals will include missing children in 2025
Partnership working with the Safer Schools Alliance	Key members of Education Subgroup
Exclusions linked to serious youth violence	Providing supported training for education
Safeguarding training and development	Providing supported training for education
OFSTED safeguarding complaints	Themes identified – Behaviour Manage-ment
CDOP (Child Death Overview Panel) and support for education settings	Providing support for education
Support for schools following summer so-cietal unrest	Providing support for education
Engagement through DSL forums	Updated ESG newsletter

## Policy Development and Practice Improvement

1. A School's Safeguarding Template Policy
2. A Child-on-Child Abuse Policy Template

These resources have supported consistency and clarity in safeguarding practice across education settings.

## Youth Violence and Exclusions

A dedicated working group was established to examine youth violence and exclusions. Findings revealed:

1. A significant proportion of excluded children had not been signposted to early help.
2. Around half of the excluded cohort had identified special educational needs.

This insight has informed the future planning and targeted support strategies.

PSHE Coordinator helping to:

1. Strengthen the quality and appropriateness of safeguarding referrals.
2. Identify emerging safeguarding themes and trends across education settings.

The Education Safeguarding Subgroup has collaborated effectively with education providers, ensuring consistency and accountability in safeguarding procedures. The Stoke-on-Trent Education Safeguarding Lead Officer has represented educational settings in multi-agency meetings, amplifying the voice of school practitioners and facilitating tailored feedback for schools.

A key responsibility of the Lead Officer included coordinating the Section 175 Safeguarding Audit, which has been completed, reinforcing confidence in the Subgroup's efforts. A business case for adopting the 'Phew' audit tool for the 2025/2026 audit has also been finalised.

## Education Safeguarding Officer: Training, Awareness, and Strategic Support

The Education Safeguarding Officer has played a crucial role in supporting schools in Stoke-on-Trent by delivering high-quality safeguarding training and fostering strategic engagement for student safety.

Training and Briefings:

1. Provided Level 1 and Level 4 Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) training and refresher courses.
2. Hosted termly briefings for DSLs on policy updates and emerging safeguarding issues.

## Raising Awareness of Private Fostering

The Officer has actively raised awareness of private fostering among DSLs and enhanced the identification of such arrangements in schools. They have served as a vital link between educational institutions and the wider safeguarding partnership, ensuring DSLs are informed and prepared to handle complex safeguarding scenarios.

## 2024-2025 Multi-agency Education Audit

### Safeguarding in Education: Audit, Support, and Strategic Development

Under Section 175 of the Education Act 2002, local education authorities and school governing bodies must ensure the safeguarding and welfare of children. In Stoke-on-Trent, a recent audit assessed compliance with these duties, covering staff safeguarding and safer recruitment. Completion rates were as follows:

Education Setting	Audit Completion Rate
Primary Schools	70%
Secondary Schools	66%
Special Schools	75%
Alternative Providers	59%

### Targeted Support and Resources

In response to the audit, tailored resources were developed to support high-quality Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education, focusing on issues like criminal exploitation and County Lines for both primary and secondary students. The Supporting Families Service now prioritises school engagement with:

#### School Support Initiatives and Audit Completion Rates (2024–2025)

### Figure 13: Education Audit Completion Rates

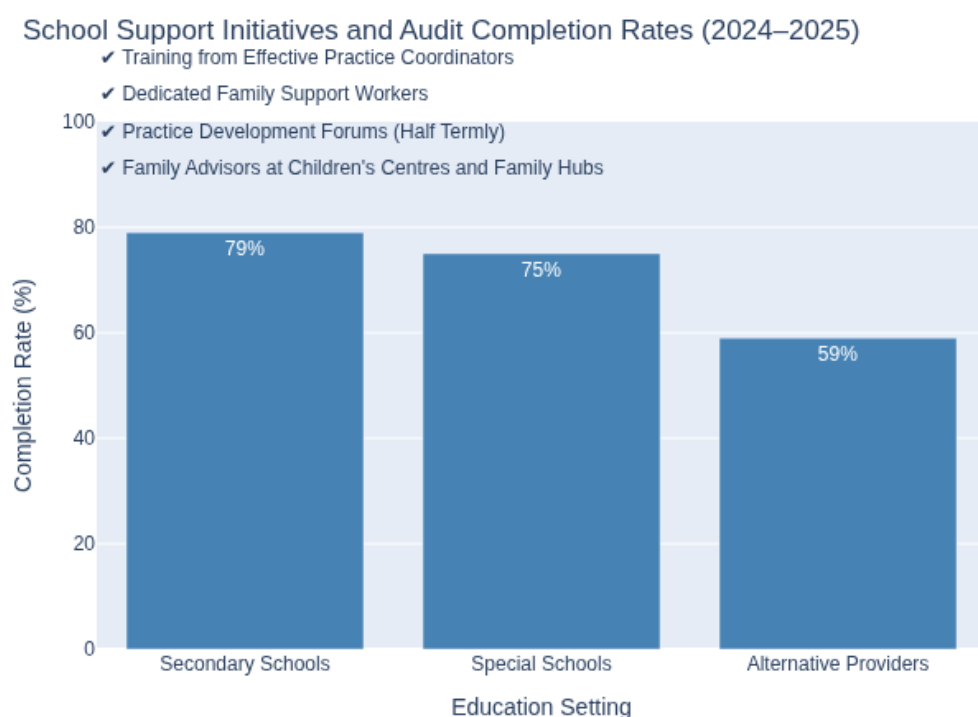
This graphic provides a snapshot of audit completion rates across different education settings in Stoke-on-Trent for the 2024–2025 period. It highlights the level of engagement among **Secondary Schools (79%)**, **Special Schools (75%)**, and **Alternative Providers (59%)** in completing safeguarding audits.

Alongside these figures, the chart outlines key **school support initiatives** that have been implemented to strengthen safeguarding practice. These include:

1. Training from Effective Practice Coordinators
2. Dedicated Family Support Workers
3. Practice Development Forums (held half-termly)
4. Family Advisors based at Children's Centres and Family Hubs

Together, these initiatives aim to build capacity, improve consistency, and ensure that children and families receive timely and effective support. The data reflects both the progress made and areas where further engagement may be needed.





## Looking Ahead to Strategic Developments in Safeguarding

As the Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership prepares for the 2025–2026 period, it continues to build on a foundation of collaboration, innovation, and learning. The next phase of development will be shaped by two key strategic initiatives that aim to enhance multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and deliver more responsive, coordinated support for children and families.

The introduction of a dedicated Child Exploitation and Missing Subgroup will strengthen strategic oversight and ensure that insights from reviews and frontline practice directly inform safeguarding responses. This targeted focus will help agencies work together more effectively to protect vulnerable children.

Alongside this, the launch of the Family First Strategic Change Programme marks a transformative step in how services are delivered. Centred around four pillars, integrated service delivery, early help access, whole-family wellbeing, and multi-disciplinary teams, the programme reflects a commitment to proactive, joined-up support that meets the needs of families before issues escalate.

Together, these developments signal a bold and confident approach to safeguarding, rooted in partnership, prevention, and continuous improvement.

## Providing Help Support & Protection

The Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership (SoTSCP) is committed to placing children and young people at the heart of service design, delivery, and scrutiny. Through the *Be the Cause* Youth Participation Strategy, we have built strong platforms for youth voice, enabling meaningful engagement that shapes local and national strategies. By embedding youth perspectives into safeguarding structures and community partnerships, we ensure services are transparent, accountable, and responsive to the lived experiences of young people. This collaborative approach strengthens safeguarding outcomes and empowers young people to actively influence the support systems around them.

### Youth Voice and Participation: Be the Cause Strategy

In 2021, the Stoke-on-Trent Children, Young People and Families Strategic Partnership Board launched the *Be the Cause* Youth Participation Strategy (2021–2025) to integrate youth voice into service design and delivery. The Stoke-on-Trent Youth Council, representing young people aged 11–18 (up to 25 with SEND), gathers insights that influence local services.

Young people have expressed their concerns and aspirations, leading to collaborative efforts on a new Youth Strategy for the city and the upcoming National Youth Strategy set for launch in Autumn 2025.

The Children's Safeguarding Partnership engages young people through established platforms like the Children in Care Council and School Councils, providing feedback through surveys, discussions, and focus groups.

Going forward, the focus will be on amplifying the voices of children and young people with service experience through targeted engagement activities, including workshops and community outreach. The Partnership is committed to ensuring meaningful youth participation that empowers young people to contribute actively to the services supporting them.

### **Next Steps**

#### Embedding Youth Voice in Scrutiny and Partnership Development

The Delegated Safeguarding Partnership (DSP) have been dedicated to meaningful youth participation by collaborating with Independent Scrutineers to establish a model for young scrutineers. This initiative enhances the voice of children and young people in safeguarding structures, ensuring their experiences inform service development and evaluation.

By engaging young people in scrutiny activities, we aim to improve transparency, accountability, and service relevance, ultimately enhancing service delivery and inclusive decision-making.

The SoTSCP Voluntary and Community Sector Group (SCSG) plays a vital role in ensuring local organisations meet safeguarding responsibilities and promote best practices. Recent achievements include a presentation from the NSPCC on the

Together for Childhood programme, discussions on complex safeguarding cases, and active participation in consultations on the Working Together 2023 guidance. The group also welcomes new members and emphasises community safety and homelessness.

By meeting regularly and sharing information, the SCSG strengthens partnerships and raises safeguarding standards across the sector.

## Family Hubs: Strengthening Communities Through Integrated Support

Stoke-on-Trent's Family Hubs are central to delivering accessible, community-based support for children and families. With a strong multi-agency approach, each of the six hubs reflects the unique cultural needs of its local area, offering tailored services that promote early intervention, child development, and family wellbeing. By embedding the voices of children and families into service planning, the hubs play a vital role in shaping safeguarding priorities and improving outcomes across the city.

The strength of our Family Hubs is their multi-agency approach and central role in communities, linking families to vital services. They have ensured that the voices of children and families influence the SoTSCP. There are six hubs across Stoke-on-Trent, one in each town, strategically located to meet the distinct cultural needs of each community.

### Normacot Family Hub Services

The Normacot Family Hub exemplifies a community-based, multi-agency approach to supporting families. It provides a welcoming space where families can access a wide range of services tailored to their needs.

### Family Hub Services for Children Aged 0–5 Years

Stoke-on-Trent Family Hubs offer a range of early years services designed to support child development and strengthen parent-child relationships. Below is a summary of the key programmes available for children aged 0–5 years:

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Description</b>
Babbling Babies	Music and movement sessions
Sensory Stars	Multi-sensory experiences
Stay and play	Messy play and crafts
Talking Tots & Read	Storytime and early communication
Mini-Movers	Dance and play for younger children

Through its close collaboration with local partners, the Normacot Hub ensured that services have been accessible, culturally sensitive, and responsive to local needs.

Moreover, it played a pivotal role in identifying emerging issues and providing valuable insights for strategic planning.

#### Family Forum: Coordinated Early Help and Referral Management

The Family Forum is a multi-agency meeting where early help referrals made to Family Hubs by local partners are discussed with family consent. This collaborative approach facilitated timely support and helped manage statutory service demands efficiently. Education partners played a crucial role in addressing issues such as anti-social behaviour and bullying, positively impacting referral management and community safety.

Strategic Manager Rachel Dodd (Early Help) highlighted the significant success of the triage process, stating:

“The number of police referrals into the front door from September 2024 to March 2025 has reduced to 2,866, compared to 5,368 during the same period in 2023/24. This is a remarkable achievement and a testament to the effectiveness of our triage process. Let's continue this momentum!”

## Multi-Agency Response to Child Exploitation and Serious Youth Violence

The Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership continues to strengthen its response to child exploitation and serious youth violence through coordinated, multi-agency efforts. In 2024–2025, significant progress was made in identifying risk, improving service integration, and enhancing workforce development. These initiatives reflect a proactive commitment to safeguarding, ensuring that professionals are equipped with the knowledge, tools, and strategic support needed to protect vulnerable children and young people. By fostering collaboration and continuous learning, the Partnership is building a safer, more resilient community.

In 2024–2025, the partnership made significant strides in enhancing practice around the identification and reduction of risks related to violence and exploitation. This progress should make us all proud and encouraged for the future. A more integrated approach was developed, focusing on understanding the demographics of affected young people and improving multi-agency coordination.

A Task and Finish Workforce Development Group was convened to support the re-commissioning of the Child Exploitation and Missing Persons Service. The group mapped out learning and development priorities to ensure staff could access criminal and child sexual exploitation training at the appropriate level, aligned with their roles and responsibilities.

Strategic Progress and Service Enhancements: Keeping You Informed and Involved, at the April 2023 Safeguarding Conference, the following developments were highlighted:

These initiatives reflect a proactive and collaborative approach to safeguarding, ensuring that frontline staff are equipped with the tools, training, and strategic support needed to respond effectively to exploitation and serious youth violence. This approach should reassure you of our commitment and confidence in our initiatives.

## Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Initiatives & Supporting Partnerships

This graphic summarises key initiatives and collaborative efforts undertaken to address child exploitation, highlighting the roles of various agencies and partnerships in prevention, intervention, and community safety.

### Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Initiatives

This section outlines key initiatives undertaken to address child exploitation in Stoke-on-Trent, supported by various strategic partnerships. The redesign presents a structured overview of collaborative efforts, highlighting the breadth and depth of multi-agency engagement.

### Key Initiatives and Supporting Partnerships

<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Supporting Partnership(s)</b>
Establishment of a Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Panel	Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Strategic Partnership (SoTSCP)
Increased capacity for Child Exploitation Coordinators	SoTSCP
Creation of a Child Exploitation Social Work Team	SoTSCP
Creation of a Specialist Police Child Exploitation Team	SoTSCP
Continued investment by the Police into a Violence Reduction Team	SoTSCP & Violence Reduction Alliance (VRA)
Development of a Child Exploitation Tracker	SoTSCP
Delivery of a Youth Conference focused on knife crime	SoTSCP & Community Safety Partnership (CSP)
Launch of an Attachment Aware and Trauma-Informed Pilot (12 schools)	SoTSCP & PSHE
Implementation of a Peer Mentoring Pilot with the Prince's Trust	SoTSCP
Strategic focus on Contextual Safeguarding	SoTSCP
Safer Streets funding	SoTSCP & Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC)
Violence Against Women and Girls initiatives	SoTSCP & OPFCC
Operation Synchro – Safer by Design review of five parks	SoTSCP, CSP & VRA
Review and refinement of the Risk Factor Matrix	SoTSCP

Collaboration with the Tackling Child Exploitation (TCE) Programme	SoTSCP
Monitoring impact of lighting and CCTV on crime displacement	SoTSCP & CSP
Year-round maintenance for CCTV coverage (tree canopy management)	SoTSCP & CSP

## Service Re-design

### Child Exploitation and Missing: Strengthening Multi-Agency Safeguarding

In 2024–2025, the partnership introduced a new multi-agency process that is a significant step forward in protecting young people at risk of exploitation and going missing. This approach prioritises disruption tactics, contextual safeguarding, and collaborative planning to safeguard vulnerable children and disrupt exploiters.

#### Multi-Agency Disruption and Mapping

Bi-weekly disruption and mapping meetings have seen strong attendance from key agencies, including schools, police, and social care. These meetings enable:

1. Timely and effective safeguarding plans
2. Coordinated disruption of exploiters
3. Improved information sharing and joint decision-making

Young people are consulted every eight weeks to ensure their voices inform planning and review.

#### Monitoring and Evaluation

While improvements are still needed in addressing exploitation, the partnership remains unwaveringly committed to progress. In 2024–2025, the partnership self-assessment action plans will be monitored to evaluate their impact on practice and service delivery.

#### Effective Tools and Processes:

1. The Risk Factor Matrix (RFM) and Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) processes have proven effective, with strong attendance and valuable contributions from partners.
2. Enhanced use of complex safeguarding methods and police operations, including Closure Orders and targeted disruption strategies.

#### Wider Support and Strategic Leadership

The Virtual School plays a crucial role in providing trauma-aware education and positive behaviour management, offering support and guidance to schools and other educational institutions. We have actively engaged with third sector providers who offer a

range of positive activities for young people, from sports and arts programs to mentoring and counselling services. Strong governance and leadership from the Community Safety Partnership, including:

1. Data sharing
2. Project commissioning via the Violence Reduction Alliance
3. The Anti-Social Behaviour teams have been instrumental in providing proactive responses to potential exploitation situations, often working in close collaboration with other agencies to ensure a swift and effective intervention. Tailored support through services like the Catalyst Project, offering enhanced short-term and complex support for at-risk children and families.

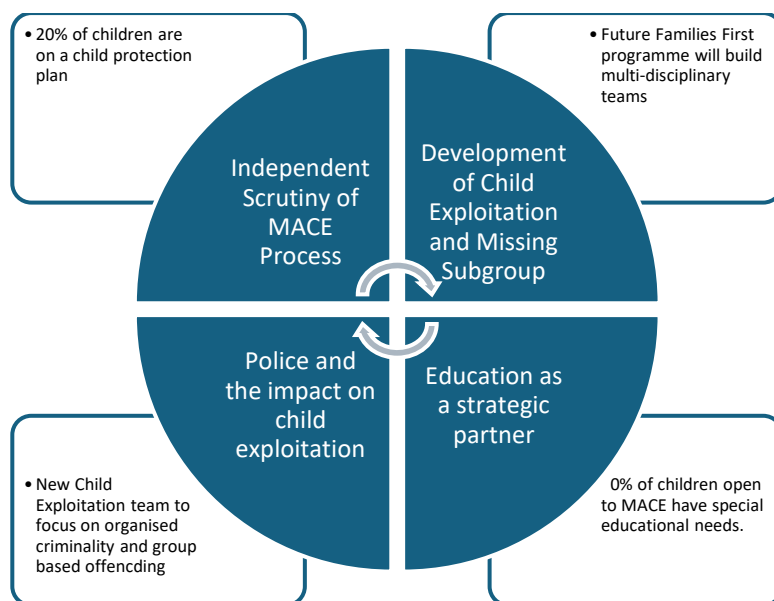
These developments reflect a robust and evolving safeguarding landscape, with a clear focus on prevention, disruption, and multi-agency collaboration.

### Figure 14. Multi-Agency Approach to Child Exploitation

This graphic illustrates the multi-agency approach to tackling **child exploitation** in Stoke-on-Trent, highlighting four strategic pillars that underpin current and future safeguarding efforts. Each quadrant represents a critical area of focus:

1. **Independent Scrutiny of the MACE Process:** Ensuring accountability and oversight, with 20% of children involved currently on a child protection plan.
2. **Development of the Child Exploitation and Missing Subgroup:** Supporting the launch of the *Future Families First* programme, which will embed multi-disciplinary teams to enhance early intervention.
3. **Police and the Impact on Child Exploitation:** Establishing a new Child Exploitation team to target organised criminality and group-based offending.
4. **Education as a Strategic Partner:** Strengthening collaboration with schools, noting that 10% of children open to MACE have special educational needs.

Together, these components reflect a coordinated response to child exploitation, aiming to improve outcomes through partnership, prevention, and targeted support.



## Missing Children

The SoTSCP remains committed to protecting children who go missing from home or care. In the past year, a reduction in missing episodes reflects progress, but the risks remain significant. To address this, a refreshed multi-agency protocol has been introduced, prioritising child safety, swift recovery, and understanding the underlying causes of missing episodes. Developed collaboratively with Staffordshire Police and local authorities, this framework ensures consistent safeguarding practices and reinforces our shared responsibility to protect vulnerable children.

In the past year, 395 children were reported missing from home or care in Stoke-on-Trent, resulting in 1588 episodes. On average, a child in need of support was missing 4 times, showing improvement from 509 missing children and 1810 episodes the previous year.

To address this, a refreshed Missing from Home or Care Protocol was implemented, developed by Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Authorities in collaboration with Staffordshire Police. This protocol emphasised a coordinated multi-agency response with the following safeguarding principles:

1. The child's safety and welfare are paramount.
2. The primary objective is to locate and return the child to a safe environment.
3. The views of the child and their parent/carer must be considered.
4. Understanding the circumstances of the missing episode is essential for reducing future risks.



This framework supports consistent practices across agencies and reinforces the commitment to protecting vulnerable children.

<https://safeguardingchildren.stoke.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/10/staffordshire-stoke-on-trent-missing-protocol-jan22.pdf>

## Multi-agency Response to Child Mental Health

### Safeguarding Assurance and Strategic Oversight

During 2024/25, Designated Safeguarding Partners (DSPs) have sought assurance from partners and evidence of adequate safeguarding arrangements about:

1. Child mental health
2. Suicide prevention

This approach reflected the partnership's unwavering commitment to ensuring that mental health services for children and young people are not only clinically effective but also safeguarding-aware, trauma-informed, and aligned with broader strategic priorities, instilling confidence in the quality of the services.

### Digital Transformation Initiatives

This document presents a redesigned summary of the strategic initiatives under three key themes: Joint Working, Improving Access to Help and Support, and Digitally Enabled Care Pathways. The visual representation has been adapted for clarity and suitability in executive reporting.

### Summary – Where we need to improve

The following graphic illustrates the three strategic themes and their associated initiatives:

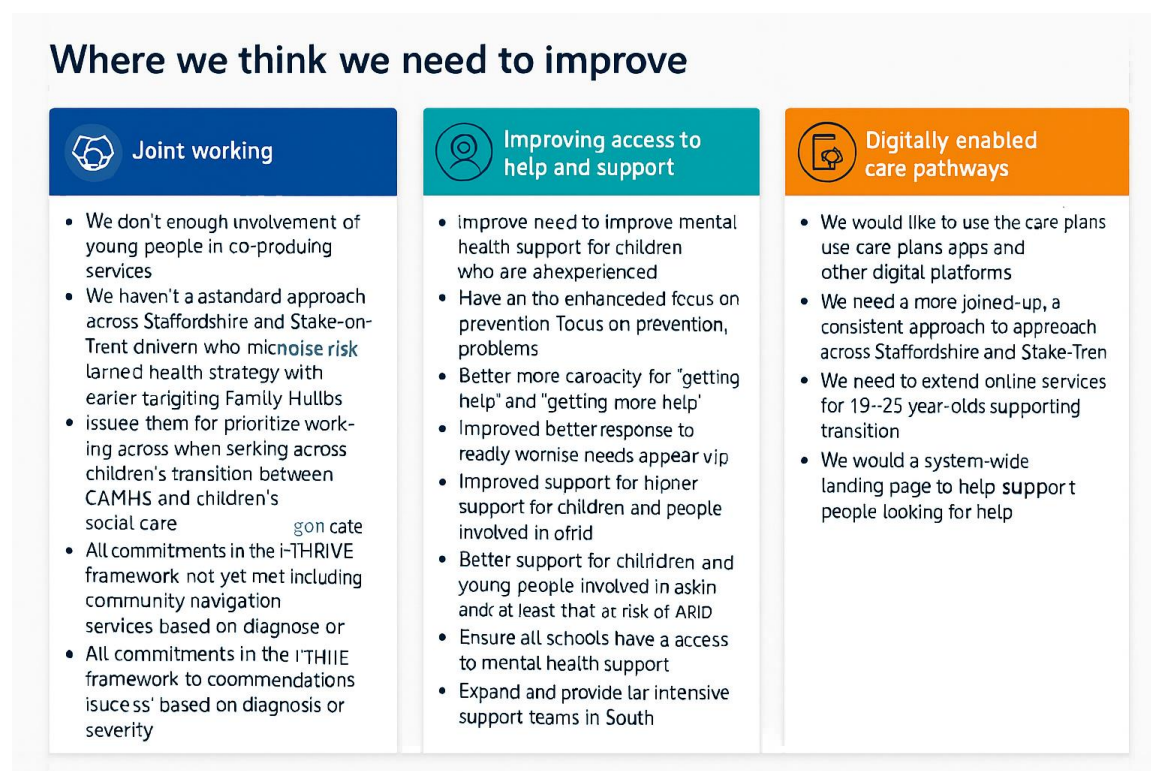
### Figure 15: Key Areas for Improvement

These graphic outlines key areas identified for improvement across the children and young people's mental health and wellbeing system in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. It reflects a collective recognition of gaps in service delivery, coordination, and accessibility, and is structured around three core themes:

1. **Joint Working:** Emphasises the need for better collaboration across agencies, consistent approaches to risk and health strategy, and smoother transitions between services such as CAMHS and social care. It also highlights the importance of involving young people in co-producing services and fully implementing the iTHRIVE framework.
2. **Improving Access to Help and Support:** Focuses on enhancing mental health support, particularly for vulnerable children and young people. Priorities include increasing capacity for early intervention, ensuring all schools have access to mental health services, and expanding intensive support teams.

3. **Digitally Enabled Care Pathways:** Calls for a more integrated digital infrastructure, including care plan apps, online services for young adults, and a unified system-wide landing page to simplify access to support.

This visual summary serves as a strategic prompt for targeted action and system-wide collaboration to improve outcomes for children and families.



## Children's Mental Health Improvements

The following graphic illustrates key improvements and initiatives in children's mental health. This visual summary is designed to support executive-level understanding and decision-making.

Figure:16 Where are we Now

This graphic provides a high-level overview of the current strengths and progress made across the children and young people's mental health system in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. It is structured around three key pillars:




- **Joint Working:** Highlights the establishment of a multi-agency improvement group and subgroups that include local authorities, NHS providers, education, and voluntary sector partners. It also showcases strong collaboration through networks such as the Mental Health Leads in Education, which offer guidance, training, and shared tools.
- **Improving Access to Help and Support:** Demonstrates increased access to mental health services for children and young people, supported by initiatives like the Children and Families Single Point of Access (CaFSPA), intensive

support teams, and virtual consultations. Schools across the region are receiving targeted mental health support, backed by dedicated funding.

- **Digitally Enabled Care Pathways:** Reflects the growing availability of digital mental health services, including one-to-one support and award-winning platforms. While progress has been made, the graphic also acknowledges the need for a more joined-up digital approach and expanded access for children and young people.

This summary serves as a foundation for understanding current system capabilities and identifying areas for further development.

## Where are we now?

 <b>Joint working</b>	 <b>Improving access to help and support</b>	 <b>Digitally enabled care pathways</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have an active CYP Mental Health improvement Group</li> <li>• We gather a multi-agency being subgroups available across Local authorities, local NHS providers, VCs providers, education, and</li> <li>• Have a multi-agency subgroup key issues</li> <li>• Have a strong subcommunication that include guidance, and training providing local members, including atwars, ascoars, toots</li> <li>• Good liaison with partners providers including discussions</li> <li>• Have established a Mental-Health Leads in Education Network providing guidance, and training, covering various topics and tools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have increased the number of children and young people accessing mental health support</li> <li>• Have a single point of access for proven provision providers</li> <li>• Our new Children and Families Single Point of Access (GAFSPA) provides advice and advice advice and support teams</li> <li>• Schools across both Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent receive mental health support funding for 2023/24 for 2023/24</li> <li>• All four CYP mental health services in place</li> <li>• Intensive Support teams available</li> <li>• Local providers offer virtual consultations in addition to one-to-one</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There a range of digital offers across providers including one-to-one support and award-winning</li> <li>• We need a more joined-up, a consistent approach to across Staffordshire and Stoke-Tren</li> <li>• We need to expand access via digital offers such as</li> <li>• Children young people access services</li> <li>• Children and young people access services digitally</li> </ul>

## Police Violent Reduction Team

### Violence Reduction Alliance - A Public Health Approach

In response to the growing need for a coordinated and trauma-informed approach to reducing violence among young people, the Violence Reduction Alliance (VRA) has adopted a public health framework that prioritises prevention, early intervention, and integrated support. This approach recognises the long-term impact of trauma and aims to mitigate its effects by fostering safer communities and improving individual wellbeing. Building on this foundation, a series of targeted initiatives have been launched to support vulnerable children and young adults across Stoke-on-Trent.

**Naomi Smith violence lead for Office of Police, Fire, Crime Commissioner.**

The VRA public health approach focuses on identifying effective strategies to prevent violence and reduce its harms, emphasising the importance of avoiding trauma and its adverse effects to improve community safety (Wilson, 2022). In 2023, the VRA commissioned Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust (MPFT) to pilot a Wellbeing Service for individuals in the VRT cohort. This service started in July 2024, with referrals beginning in October 2024. It employs a mixed model approach that includes mental health assessments, consideration of neurodiversity, and psychologically informed interventions.

In collaboration with the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Violence Reduction Alliance, the Police and Health colleagues have introduced a dedicated Mental Health Support Nurse to assist the Violence Reduction Team (VRT) in Stoke-on-Trent. This initiative targets children and young adults aged 14–24, aiming to reduce violence risk through early intervention and trauma-informed care.

The VRT partners with agencies including Children's Services and the NHS to help individuals who are vulnerable to exploitation, disengaged from education, or at risk of criminality. Operating since 2020, the team has shifted from a traditional policing focus to a public health-led strategy, emphasising Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary prevention methods.

A multi-agency process has been implemented to safeguard at-risk youth, featuring bi-weekly meetings for coordinated support. Young people are consulted every eight weeks to inform service delivery.

### **Trauma-Informed Multi-Agency Strategy**

#### **Figure 16: Identified Notable strengths**

The following graphic summarises the notable strengths of the trauma-informed, multi-agency strategy aimed at prevention, disruption, and long-term support for vulnerable children and young people.



## **Notable strengths**

- Use of the Risk Factor Matrix (RFM) and Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) processes.
- Support from the Virtual School for trauma-aware education.
- Engagement with third-sector providers for positive activities.
- Strong governance through the Community Safety Partnership
- Enhanced support for at-risk children and better information sharing across agencies.

This approach fosters a trauma-informed, multi-agency strategy focused on prevention, disruption, and long-term support.

## **Public-Health Approaches to Safeguarding Children: A Whole-System Response**

Public-health approaches to safeguarding children focus on prevention, early intervention, and systemic collaboration to reduce harm and promote wellbeing. Rather than responding solely to individual cases, this model addresses the wider social, environmental, and economic factors that contribute to risk. By using data to identify patterns and targeting resources where they are most needed, public-health safeguarding enables services to work together more effectively—across education, health, social care, and community sectors.

This approach empowers communities, strengthens resilience, and ensures that safeguarding is not just reactive but proactive. It values the voice of children and families, promotes equity, and supports long-term change by tackling root causes of vulnerability. In Stoke-on-Trent, embedding public-health principles into safeguarding practice helps create safer environments where all children can thrive.

### **Primary:**

Karl Breen from Stoke-on-Trent reported on Operation Synchro, which has improved local parks through several initiatives:

1. Paul Evison and his team are clearing overgrown areas and repairing or removing damaged property to enhance park safety and visibility.
2. Anthony Wild has trained park staff on recognising and reporting concerns related to community safety.
3. CCTV and lighting are being installed in parks with Safer Streets funding to enhance safety for women and girls.
4. The Community Safety team is working with youth providers to increase activities in parks and repurpose vacant buildings.
5. Chit Chat 4 U continues weapon sweeps as a tribute to the Knife Angel.
6. Police have assigned PCSOs for evening walkthroughs, shown to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.

Data from Staffordshire Police indicates that Operation Synchro has led to a reduction of 40% in reported incidents and a 60% reduction in serious violence. Reassuringly there has been a sizable increase in foot traffic in the parks.

Feedback from Family in Longton Park Stoke-on-Trent

“The investment in the park has been fantastic. The CCTV and lighting have created a safe place for the kids to play. With the help of the police and council it feels like the park has become ours again. The heart of our community that we all can enjoy”

### **Secondary:**



In partnership with the Police and Fire Crime Commissioner, the Violence Reduction Team, and the Community Safety Partnership, the SoTSCP brought the Knife Angel to Stoke-on-Trent in 2022. Over 600 children visited this impressive installation at the Smithfield building in Hanley Town Centre

### Figure 17: Stoke-on-Trent Visit of the Knife Angel

This powerful image captures a moment of reflection and community engagement in front of **The Knife Angel**; a nationally recognised sculpture created from over 100,000 confiscated knives. Standing as a striking symbol against knife crime and violence, the Knife Angel serves as a poignant reminder of the impact of serious violence on individuals, families, and communities.

The presence of musicians in the image suggests a commemorative poignant awareness-raising event, blending art and performance to foster dialogue and healing. Set against a backdrop of modern architecture and a sunset sky, the scene evokes both solemnity and hope, reinforcing the importance of collective action in tackling youth violence and promoting safer communities.



In 2024 the legacy of the visit of the Knife Angel has resulted in further serious violence prevention activity taking place.

A proposal was completed in 2024 to install emergency bleed control kits in public parks across the region, thanks to local partnerships and data from West Midlands

Ambulance Service (WMAS). Chit Chat 4 U will fund the cabinets, while WMAS provides the kits. These resources aim to enhance public safety and resilience, serving a variety of emergencies beyond knife-related incidents. This initiative reflects our commitment to community well-being and proactive harm reduction.

Feedback from a member of our community

“I was worried when I first saw the bleed kits but the kind worker from the ambulance service took the time to explain why they had been put in place and how vital they were to try and save lives. I now pass on the message to any one I see. I am really pleased that this positive approach to improve the safety of our community has been made”

### **Training video on how to use the kits:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRmt5E8b1lg>

A daily multi-agency meeting in Stoke-on-Trent gathers key partners, including Staffordshire Police, Children’s Services, NHS representatives, and Catch-22, to address children at risk of violence or exploitation. This initiative promotes shared safeguarding responsibilities, with concerns assigned to a lead officer of at least Inspector rank. This collaborative, intelligence-led approach ensures timely intervention and enhances protection for vulnerable children.

### **Tertiary:**

Collaborative Support for Vulnerable Children in Stoke-on-Trent

The Violence Reduction Team (VRT), Youth Offending Service (YOS), and Project Catalyst collaborate to support vulnerable children in Stoke-on-Trent. Their goal is to minimize risks from exploitation and violence by providing coordinated and preventative interventions that address both immediate dangers and underlying vulnerabilities.

The impact of the team has been significant. They manage over 30 children who are at risk of causing or suffering serious violence. By focusing on drivers for change they are having a positive impact on them as individuals and reducing the chance of harm to them and others.

In 2024-2025 Stoke-on-Trent saw a stabilisation in knife crime data recorded for children aged 14-17 years within Stoke-on-Trent which compared favourably with regional and National data which unfortunately recorded knife crime increases for children aged 14-17 years.

### **Lauren – Mental Health Clinical Associate seconded to Stoke-on-Trent’s VRT**

Psychological Support within the Violence Reduction Team: Impact and Outcomes

Since launching in October 2024, the psychological consultation service within the Violence Reduction Team (VRT) has handled ninety cases. Of these, twenty-seven progressed to referrals, with ten cases successfully discharged due to positive outcomes or effective advocacy through indirect support. Some cases showed that even with declined support, the psychological guidance provided was beneficial to VRT officers.

Currently, fifteen cases remain open, with ongoing work continuing and outcomes monitored through self-reported and practitioner-rated measures, which indicate overall improvement. A full-service evaluation will be conducted in winter 2025/26 to assess impact and guide future development.

One notable case involved M, an 18-year-old who faced significant instability and criminal exploitation after leaving kinship care. Through a five-month intervention combining Dialectical Behaviour Therapy and reflective consultation, M improved his self-esteem and emotional regulation. He accessed necessary medication and engaged positively with support, leading to successful discharge and notable reductions in symptoms. M is now in full-time employment and pursuing his driving licence, showcasing the effective, trauma-informed approach of our collaborative team. This work highlights our commitment to supporting at-risk young people and demonstrates the pride in our shared achievements.

Feedback from 'M'

"The staff within the violence team are decent. I can hardly believe that some of them are police as they are really understanding. They have always been there for me as I have tried to stay away from trouble. The chance to speak to trained professionals from health, catch 22 and the DWP have improved my chances and my state of mind and helped me to control my temper. I am now in an apprenticeship and staying away from trouble"

## **Enforcement**

Staffordshire Police: A Pivotal Year for Public Protection in 2024

In 2024, Staffordshire Police enhanced its Public Protection capabilities by investing in and restructuring its teams. They established two dedicated Child Exploitation and Missing Persons Teams—one for Staffordshire and one for Stoke-on-Trent. Operating under a unified command with the Violence Reduction Team, they focus on safeguarding vulnerable children through a coordinated, intelligence-led approach. This model is part of the region's public health strategy, emphasising multi-agency collaboration to tackle exploitation and reduce harm.

## **Neglect**

Tackling Neglect: Strengthening Early Identification and Intervention



Neglect remains the most prevalent form of child abuse in the UK, with long-term consequences for children's health, development, and emotional wellbeing. Recognising its often-hidden nature, the Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership is committed to improving early identification and intervention. By adopting evidence-based tools like the NSPCC's Graded Care Profile 2 (GCP2), professionals are better equipped to assess parenting capacity, understand family needs, and take timely action. This proactive approach ensures that children receive the support they need before harm escalates, reinforcing our shared responsibility to safeguard every child's right to safety and care.

Neglect occurs when a parent or caregiver fails to meet a child's basic physical and emotional needs, affecting their health, safety, and well-being. In the UK, neglect is the most common form of child abuse and a leading reason for children entering Child Protection Plans. Its impact on child development can be profound and long-lasting, often going unnoticed until significant harm has occurred.

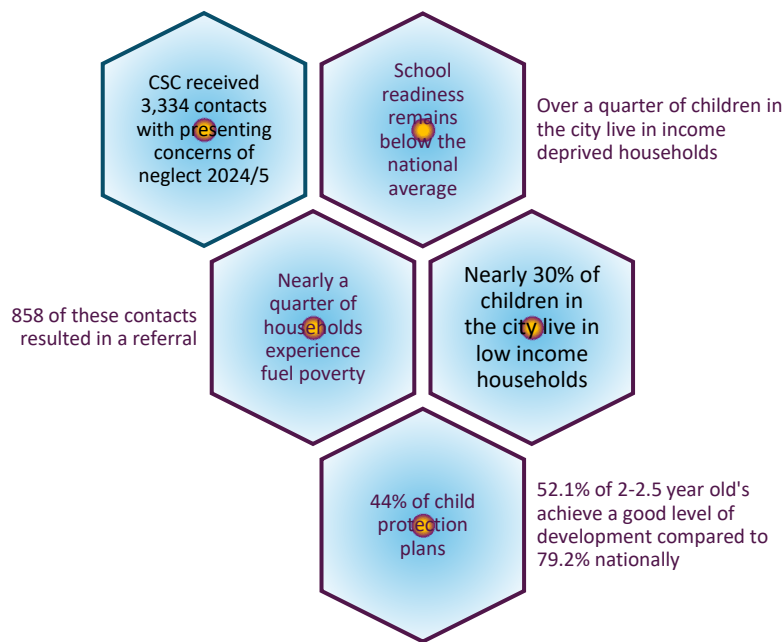
To combat this, we are using the NSPCC Graded Care Profile 2 (GCP2), an assessment tool that helps professionals recognise and respond to neglect. GCP2 has proven effective in cases of suspected neglect, allowing practitioners to make informed decisions and identify families' support needs.

To implement this approach, 'Train the Trainer' champions are providing training to ensure that professionals have the skills and confidence to identify neglect early and intervene effectively, ultimately improving outcomes for children and families.

## **Key Child Welfare Statistics**

### **Figure 18: Child Welfare in Stoke-on-Trent**

This graphic summarises key indicators of child welfare in the region, highlighting areas of concern and developmental challenges. The data reflects the socio-economic and developmental landscape affecting children and families and is intended to support strategic planning and targeted interventions.



## Strengthening the Multi-Agency Response to Childhood Neglect

In 2024/25, significant progress was achieved in addressing childhood neglect in Stoke-on-Trent. A total of one hundred and ninety-nine practitioners received training in the Graded Care Profile 2 (GCP2) assessment tool, leading to fifty-three assessments completed by Children's Social Care, up from thirty-nine the previous year.

Practitioners now have access to various resources on Neglect via Neglect ([stoke.gov.uk](http://stoke.gov.uk)), and the Neglect Strategy will undergo a crucial review by the refreshed Neglect Steering Group in 2025/26 to align with best practices.

The Partnership Annual Conference in October 2024, which included insights from recent Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, highlighted our commitment to continuous improvement in addressing Neglect. Independent Scrutineer Val Jones is leading a scrutiny activity to refine our response, with findings to be included in the 2025/26 annual report.

Despite a growing number of trained practitioners, completed assessments remain low. Our focus for 2024/25 will be on embedding GCP2 in everyday practice, enhancing its usage, and evaluating its impact on children's outcomes. This reflects our ongoing dedication to improving support for children and families.

## Domestic Abuse

The Pan Staffordshire Domestic Abuse Strategy is overseen by the Domestic Abuse Board, which includes the Safeguarding Children Partnership. In 2024/25, three training sessions were held, attended by 70 professionals across various sectors, facilitated by New Era. The training focused on recognising children as victims/survivors per the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

Looking ahead to 2025/26, the Partnership will contribute to the Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment and update the Staffordshire Strategy. New Era and Glow continue to provide support services for affected families. Domestic abuse will also be a key focus for independent scrutiny, ensuring commitment to improvement and accountability.

## Domestic Abuse Training Statistics Involving Children

Figure 19: Domestic abuse involving children

This graphic summarises key statistics related to domestic abuse involving children, highlighting projected impact and contact volumes for the year 2024–25.



## Professionalising the Multi-Agency Response to Domestic Abuse

In 2024, Staffordshire Police recognised the need to enhance their response to domestic abuse, leading to the launch of Operation DARE. This initiative reviewed over 4,000 active domestic abuse cases to assess investigation quality and multi-agency practices.

One key finding was the management of multi-agency referrals, highlighting that many families identified through Police Protection Notices (PPNs) did not receive necessary support, resulting in repeated police involvement and increased risks for children. The review also indicated that officers conducted risk assessments in isolation, leading to unnecessary referrals to Children's Services.

In response, new procedures were implemented to improve multi-agency decision-making and ensure timely support for families. This initiative aims to reduce risks, enhance referral quality, and foster coordinated safeguarding efforts.

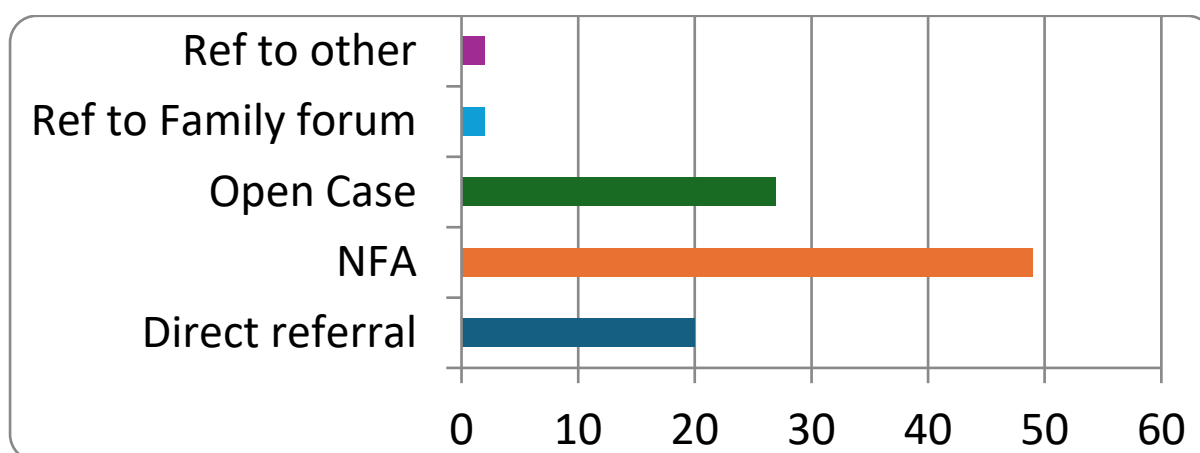
The Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership collaborated with Staffordshire Police to introduce a multi-agency triage process within the Stoke-on-Trent Harm Reduction Hubs. This system improves discussions at referral points and allows for quick access to appropriate services.

Now, every PPN is triaged daily, reducing pressure on the integrated Front Door and ensuring timely support for families without needing statutory intervention. This collaborative approach strengthens relationships and delivers appropriate assistance to Stoke-on-Trent families.

### Referral Categories Overview

The chart below illustrates the distribution of referral categories, highlighting the frequency of each type. This visual representation supports strategic decision-making by identifying areas of high referral activity.

Figure 20: Police data following introduction of triage process



Key insights:

1. 'NFA' (No Further Action) is the most frequent referral category.
2. 'Open Case' and 'Direct referral' also show significant activity.
3. Lower frequencies are observed in 'Ref to Family forum' and 'Ref to other'

## Safeguarding Children 0-2 Years

### Early Safeguarding and Infant Protection: Strengthening Practice Through Learning

The Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership continues to enhance early safeguarding practice by embedding learning from Child Safeguarding Practice

Reviews into frontline guidance and training. Recent updates to the bruising in non-mobile babies guidance reflect a renewed commitment to protecting the most vulnerable, ensuring professionals have clear, accessible protocols to follow.

Alongside this, the rollout of the nationally recognised ICON programme, *Babies Cry, You Can Cope*, is equipping parents and carers with vital knowledge to manage infant crying and reduce the risk of abusive head trauma. This initiative is already making a positive impact across the city.

To further support early intervention, the multi-agency pre-birth pathway has been revised to improve clarity and consistency in referral routes. Regular training led by the Designated Doctor ensures professionals are confident and well-informed in safeguarding unborn and newborn children.

### Multi-Agency Response

As part of our learning from a recent Child Safeguarding Practice Review, the guidance on bruising in non-mobile babies has been reviewed and updated. This revised guidance has been published on the Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership website under the Resources section, ensuring accessibility for all professionals.

Furthermore, the Partnership is actively rolling out ICON training across Stoke-on-Trent. This initiative, aimed at raising awareness of the ICON message: *Babies Cry, You Can Cope*, is making a significant impact. The nationally recognised programme supports parents and carers in managing infant crying and reducing the risk of abusive head trauma. More information and resources are available at ICON – *Babies Cry, You Can Cope*. This inspiring work is motivating us all to do more for our community's infants.

To further strengthen early safeguarding, the multi-agency pre-birth pathway has been revised and updated to ensure referral routes are clear, consistent, and easy to navigate. Regular training sessions are delivered by the Designated Doctor, covering:

1. ICON principles
2. Non-accidental injuries in children under five
3. Pre-birth safeguarding processes

These sessions aim to build knowledge and confidence across the workforce in identifying and responding to early signs of harm.

In response to findings from the Child Death Overview Panel, the Partnership has also supported city-wide awareness campaigns on safe sleeping and water safety for children. Looking ahead, a simulated Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI) event took place. This practical and immersive learning experience is designed to enhance practitioners' understanding and response in such tragic circumstances.

The Child Death Review (CDR) Process is essential for safeguarding children and improving public health. It involves reviewing and analysing the circumstances surrounding child deaths to identify factors that can enhance child welfare and safety. The CDR process aims to:

1. Document and analyse each child's death to confirm causes and identify contributing factors for prevention.
2. Make recommendations to organisations to promote children's health and safety.
3. Produce an annual report detailing patterns, lessons learned, and actions taken.
4. Contribute to initiatives aimed at improving learning from child death reviews.

Understanding the patterns and causes of child deaths is critical to informing effective safeguarding strategies and improving outcomes for children and families. This section presents key findings from Stoke-on-Trent for the 2024–2025 period, highlighting demographic trends, age-related risks, and contributing factors. These insights support the Partnership's commitment to reducing preventable child deaths through targeted interventions, enhanced training, and collaborative multi-agency efforts.

### **Key Findings: Stoke-on-Trent 2024–2025**

1. Total child deaths reported: 24
2. As in previous years, the highest risk of death remains among infants under the age of one, particularly within the first 27 days of life, followed by the 28–364 days age bracket.
3. Across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, the most significant proportion of child deaths involved children under one year of age.
4. There has been a significant increase (32%) in deaths among teenagers aged 10–17, primarily due to road traffic collisions (RTCs) and suicide, compared to the previous reporting period.
5. An increase in unexpected deaths was noted across the local areas.
6. Consistent with national trends, over half of the death notifications were for male children.
7. The most common ethnic groups were White British and White Any Other Background, followed by Asian/Asian British Pakistani.
8. The most frequent location for the onset of illness was the home, followed by the labour ward.

These findings guide local safeguarding efforts and training, reflecting the Partnership's dedication to reducing preventable child deaths and improving outcomes for families in Stoke-on-Trent.

## **Child Death Overview Panel: Identifying Modifiable Factors to Prevent Future Deaths**

As part of the Child Death Review Process, the collaboration between Child Death Overview Panels (CDOPs) and stakeholders is essential for identifying and recording contributory factors in child deaths. Modifiable factors are those where interventions could reduce the risk of future child deaths.

In Stoke-on-Trent, among the 28 child deaths reviewed, 12 cases had modifiable factors, often involving multiple issues. Notably, in six cases, English was not the mother's first language, highlighting the importance of accessible communication.

The age groups most associated with modifiable factors were:

1. 0–27 days
2. 28–365 days

Common modifiable factors included maternal smoking, maternal obesity, and unsafe sleep environments. The Partnership aims to address key concerns by monitoring child death rates, especially among the most deprived areas, and investigating increases in unexpected deaths, such as suicides in children and young people.

Additionally, immersive child death simulation training has been developed to enhance the response quality from various agencies following a child's death. This training is vital for informed interventions, effective public health messaging, and ultimately improving outcomes for children and families in the region.

Figure 21: Infant Mortality Statistics

This graphic presents a visual summary of contributing factors associated with infant mortality in Stoke-on-Trent. Each element highlights a specific risk identified through child death reviews, ranging from parental behaviours and environmental conditions to gaps in service engagement. The data underscores the importance of targeted interventions in areas such as antenatal care, substance misuse, and safe sleeping practices. By identifying these recurring themes, the Partnership aims to inform preventative strategies and improve outcomes for infants and families across the region.



## Funding Arrangements and Resourcing

### Funding Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements

Under Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023), Lead Safeguarding Partners must agree on funding to effectively deliver the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA). This funding enhances safeguarding practice in Stoke-on-Trent and ensures essential resources are in place.

#### Key funding areas include:

1. Business and analytical support for data-informed decision-making
2. Independent scrutiny for transparency and improvement
3. Core infrastructure and operational function
4. Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRs) for learning and system change
5. Multi-agency training to build workforce capability



This commitment reflects the Partnership’s dedication to strong, collaborative safeguarding arrangements that meet the needs of children, families, and communities.

Figure 22: MASA Financial Contribution 2024-2025

The following table outlines the financial contributions made by key partners to support safeguarding initiatives across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent during the 2024–2025 period. These investments reflect a shared commitment to improving outcomes for children and families through collaborative, multi-agency efforts.

Staffordshire Police	£44,990
Stoke-on-Trent City Council	£121,739
Total	£264,650

Next Steps

Suggested Safeguarding Partnership Roadmap: 2025–2026

This strategic framework outlines the Partnership’s vision and priorities for safeguarding children in Stoke-on-Trent. Centred around three strategic pillars—Learning in Practice, Amplifying Voices, and Strengthening Safeguarding—the graphic illustrates the phased actions planned for 2025 and 2026. Supported by key enablers and measurable outcomes, this roadmap reflects a commitment to continuous improvement, collaboration, and child-centred practice.

Figure 23: MASA Vision for 2025-2026

This graphic outline the strategic vision and priorities guiding safeguarding efforts for children and families in Stoke-on-Trent. At its core is a commitment to **protect and empower every child** through learning, amplifying voices, and strengthening safeguarding practices.

The framework is structured around four key pillars:

**Embedding Learning in Practice:** Launching a multi-agency learning framework and digital repository, supported by quarterly events to promote shared understanding and continuous improvement.

**Amplifying the Voices of Children:** Co-designing engagement tools and establishing a Children & Families Advisory Panel to ensure lived experiences shape service development.

**Strengthening Safeguarding Arrangements:** Reviewing protocols, enhancing data-sharing and training, and launching a safeguarding dashboard to improve coordination and visibility.

**Enablers for Success:** Focusing on governance, workforce wellbeing, and technology to support effective implementation.

Progress will be measured through key performance indicators such as reduced repeat concerns, increased engagement, and improved practitioner confidence—ensuring that safeguarding is both impactful and responsive to the needs of children and families.



## Conclusion

The 2024–2025 reporting year has been significant for the Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership, characterised by innovation, resilience, and collaboration. The Partnership has shown a strong commitment to improvement through initiatives like multi-agency training, youth engagement and targeted strategies to address neglect, domestic abuse, and child exploitation. Enhanced scrutiny mechanisms and expanded Family Hubs have improved our response to the needs of children and families.

This report highlights our progress and the ongoing challenges, such as the development of the Families First programme. Moving into 2025–2026, our focus will be on embedding learning in practice, amplifying the voices of children and families, and ensuring strong safeguarding arrangements. Together, we aim to create a system that protects and empowers every child in Stoke-on-Trent.

# Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

SoTSCP	Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership
DSP	Delegated Safeguarding Partner
GCP2	Graded Care Profile 2
MASA	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements
MACE	Multi-Agency Child Exploitation
PPN	Police Protection Notice
SUDI	Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy
VRT	Violence Reduction Team
CDOP	Child Death Overview Panel
ICON	Babies Cry, You Can Cope (national programme)
LSP	Lead Safeguarding Partner
HMICFRS	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
CAFCASS	Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
MPFT	Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust
NSCHCT	North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare Trust
DSL	Designated Safeguarding Lead
PSHE	Personal, Social, Health and Economic education
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
RFM	Risk Factor Matrix
CSPR	Child Safeguarding Practice Review
WMAS	West Midlands Ambulance Service
VRA	Violence Reduction Alliance
YOS	Youth Offending Service