

2022 – 23 SUNDERLAND SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL UPDATE REPORT

INTRODUCTION

This summary report provides an update to the 2021-22 Sunderland Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) annual report, to reflect on the progress made in 2022-23.

The SSCP ensures that the coordination of effective arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, is equally shared by the Chief Executive of Sunderland Council, the Chief Clinical Officer and Accountable Officer of North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB), and the Chief Constable of Northumbria Police.

The SSCP's Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) provide a streamlined structure for the Partnership with a strong focus on learning and improvement. The Practitioner Forum is an embedded function of the partnership and provides a clear line of sight for our senior leaders to frontline practice and the impact this is having on children, young people and families. The Forum provides a clear mechanism to 'deep dive' into an area of concern and to develop new ways of working and improve outcomes for children, young people and families, with their voice underpinning all processes.

As part of our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements and in line with Working Together 2018, we are required to publish an annual report. This is our third Annual Report, and it sets out:

1. 2023 Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) findings
2. 2022/23 delivery against SSCP Business Plan
3. The training offer we have provided to ensure the Sunderland workforce is better equipped to support the children, young people and families who need it.
4. Reflections from the Independent Scrutineer

Working Together 2023 launched in December 2023, outside of the time period this report is focused on. The 2023/24 annual report will detail how Sunderland will be implementing the changes within this guidance.

PARTNERS' FOREWORD

The SSCP has worked hard to continue to improve outcomes for children, young people and families against the backdrop of complex challenges including the cost of living crisis, international conflict, and ongoing Covid-19 recovery which will continue to impact for years to come.

Building on the success of implemented actions in 2021/22 the partnership has continued in 2022/23 to put in place actions and processes that we truly believe will make a difference for children, young people and families.

Through changes implemented in 2021/22 the SSCP has utilised 2022/23 to embed new services and support workers to enable young people to have access to direct support for relationship and sexual health advice, as well as continued access to Sunderland's prevention bus, Wear Here 4 You. The prevention bus has been invaluable in connecting with young people, providing them with a safe space, and delivering prevention services, information, advice, and guidance. Through its delivery model, it has also enabled a strengthening of relationships between teams and organisations.

In 2021/22, Together for Children piloted a Young Person's Team to work directly with vulnerable teenagers who are experiencing harm outside the home. This is now embedded practice, and is having a positive impact for families. The team works with smaller numbers of families so can spend more time building positive relationships with young people, and parents and carers are engaged as they feel supported rather than judged. In 2022/23, aligned to the work of this team, a multi-agency Young Person's Plan was introduced – an alternative to a child protection plan which focuses on working directly with young people themselves, rather than changes to parental behaviours.

Alongside this new embedded practice, our Practitioner Forum remains in place and is valued by practitioners from across the partnership as a way to ensure learning drives forward improvements. The forum sessions will form a key vehicle to determine and drive forward learning and recommendations in 2023/24.

Relevant and needs-led training has also been delivered and disseminated across the Sunderland workforce, with 100 training sessions taken place through the partnership, sharing skills and learning with 1933 professionals from a range of key agencies.

A Joint Targeted Area Inspection took place in January 2023, which concluded that our multi-agency response to families and children that need help, had a number of core strengths as well as areas for further development, including a need for more consideration about the ethnic identity, cultural heritage and religious needs of children within processes. Partners worked together to develop an action plan in response to the JTAI, and these actions will be reflected in the next SSCP business plan due to be developed in 2024/25.

Much has been achieved in 2022/23 but as ever, there is no room for complacency; there are still so many challenges, including those reflected within the JTAI. Relationships within the partnership have strengthened over the last six years, but more work can be done to further strengthen communication pathways and to respond to new and emerging issues including those identified within the JTAI. Implementing Working Together 2023 will provide a timely opportunity to reflect on our processes both within Sunderland and across our regional footprint.

Key areas of focus for 2023/24 will include culture and diversity, as well as ensuring the voice of the family is front and centre of partnership decisions and processes.

As mentioned, the work of the SSCP is set in the backdrop of the worst cost of living crisis this country has seen for around 40 years. We know the pressure that this puts on families, particularly those that are already vulnerable, with increased complexity to the challenges being faced. We need to be prepared for potential further increases in demand and further complexities.

By delivering on our mission of

“High Support, High Challenge – Working together; making a difference; safeguarding children.”

we will improve the lives of the most vulnerable children and young people in Sunderland.

1. JOINT TARGETED AREA INSPECTION 2023

In the recent Joint Targeted Area Inspection which took place in January 2023, our multi-agency response to families and children that need help was found to have a number of core strengths as well as areas for further development which will be reflected in the next SSCP business plan. A summary of the findings from this inspection can be found [here](#)

The headline findings from this inspection were:

“Sunderland Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSP) arrangements are well established and effective. Leaders have an accurate understanding of the needs of vulnerable children in their local area. They are fully cognisant of the importance of addressing children’s needs early. LSP strategic arrangements are closely aligned with local universal and voluntary organisations, ensuring a clear understanding and shared approach to prioritising and meeting children’s needs. Partners work persistently and creatively together in an environment of significant and extensive local deprivation to coordinate and deliver an array of multi-agency early help services that are successfully reducing harm and preventing risks to most children receiving services from escalating.

Enthusiastic, experienced early help frontline practitioners provide sensitive and innovative child-centred interventions. Parents receive respectful and thoughtful services, which help them to think differently about how they parent their children. Consequently, many are enabled to provide safer and more confident daily care. Thresholds of risk, need and harm to children are understood, leading to most children swiftly receiving a proportionate level of help that is child-centred. Leaders accept that more work is needed to ensure that all partner agencies are routinely informed and included in decisions and meetings about the next steps required to help children and families. Staffing capacity is limiting the consistent inclusion and impact of school nurses, health visitors and mental health professionals working across early help teams. The ethnic identity, cultural heritage and religious needs of children are too often absent from, or not considered enough in, referrals to the integrated contact and referral (ICRT) team and in assessments and plans. The LSP acknowledges that multi-agency audits of early help work need further development as there are delays in progressing multi-agency early help assessments and plans for a small number of children”.

Partners held a planning event following the JTAI recommendations which was used to develop a partnership action plan. These actions will be incorporated in the new SSCP business plan which will be developed in 2024/25.

2. DELIVERY OF SSCP BUSINESS PLAN

Six priority areas are identified in the current SSCP Business Plan:

1. Covid-19 Recovery
2. Domestic Abuse
3. Contextual Safeguarding
4. Vulnerable Babies
5. Mental health of children and young people
6. Strategic safeguarding approaches.

These priority areas will be reviewed in 2024 when the SSCP Business Plan will be refreshed in line with local and national learning and Working Together 2023.

PRIORITY AREA 1 - COVID-19 RECOVERY

There was no specific action plan for this priority, recognising that the impacts were ever changing and likely to do so for several years.

In 2021/22, actions needed in response to Covid Recovery led to the establishment of 2 sessional Relationship & Sex Education Workers, 6 Child and Family workers, and a prevention bus (Wear Here 4 U). Recognising the long-term nature of this work, these are all still in place for 2022/23.

The impacts of these workers and the establishment of the prevention bus for children, young people and families are detailed below.

Relationship and Sex Education (RSHE) Workers

The Relationship Sex and Health Education (RSHE) Team, work with Children and Young People aged 8-18 (up to the age of 25 for care experienced or SEND children). Referrals are received from Early Help, Children's Social Care, Schools, Health, or Self-Referrals by young people aged 13+ or their parents. The RSHE Team offers work around: Healthy Relationships, Sexual Health, Self-Esteem, Internet Safety, Child Sexual Exploitation and grooming. This work can either be completed through direct work, classroom-based learning, groupwork or assemblies.

In the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, 254 referrals were received for direct work. This is a 10% decrease in referrals compared to the previous year.

In addition to the direct work offered to young people who have been referred into the service, during 2022/23 the RSHE Team also delivered the following:

- 33 school lessons
- 18 drop-in sessions
- 24 LGBTQ+ Groups
- Bi- weekly drop in sessions
- Wear Here 4 U Prevention Bus sessions

In total 3,405 children and young people completed a brief intervention with the RSHE service between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023.

"I got some support, I learnt and had fun. We talked about everything."

"I feel more confident."

An RSHE Coordinator was also funded by Public Health to support schools in their implementation of RSHE. This support was given by looking at school policies, lesson plans and offering both standard and bespoke staff CPD to not only upskill and make staff feel more confident within their RSHE delivery, but to ensure they have a clear understanding of why RSHE has been made statutory.

In the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023:

- 19 schools received a consultation around their RSHE delivery.
- 19 Schools received 'Introduction to RSHE'.
- Seven Bespoke Training sessions were delivered.
- One Partnership Conference was supported.

"Staff feel more confident and comfortable in delivering RSHE sessions."

Prevention bus – WEAR HERE 4 U

The **Wear Here 4 U** bus was launched on 16 October 2021, promoting a range of prevention services to children and young people. In 2022/23, using the Wear Here 4 U bus, Together for Children, Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust's (HDFT) Growing Healthy Service, Northumbria Police, the Youth Consortium and other partners engaged with children and young people on issues that matter to them, giving advice and support in relation to:

- Relationship, Sex, Health Education
- Peer Support and Bullying
- Sexual Health Service
- Youth Drug and Alcohol
- Wear Kids
- Engagement Groups
- Early Help
- Family Group Conferencing
- Careers
- Restorative Justice

In the period 1 October 2022–31 March 2023 the following sessions have taken place:

Location	Sessions	Number of:	
		Children and young people	Parent/carers
School	13	1282	24
Community	4	112	31
Total	17	1394	59

"It has helped me to stop being nervous, I have learned that it has built my confidence. I don't look around when there's noise and get distracted, it's helped me concentrate more and in school. I used to get into trouble for not concentrating in class, but now I don't get into trouble anymore. I used to cover my ears when it was too loud in school, this bus has helped me cope with noise more."

Successes of the Prevention Bus:

- Young people were respectful and appreciated having someone to talk to and a trusted adult who listened.
- When Partner agencies came to the sessions, for example the Police, young people were not shocked to see them there and did not leave when they were around. This gave an opportunity to break down barriers between young people and the police.
- A lot of young people spoke to workers about their mental health, with young people struggling to understand how they were feeling and that it is okay to feel sad sometimes. Talking through this with workers helped.
- A lot of work was done around healthy relationships.
- Being out in the community helped to show that Together for Children are there to give support. This helped as one family repeatedly came to the bus, providing the opportunity to support a parent to understand how they can access help which led to a self-referral to Early Help.
- Young people accessed services around relationships and C-Card. They said they preferred accessing in the Community as it's an embarrassing subject to talk about in school.
- Supported a family who had just moved to the area and did not speak English – Early Help support was put in place for the family to support children to access school.
- Partnership working – youth providers who were working in the city centre area dropped into the sessions which helped young people understand that we have a partnership approach and that we work together in Sunderland. This also helped build relationships.
- Young people received signposting information to several services and were directed to provision within their areas.
- A young couple with a baby came to the bus for support, upset saying they had been kicked out and had nowhere to go. They were supported by the bus team and followed up the next day, resulting in accommodation issues being resolved, and signposting to a local charity for additional support.

PRIORITY AREA 2 - DOMESTIC ABUSE

Domestic abuse has long been a concern in Sunderland with the Covid-19 pandemic shining a particular spotlight on this. In terms of children’s safeguarding, generally two-fifths of all domestic abuse incidents recorded in Sunderland involve children and young people and so this remains a priority for the SSCP. The table below illustrates how domestic violence prevalence has changed between 2020 and 2023 with overall number of domestic abuse incidents reducing, but those incidents involving a child remaining relatively static.

Indicator	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number of domestic abuse incidents	8433	8309	8178
Domestic incidents with a child involved	3484	3442	3445
Arrests associated with domestic violence incidents with child involved	873	736	724
DV Victim aged 16 or 17	67	104	74
Offences against children: Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)*	0	0	0

*While there were no cases of FGM for children, in this time period, STSFT report 41 disclosures from adult females in relation to FGM for the 2022/23 time period.

Increased awareness raising

Northumbria Police continue to promote in force their “Through the Eyes of a child” campaign as part of frontline response to domestic abuse incidents.

Domestic Abuse training is also provided through the SSCP training offer.

PRIORITY AREA 3 - CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING

The table below illustrates some of the key indicators we look at in relation to contextual safeguarding.

	National	Regional	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
First Time Entrants to the Youth Justice System per 100k of the population	148.9	151.6	100	112	132
Under 18 conception Rates per 1000 girls (15-17)	13.1 2021	19.8 2021	24.3 2019	21.7 2020	26.4 2021
Under 18 Hospital Admissions (Alcohol related) - rate per 100,000	29.3 18/19- 20/21	52.0 18/19- 20/21	82.4 17/18- 19/20	76.0 18/19- 20/21	No updated data available
All children reported missing to the police as missing from home		8593	1278	1355	1743
Number of Individuals missing from home		2811	447	703	609
Offences against children: CSE		246	40	18	30
Numbers of CSE referrals by age range					
- 10 and under		29		1	0
- 11-17 years		469		58	64
Numbers of CSE referrals by gender					
- Female		415		53	55
- Male		78		6	9
- Transgender		5		0	0
Offences against children: modern slavery		60	14	15	25

The data shows a mixed picture, with, for example, an increase in the number of children reported to the police as missing from home, but a decrease in the overall number of individuals missing from home.

Strategic Exploitation Group

This data, and any issues relating to contextual safeguarding are discussed and addressed at the Sunderland Strategic Exploitation Group meeting which was established during 2022/23 and covers all ages. A Sunderland Strategic Plan for Exploitation will be put in place in 2024/25.

In March 2022, the SSCP, Sunderland Safeguarding Adults Board and the Safer Sunderland Partnership held a joint workshop on exploitation. Professionals agreed that exploitation affects all age groups and all communities and requires a multi-agency strategic approach to drive improvements. It was at this workshop that it was recommended to develop the Strategic Exploitation Group, reporting to each of the individual boards. The Strategic Exploitation Group is now in place and meets quarterly. The regional approach to MSET is being reviewed in February 2024, and work will be undertaken to ensure the strategic exploitation group is aligned to this appropriately.

Northumbria Police have developed a new Prevention department. This has been created to fall in line with the national prevention strategy and has 4 key pillars: problem solving, reduction of harm, reduced offending and reduced demand. MSET will fall within this, linking with the exploitation hub which remains in place with a focus on more complex, serious and organised crime.

Reducing missing through the work of the prevention department and relevant partners, will reduce the chance of exploitation.

The actions identified within this priority were developed through the Complex Adolescents Practitioner Forum and through the Child Safeguarding Practice Review for Child FC. One thing that was very apparent through both of these elements of learning was a need to work differently with young people who experienced harm outside of the home. This led to the development of the Young Person's Team and Young Person's Plan.

Young Person's Team

Using learning from other areas, practitioners developed a radical new approach to protecting young people who are experiencing harm outside the home. In November 2021, Together for Children launched an initial one-year pilot of their Young Person's Team, which is now embedded, and works with young people, aged 11+, where there are no concerns about parents' behaviour, and who are facing:

- Sexual exploitation
- Criminal exploitation including through county lines and drug dealing
- Peer on peer abuse (outside of the family)
- Gang association
- Violence and knife crime
- Trafficking and modern-day slavery
- Anti-social behaviour, including drug and alcohol misuse.
- Radicalisation
- Mental health and emotional wellbeing.

Closely linked to this is the multi-agency Young Person's Plan (YPP) which launched in April 2022. This new way of working was put in place to respond to needs of the young person, through positive dialogue directly with the young person. A feature of the YPP, is that young people are able to say who they want to be their 'lead professional'. This will be someone the young person trusts or has a connection with and will act as a single point of contact.

The team benefits from having small caseloads enabling them to work more intensively with young people.

From both a strategic and operational standpoint, there has been a strong focus this year upon strengthening relationships with those partner agencies that are typically heavily involved in the planning, disruption, and risk management of the plans, to keep young people who are open to the team as safe as possible. As a result, we have seen more collaborative joined up working with the Police, Youth Offending Service (YOS), Early Help Preventative Services and Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust (CNTW)'s Children and Young People's Services. The MSET coordinator has also been aligned with the team to enhance support.

A good example of this is the joined-up approach from TFC and Northumbria Police in response to Operation Canarywood which has a particular focus upon the SR4 Grafters (an urban street gang). TFC, Police and other agencies now meet monthly to share intelligence, discuss disruption tactics and ultimately consider how best to support and improve outcomes for the young people who are being criminally exploited. The communication and information sharing amongst partners has significantly improved and the plans for the young people are far more robust.

The strength of working closely with partner agencies has really been evidenced in the positive outcomes for some of our young people this year. So much so, there is a plan to co-locate the Young Persons Team with Youth Offending Services and Early Help Preventive Services as a means to reinforce this joined up approach to practice. CYPS have also given key members of staff the approval to be based alongside the Young Persons Team a couple of days per week in recognition of how beneficial multi-agency collaboration is when managing risk outside of the home.

Many of the young people open to the team are edge of care. Through the use of our Speech and Language Therapist based within Wear Together (our Edge of Care Team) and Northumbria Police's Do It Profiler, the team are starting to see a correlation between young people who are exploited in the community and neurodiversity.

The Young Persons Team has benefited from extensive specialist training relating to complex safeguarding this year. Signs of Safety is our Sunderland practice model and all development opportunities that are offered align with this model. The team has also worked with a Signs of Safety specialist trainer with significant experience of working with risks outside of the home, enabling the team to be able to ensure that they are fully utilising the model including networks to create the safety that is needed. The team Practice Leads take ownership of Signs of Safety which allows the sharing of good practice, helps social workers think about the different perspectives, and focuses on our language, working on keeping this clear, jargon free and child focused. They have additional group supervision and workshop training.

There has been an increased focus in utilising the practice knowledge of our existing workforce to deliver in house practice learning sessions for all colleagues, again strengthening multi-agency working.

The team has 45 young people open to it and 4 qualified social workers. Earlier this year, a Child & Family Worker was also appointed. Whilst this worker sits within the team, the purpose of this role is to deliver intensive intervention to young people whose plans are managed by social workers in other parts of the service due to more traditional child protection worries but we also know through our MSET arrangements, are experiencing risk outside of the home too. This ensures that the expertise that sits within the Young Person's Team can be effectively utilised by any young person who experiences risk outside of the home regardless of which team they are open to within TFC.

For more information about the Young Person's Team and the Young Person's Plan you can access a [presentation](#) which has been delivered across the partnership

PRIORITY AREA 4 – VULNERABLE BABIES

Born into Care project:

Sunderland and 8 other local authority areas have continued to be part of the national research into babies who become cared for at birth. Sunderland's pre-birth team were involved in supporting with the identification of a set of best practice guidelines and resources to inform multi-agency practice when local authorities take safeguarding action pre-birth, at birth and in the immediate follow-up period, after discharge from hospital. The pre-birth team were involved in a series of films to assist professionals nationally involved in safeguarding babies at or close to birth.

The innovative work of the pre-birth team in Sunderland continues to be featured regularly in the Nuffield Foundations Babies Bulletin.

Sunderland have been part of the HOPE boxes initiative for parents separated from their children at birth. The boxes are provided in pairs, one for mother, one for baby, and hold various objects such as soft blankets, cuddly toys and baby record books, to help preserve the connection between mother and child.

PRIORITY AREA 5 - MENTAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

It was agreed through the development of the SSCP Business Plan that there would not be a bespoke action plan in relation to mental health of children and young people, as this would risk duplication or confusion; instead, in recognition of the close links between mental health and safeguarding, the SSCP would work with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Partnership to improve outcomes for children and young people with emotional and mental health difficulties.

PRIORITY AREA 6 - STRATEGIC SAFEGUARDING APPROACHES

This priority relates to those approaches that provide strategic direction to the children's safeguarding workforce and will enable them to better support vulnerable children, young people and their families. It builds upon the already strong foundations that have been laid across the partnership, by innovative and committed partners and a highly skilled and dedicated workforce.

The areas identified for the SSCP to develop are ones that will help give practitioners the competencies, skills and knowledge to improve outcomes for children and families.

Joint work with Sunderland Safeguarding Adults Board

Good progress has been made in implementing a programme of joint working with the Sunderland Safeguarding Adults Board with three workshops taking place last year to drive improvement forward in relation to domestic abuse, self-harm and suicide, and exploitation. An annual Safeguarding Learning Week takes place each year, organised between the two partnerships, with a focus on engaging with and providing needs-led training for the Sunderland workforce. This approach of joined up working will continue in 2023/24.

Signs of Safety roll out.

The SSCP agreed to adopt Signs of Safety as an operating model in 2018 and TfC's children's social care service has been implementing this in earnest for five years now. Partners have been involved in that roll out and have done lots of work to align their processes with Signs of Safety, such as revising the format of child protection reporting templates to fit with the model.

The model is now well established in children's social care and the partnership agreed it was timely to provide further training and support to other partners to improve their understanding and confidence in working in a Signs of Safety way, ensuring the support families in Sunderland receive is consistent, whichever agency they work with.

Following an initial one-year pilot, the SSCP provided £30,000 to fund a part-time post to develop and deliver a programme of training. A multi-agency Signs of Safety group was convened to establish a training offer that was relevant to individual agencies and schools and the roll out of this began in April 2022.

There were 4 workshops on offer as part of this training:

- Safety planning
- Creating a balanced assessment and scaling
- The child's voice.
- Professional Curiosity – Star and Arthur

These started initially on Teams due to Covid-19 but were then moved to face-to-face delivery.

"The group activities were great and gave a good opportunity to chat to other professionals. The different activities were well explained and gave everyone a chance to get involved and ask questions".

"The training was interesting as there was a lot of different roles in the room with different experiences".

0-19 Service

The 0-19 Service are involved in the family hub workstreams and co-delivery within the family hubs is now well underway.

The health rooms are now functional within 3 of the family hubs, 0-19 service are supporting with the delivery of ante natal classes from within the hubs, review and development clinics. Peer Support workers are now in place across the hubs. There is an Early Years CAMHS worker now situated within the hubs and a Speech and Language Therapist post has been agreed.

Cared for Children

The Cared for Children team within South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust (STSFT) have implemented the Signs of Success/ Strengthening Families model of practice into health assessments, using tools which will also enable the views of pre- and non-verbal children to be captured.

Throughout 2022/23 the STSFT adults, children, unborn and cared for children joint audit programme has continued, ensuring a 'Think Family' approach. The audits have continued to provide assurance of effective safeguarding practice, which has been evidenced through the Safeguarding Governance arrangements and their quarterly safeguarding dashboard. All 2022-23 audits have been completed with action plans, incorporating actions and recommendations from Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SAR's), Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPR's) and Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHR's). For more information see the 2022/24 Safeguarding and Cared for Children Annual Report.

It is also recognised that it is important to hear about the experiences and views of Cared for Children, to help shape plans and provision. The Change Council, hosted by Together For Children, is a well-established group of cared for and care experienced children and young people who are supported, empowered and encouraged to run their own meetings, create actions, develop campaigns and have their say about things that matter to them. Members represent the voices of children and young people who are cared for and care experienced, campaigning for change and helping to shape future services for all cared for young people in Sunderland.

CHILD SAFEGUARDING PRACTICE REVIEWS (CSPRs)

There were no CSPRs within the 2022/23 time period.

TRAINING

Since last year, significant progress has been made in relation to delivering and developing the SSCP training offer. Training is designed to engage, upskill and raise the confidence of professionals in Sunderland who work with children, young people and their families.

Key principles embedded within all SSCP training are:

1. To listen to and reflect the voice of the child and encourage opportunities for practitioners to embed this in practice.
2. To promote working with children, young people, and their families through a trauma-informed lens.
3. Promote a culture of continuous learning and improvement ensuring learning from local and national reviews is embedded in practice.

These principles are underpinned by the [Signs of Safety](#) method of working with children, young people and their families in Sunderland. The aim is to help workers build positive relationships and work in partnership with children and their important grown-ups, by using a strengths-based, solution-focused questioning approach that is grounded in everyday lives of children.

Training offered by the SSCP includes:

- Guide to our Thresholds of Need

- Neglect Training
- Domestic Abuse Practitioner Standard Levels 1 & 2
- Signs of Safety Briefings

There has also been an introduction of new courses (DAPS, MSET/Extra-Familial Harm) and updates for others (Thresholds of Need, Vulnerable Babies). Neglect is due to be updated in response to the updated toolkit. There has also been joint working with Children's Homes Managers to create and deliver bespoke safeguarding training at the Thresholds level that is specific to their needs. Collaboration with Signs of Safety Multi-agency lead has begun to introduce elements such as safety planning, as standard.

To improve the accessibility and monitoring of training, in 2023, an attendance policy was introduced, introducing a waiting list and ensuring further accuracies in data, along with changes in the frequency in sessions. As a result, there has been a rise in bookings, a decrease in non-attendance and therefore the training offer has represented better value for money. While improvements have been seen immediately, the full extent of this will be reflected in next year's data.

In terms of bookings, there has been a 34% rise this year, compared with the previous year.

Between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023, 100 sessions took place. A total of 1933 professionals booked on to training from 11 agency types with the highest representations from TfC, Health, and Education. 714 attended, a much higher number than the 375 who attended last year.

Learning outcomes from the training are very positive. In terms of evaluations, professionals rate their knowledge as 5.5 out of 10 on average before the sessions and move to 8.2 out of 10 after. Quality of the sessions are rated as 9.2 out of 10 on average and 100% of responders agree the facilitators have good knowledge of the subject.

Feedback on what worked well includes:

"Very knowledgeable facilitators, very interesting information. "

"The encouraged interaction between the facilitators and participants. The honest, open conversations that were had. I wouldn't change anything."

"Brilliant insight into safeguarding within the workplace. Makes you realise you are constantly safeguarding the young people with your care. "

"Excellent content and links for further reading which I will access."

Moving forward the SSCP training will focus on:

- Continued work with partners and development of timetable to improve attendance on sessions.
- Ensure quality and content of all sessions is of an excellent standard.
- Work with the newly formed training network to analyse gaps, avoid duplication and create training that meets the needs of the whole workforce.

NEXT STEPS FOR THE SSCP

The SSCP's priorities are still relevant, with the business plan being valid until 2024. The priorities will be reviewed during 2024/25 as part of the business plan update, and in line with the publication of *Working Together 2023*, to ensure the focus of the partnership remains on the most pressing and relevant needs of children, young people and families. There has already been lots of activity implemented in the first years, with more still to do. Our priorities are relatively broad, requiring input from more than children's safeguarding services. We will, therefore, continue to work strategically, with other partnerships across the system, to maximise the positive outcomes for children and families in the city, and to ensure that children's safeguarding remains everybody's business.

It will also be important for us to review the activity already implemented and establish robust measures for assessing effectiveness for planned future activity, to understand the impact for our children, young people and families who are at the heart of the support offered.

INDEPENDENT SCRUTINEER REPORT

As Independent Scrutineer, my role is to provide critical challenge and appraisal of the multi-agency arrangements. Taking a 'hands on' approach, my work involves meeting with children, young people, parents and carers as well as practitioners in a variety of settings to observe practice and hear directly about their experiences, in addition to attending more formal SSCP meetings and Practitioner Forums.

2022/23 has been another challenging year for safeguarding children in Sunderland. The impact of the Covid Pandemic on our children and young people remains a concern. However, the emerging threat is child poverty as families struggle to cope with the impact of austerity.

The work of the Partnership has been focussed on its priorities: -

1. Covid-19 Recovery
2. Domestic Abuse
3. Contextual Safeguarding
4. Vulnerable Babies
5. Mental health of children and young people
6. Strategic safeguarding approaches.

Throughout this year, I have been able to 'walk the floor' much more and undertake a number of field visits to observe both single and multi-agency work to safeguard children, and to speak with children, young people and practitioners about how we can effectively keep our children and young people safe.

In June 2022 with a focus on "Young People" I visited: -

- The Link School (Springwell Dene Campus which provides education at Key Stage 2 and 3).
- Northumbria Police Missing/Harm Reduction Team and attended at Hopewood Park Hospital to meet with the Mental Health Street Triage Team.
- Elwin Terrace Children's Home.
- The newly formed Young Persons Team at the Sandhill Centre.
- City Hall to meet with the Youth Council

In September 2022 my focus was mainly on "Vulnerable Babies" and my visits included:-

- The Link School (Pallion Campus which provides education to Key Stage 4 students and links to employment and further education).
- South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS FT – Sunderland Maternity Unit.
- 0-19 Service Transformation Team.
- Shadowing a Health Visitor undertaking an antenatal home visit.
- Northumbria Police Headquarters to meet with the Assistant Chief Constable with responsibility for Protecting Vulnerable People.

In November 2022 my focus was on "Keeping Children Safe in Education", to complement the written audit undertaken by the SSCP across all Sunderland schools. I visited the following schools to observe how they keep children safe: -

- Monkwearmouth Academy.
- Grange Park Primary School, Southwick.
- Ryhope Junior School.
- Venerable Bede Church of England Academy, Ryhope.

➤ Southwick Community Primary School.

The visits give me a fantastic opportunity to see what is happening in practice and to speak to children, young people, parents, and frontline practitioners, as well as managers, about their experiences. I provided a written reflection to the SSCP Executive and the wider SSCP Board which, celebrates “What is working well”, highlights “What we are worried about” and facilitates further discussion about “What needs to happen”.

In early 2023 my time in Sunderland was focussed on the JTAI Early Help Inspection and the workshop held in March 2023 to develop an action plan following our really positive feedback from the Inspection.

As the Partnership have striven to work together on their priorities, there has been a definite shift to a broader approach to safeguarding children. The benefits of taking a more preventative approach, intervening earlier and working with the family as a whole have started to pay dividends. The establishment of Family Hubs will further strengthen this approach. As we continue to deal with the impact of Covid and weather the current economic crisis, the importance of universal services identifying where children and families need help is key to keeping our children and young people safe from neglect, harm and abuse.

Domestic Abuse and the impact on children remain a concern. Whilst the number of domestic incidents has reduced, the number involving children remains static. Much work has been done at a Strategic level in Sunderland, through the Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Board (DA&VAWG) to bring greater focus to this issue, however, more needs to be done to drive operational activity. Northumbria Police have undertaken a significant campaign to ensure front line officers attending domestic abuse incidents are thinking about the impact on the child.

Contextual Safeguarding continues to be a focus of the SSCP. The volume of referrals to our MSET process (Missing, Sexually Exploited and Trafficked) has increased and the data shows increases across the board in the indicators we are currently using. It is difficult to understand whether exploitation of our children and young people is increasing or whether this is a result of greater awareness of the issue and confidence in terms of reporting. Certainly, the development of the Young People’s Team and the introduction of the Young Person’s Plan have brought a step change in the effectiveness of responding to Contextual Abuse. Some excellent work has been undertaken by Northumbria Police to identify Neurodiversity as young people enter the Criminal Justice System, which will inform a greater understanding of the link between neurodiversity and exploitation. Finally, following the joint workshop on Exploitation with Sunderland Safeguarding Adults Board, a Strategic Exploitation Group has been established in Sunderland. This group will ensure a joined-up approach with broader Strategic Partnerships to tackle Exploitation across Sunderland.

Whilst there has been some excellent partnership work to safeguard babies and infants, “Vulnerable Babies” remains a priority both locally and indeed nationally. The work of the joint pre-birth team ensures that those expectant mothers needing additional help are identified and given the help they need, however there is still more work to be done to ensure that information about both parents routinely informs assessments and that the role of father is better understood. The introduction of the Family Hubs will assist but the staffing gaps in midwifery and health visiting services remains a concern.

During my visit to Hopewood Hospital to meet with the Mental Health Street Triage Team, it was good to hear of the work undertaken to keep our young people at mental health crisis

point safe, however, delays in accessing specialist mental health services to prevent children and young people reaching crisis point is worrying. The lack of mental health beds for children and young people requiring inpatient treatment is a national concern. It is important that this remains a priority for the SSCP and that they continue to work with and seek assurance from the CAMHS partnership to reduce delays in accessing services and improve outcomes for Children and Young People.

I welcomed the feedback from the JTAI inspection, which I felt was balanced and fair. It was largely extremely positive about how partners work together effectively to respond to families who need help. The inspectors did identify some areas to strengthen, including addressing the staffing gaps within health services, as well as improving the consideration of ethnicity and cultural heritage in contacts, referrals and assessments. I look forward to seeing how the partnership work together through their joint action plan to further strengthen the “Early Help” offer across Sunderland.

I continue to be impressed by the passion to safeguard children and young people and the commitment to work together to improve outcomes across the Partnership. I have observed a very positive culture, not only within Together for Children but across the Partnership. There is a willingness to try new ways of working, to take measured risks and to learn from mistakes.

The SSCP continues to work effectively with other strategic partnerships both in Sunderland and across the region, enabling a more joined up approach to tackle some challenging cross cutting themes. Of particular note is the ongoing work to review the regional MSET framework.

Whilst many of the Partnership’s current priorities remain, it is now time to review and refresh the strategic plan and identify the focus of the SSCP in 2024 and beyond.