



Stockton-on-Tees  
Domestic Abuse Strategy  
2022-2028

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# Mission Statement

In Stockton-on-Tees, there is no place for domestic abuse. We want everyone living or working in Stockton-on-Tees to feel safe, supported and protected from domestic abuse, regardless of their age, sex, gender, sexuality, disability, socio-economic status, faith or background.

## Introduction

This strategy describes our vision, joint approach and strategic priorities to tackle domestic abuse in Stockton-on-Tees over the next five years in response to the *Domestic Abuse Act (2021)*, national strategy, policy, guidance and local need.

This strategy provides an opportunity to align our priorities with existing strategies relating to health and wellbeing, mental health, inequality, children and young people, community safety, housing, safeguarding, social care, and serious violence. It will assist us to better understand local need and to work collaboratively on the development of joint approaches for Stockton-on-Tees or with partners across Teesside to tackle domestic abuse through our combined resources.

The development of this strategy has been informed and overseen by the Domestic Abuse Steering Group, which reports to the Stockton-on-Tees Health and Wellbeing Board and links to the Safer Stockton Partnership. The strategy builds on the reflection on and learning from the previous Domestic Abuse Strategy 2017-22 which advised to focus on a shared vision and set of priorities and a strong sense of how partners will work together to address domestic abuse. A comprehensive health needs assessment and a review of the evidence for effective interventions informed our understanding of local need and priorities.

The strategy was developed collaboratively by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, including Children's Services, Adult Social Care, Safeguarding, Housing and Homelessness, Community Safety and Public Health, North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust, NHS Tees Valley Clinical Commissioning Group/North East Integrated Care Partnership, Harbour Domestic Abuse Service and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. The voice of victim-survivors and service user views and feedback were crucial throughout the process in guiding the development of our vision and priorities.

This partnership ensures the alignment and consistency in our approach to protect and support everyone including children and young people experiencing domestic abuse in our communities with the aim to expand the partnership in recognition of the contribution that can be made by many more organisations including those in the voluntary, private, and financial sector.

# Background

Anyone can become a victim or survivor of domestic abuse. The *Domestic Abuse Act* introduces a comprehensive statutory definition of domestic abuse and the provisions, and protective powers for victim-survivors.

The Domestic Abuse Act defines domestic abuse as:

- *Both individuals are personally connected to each other, and the behaviour is abusive*
- *Both individuals are over 16 years of age*
- *The behaviour is towards someone, and may be directed at another (including children)*
- *Children (under 18 years of age) are recognised as victim-survivors if they are exposed to domestic abuse*

Domestic abuse can be any of the following (a single incident or a course of conduct):

- *physical or sexual abuse;*
- *violent or threatening behaviour;*
- *controlling or coercive behaviour;*
- *economic abuse (acquire, use of maintain money or property, goods, or services)*
- *psychological and emotional abuse*
- *other abuse (verbal, technology facilitated abuse, abuse relating to faith and 'honour' based abuse)*

*The Domestic Abuse Act* places a statutory duty on local authorities to provide accommodation-based support for people experiencing domestic abuse to ensure that victim-survivors and their dependents are safe and supported in their own home or safe accommodation. In most cases the victim survivor leaves the home.

Perpetrating domestic abuse is a crime. The *Domestic Abuse Act* extends the list of abusive behaviours which are recognised as criminal offences and is clear that there is no justification for domestic abuse. Perpetrators are responsible for their behaviour and should be held to account as well as supported to change their behaviour.

## Key provisions within the Domestic Abuse Act 2021

1. Use of the term 'personally connected' includes sibling and adolescent to parent abuse
2. Children are now recognised as victims if they see, hear or experience abuse
3. Coercion and controlling behaviour post-separation now recognised as abuse
4. Prohibition on victims being cross-examined by the alleged perpetrator
5. Domestic Abuse Protection Notices provide immediate protection for 48hrs
6. All those who are made homeless by domestic abuse will have a priority need
7. Statutory duty placed on local authorities to provide support in safe accommodation
8. Domestic Violence Disclosure scheme (Clare's Law) has a statutory footing
9. Non-fatal strangulation (including suffocation) is a criminal offence
10. Threatening to disclose intimate images without consent is an offence
11. 'Rough sex' can no longer be used as a defence – a person cannot consent to serious assault

The *Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan*<sup>i</sup> focuses on how the new investment will deliver the provision so the action through prevention to attitudes and behaviours, access to safe accommodation and a strengthened response to perpetrators.

The *Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance*<sup>ii</sup> sets out how the whole system response to domestic abuse is as collaborative, robust, and effective as it can be so that all victim-survivors, including children and young people, can access the help they need.

Further statutory guidance on *Delivering Support to Domestic Abuse Victims in Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Services*<sup>iii</sup> provides a framework for the provision of safe accommodation.

The national *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls* strategy<sup>iv</sup> recognises that most victim-survivors are women. Violence against women and girls also includes Honor-based abuse, forced marriage and female genital mutilation. The *Violence Against Women and Girls National Statement of Expectations*<sup>v</sup> provides further guidance on commissioning services to support victims and survivors of violence against women and girls.

Each of these frameworks sets the victim-survivor at the centre, prioritises prevention, and recognises the benefit of system working and the added value of joint commissioning.

The *Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act*<sup>vi</sup> places a duty on public sector organisations to work together to reduce serious violence with a clear message to build stronger partnerships to tackle violence. Half of all violence incidents within the Cleveland Police area are domestic violence incidents with a high proportion of repeat perpetrators and repeat victim-survivors. In addition, the *Act* sets the serious violence duty which specifies collaboration across agencies to intervene and disrupt violence including domestic abuse.

There is a growing body of evidence based programmes and interventions to tackle domestic abuse starting from preventative approaches such as healthy relationship education in schools and bystander programmes which help young people to recognise and respond to domestic abuse.

National early interventions programmes include Operation Encompass which operates jointly between schools and police forces and ensures that schools are informed of any pupil being a victim-survivor of domestic abuse so that they can offer the right support.

Working together across agencies helps to protect victim-survivors and to identify the most harmful perpetrators. Sharing information between agencies so that professionals can assess risk and implement safeguarding measures is achieved for individuals known to be a risk to our communities via multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA<sup>vii</sup>), individuals known to be at high risk via multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC<sup>viii</sup>), and serial perpetrators of domestic abuse identified via the multi-agency task and co-ordination process (MATAC<sup>ix</sup>).



# Local Picture

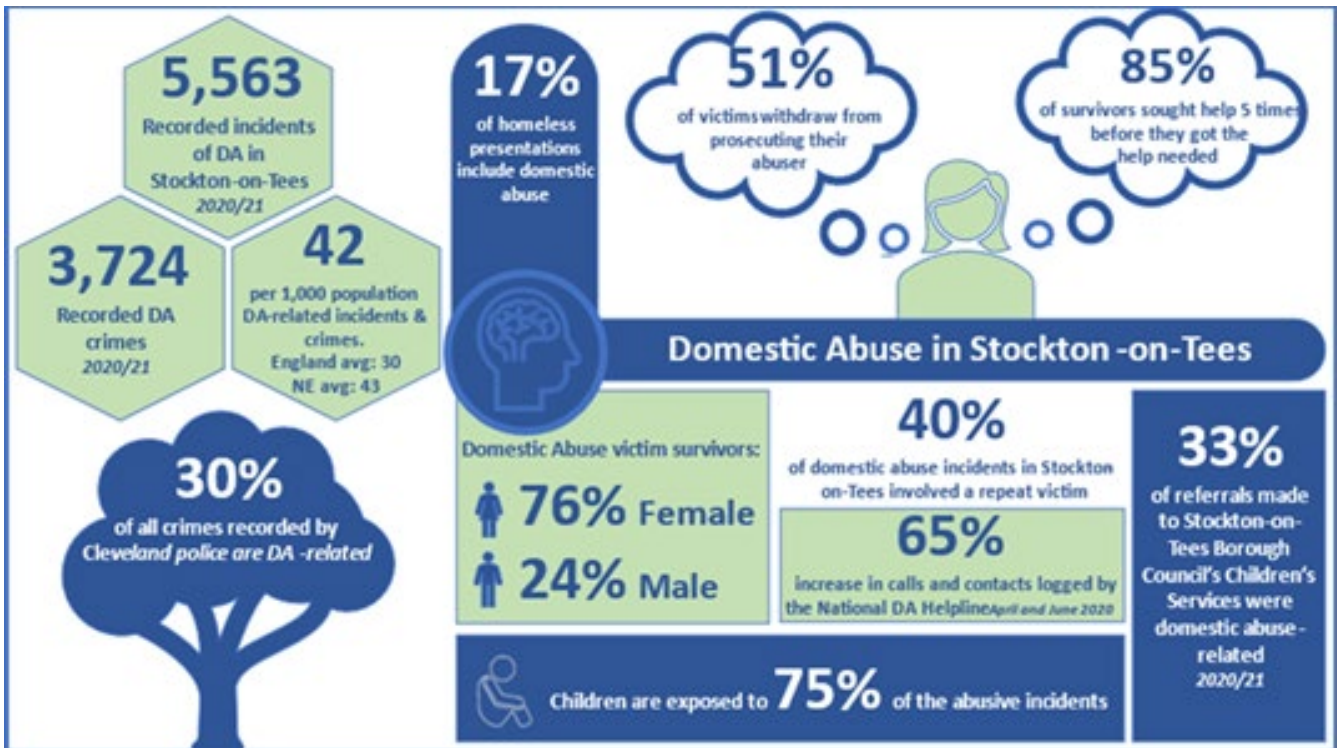
Calls to domestic abuse helplines have increased during the pandemic at national and local level. Domestic abuse incidents in Stockton-on-Tees which were reported to police doubled over the last 6 years. The rates in 2020/21 were higher than the national average and similar to the North East average. It is widely recognised that behind these numbers are many unreported incidents of domestic abuse.

Local data show that in Stockton-on-Tees 5,563 incidents of domestic abuse were reported in a single year (2020/21), with two thirds of the incidents recorded as a crime of which half resulted in an arrest. However, in half of all cases, victims later withdrew from prosecution. Almost half of domestic abuse incidents in Stockton-on-Tees involved a repeat victim-survivor.

The rates of reported incidents were higher in younger adults under 40 years and in three quarters of reported incidents the victim-survivors were female whilst the overwhelming majority of perpetrators were male.

Domestic abuse also increased among young people aged 16-19 years and often involves abuse through a sibling or partner with the use of social media as a platform for abuse playing a significant role in this age group.

Local information tells us that children were exposed to 75% of abusive incidents and that 33% of referrals to children's services were related to concerns about domestic abuse.





Domestic abuse can cause serious short and long term physical, mental and emotional health issues in children and adults which can range from physical injuries, functional, sleeping and eating disorders to anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. It is well documented that the experience of domestic abuse can also lead to addiction, suicide, unemployment, financial hardship and homelessness and increases not only health inequalities but also socio-economic inequalities.

Domestic abuse has a devastating impact on children, young people and families who see, hear or experience it. Domestic abuse can seriously affect families and the physical, mental and emotional health, wellbeing and development of children and young people. In addition to the issues listed above, children and young people can develop emotional, behavioural and developmental issues such as anxiety, challenging and aggressive behaviour or withdrawal, delayed speech, language and communication and low self-esteem affecting their ability to form healthy relationships and educational attainment. In 2020/21 the local domestic abuse service found that children were exposed to three quarters of domestic abuse incidents, whilst a third of referrals to Children's Services were related to domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse can be experienced by anyone, and disproportionately affects individuals and groups in the community including women, children and young people, people with disabilities, LGBT, pregnant women, BAME and migrants with insecure status. Domestic abuse can be one of the factors resulting in exploitation and can contribute and exacerbate multiple disadvantage. These individuals are often known to services concerned with homelessness, substance misuse and mental health. Local services reported in 2020/21 that 17% of homeless presentations were related to domestic abuse and 20% of substance misuse service users had experienced domestic abuse.

The response to domestic abuse is often delayed. Research evidence shows that 85% of victim-survivors sought help five times in the year before they got the help they needed, and confirms local findings that often people presenting as homeless and experiencing domestic abuse do not disclose their experience of abuse at the initial assessment.

This highlights the need to create environments where victim-survivors feel safe and empowered to disclose, such as in healthcare settings. There is good evidence that healthcare practitioners are trusted and, given the opportunity, victim-survivors are most likely to disclose during a healthcare consultation.

The local domestic abuse health needs assessment emphasised the specific needs of children, young people and adults affected by domestic abuse. The assessment clearly identified the increase in cases and the issue of repeat domestic abuse calling for more affordable, quality and safe accommodation and recommended to monitor local need in order to influence specialist housing provision including domestic abuse safe accommodation.

The needs assessment also showed the need for more specialist support for victim-survivors and a more coordinated, family-inclusive approach as well as further targeted interventions to address perpetrators. A clear need for training of professionals and the wider workforce was identified. Improving awareness and understanding of domestic abuse in its different forms and the impacts on children was recommended. Implementing prevention and early intervention programmes in schools was also highlighted. Other aspects such as stalking or special needs of victim-survivors with protected characteristics were more difficult to understand due to limited data.

## Feedback from Service Users

*"My mental health had rapidly declined and not only was I struggling to function with my day to day life, I was also being abused mentally and physically. Finding the strength to speak out and ask for help felt like an enormous task. I realised the importance of services understanding the additional pressures for victims struggling with their mental health.*

*"I probably remained in my relationship for a lot longer due to my concerns around financial stability and options. I felt like I had to stay where I was so that my children were not affected financially. I realise now that help is out there and nothing is worth staying. With the way things are currently around cost of living, I believe that this barrier will only increase when people are seeking to leave abusive situations."*

*"I am one of those people who thought that my children were not affected as they were always upstairs with their bedroom door closed, it was many years afterwards when I realised the impact that domestic abuse had on my children and the struggles they faced in their teenage years.*

*"Having someone there who I trusted to listen to me and explain that what I was facing was actually domestic abuse, opened my eyes that I needed to get myself and my children out of the situation before things got worse. Without those conversations, I really do believe that I would have put up with the abuse for a lot longer."*

*"I was in a new country, no family, no friends, no connections and no money. Being deported meant that I would have been pushed back in to more shame, risk and danger. I really didn't know where to turn with no money and no idea if I could stay safe in this country."*

*"People really don't understand the strength it requires to walk away from your life as you know it and everything familiar to you. The shame, the guilt, the doubt, the fear, the confusion and so many unanswered questions. Walking in to the unknown in such a vulnerable state is one of the bravest things you can do. The more support services of all types that understand this, the better.*

## Our Vision

Our vision is for Stockton-on-Tees to be a place where:

- Everyone - children, young people and adults - at risk of, experiencing or affected by domestic abuse is listened to, supported, and protected to live their life free from abuse.
- All victims of domestic abuse have access to inclusive, quality, affordable and appropriate safe accommodation and support.
- Perpetrators of domestic abuse are held to account and supported to change their behaviour.

This vision will be realised through the following underlying principles.

An **equitable** and **No Wrong Door approach** across the system will help to improve access to support and protection for victim-survivors and stop the cycle of repeat abuse, by ensuring that whoever they are and wherever they seek help, they will be listened to, supported and signposted to the right support.

An **empowered and enabled workforce** will be key to respond in a timely, appropriate and effective way to any indicators or disclosures of harmful abuse and to abusive behaviours. This will be supported by the **sharing of expertise** of system partners and support through a specialist service.

The **implementation of evidence-based approaches** within different settings across the system including **trauma-informed practice** will be at the heart of prevention, early intervention and support services, programmes and interventions.

We will continue to **learn and improve** by monitoring and reviewing the impact of our actions and **maximise our resources** through partnership working and joint commissioning.

# Our Priorities

We have identified five key priorities which will guide us on our journey to achieve our vision over the next five years.

## Priority 1 - Prevent domestic abuse

Preventing domestic abuse is the core of everything we do. Raising awareness, changing attitudes, identifying abusive, harmful behaviours and the expectation for everyone to have a right to respectful, healthy relationships is central in reducing incidents of domestic abuse. Organisations, services and partners across the system will work together to reach out to individuals and communities from an early age to convey these messages as well as challenging and not condoning abusive attitudes and behaviours.

### **We will prevent domestic abuse:**

- We will support children and young people to develop healthy relationships from an early age.
- We will raise awareness to unhealthy relationships and challenge attitudes to domestic abuse and violence.
- We recognise and will raise awareness to the risk posed by technology and social media and its role it can play in abusive relationships.

### **How we will achieve this:**

- We will work with schools and education services to deliver healthy relationships education.
- We will deliver communication, engagement and social marketing in communities and workplaces to raise awareness and challenge attitudes to domestic abuse.
- We will work collaboratively with communities, individuals and groups affected by domestic abuse to coproduce and promote resources and campaigns to prevent domestic abuse.

## Priority 2 - Intervene early

Strengthening our response to the first signs of domestic abuse is important to protect victim-survivors and stop domestic abuse at the earliest opportunity.

Early identification and subsequent engagement in evidence-based programmes to change attitudes and behaviours includes a spectrum of interventions from brief intervention to diversionary programmes. Early intervention for domestic abuse should be approached from two perspectives: individuals displaying abusive behaviours and individual recipients of abusive behaviour. Abusive behaviours can be identified within individuals of any age.

### **We will intervene early:**

- We will build capacity across the system to identify abusive behaviours and those at risk of experiencing abuse and respond appropriately to domestic abuse.
- We will ensure that specialist services are in place to provide early interventions for victim-survivors and perpetrators to prevent domestic abuse.

### How we will achieve this:

- Building on the strengths of *Operation Encompass*, we will work with schools so that all children experiencing domestic abuse receive timely support in their school through well trained staff who is aware and confident to support.
- We will pilot evidence-based programmes in secondary schools and further education colleges to empower young people to recognise domestic abuse, challenge harmful attitudes, language and behaviour and to safely intervene.
- We will empower communities and individuals to respond early to abusive behaviours.
- We will encourage employers to protect their workforce from domestic abuse.
- We will work with specialist services to provide dedicated and accessible early intervention programmes for those at risk of experiencing or perpetrating domestic abuse.
- We will work with the local safeguarding structures and use their resources, knowledge and skills to protect those at risk or experiencing domestic abuse.

## Priority 3 - Support and protect victim-survivors

Providing the right support at the right time, with the ability to respond consistently, quickly, and effectively is crucial. Victim-survivors of domestic abuse are far too often not heard and have to repeatedly ask for help until they receive the support they require.

Statutory guidance asks for victim-survivors of domestic abuse to have access to relevant safe accommodation and the right accommodation-based support when they need it.

The police have additional powers to protect victim-survivors through the introduction of *Domestic Violence Protection Notices* and the recognition of additional harmful behaviours as criminal offences.

- We will ensure that victim-survivors of domestic abuse are supported and protected
- We will follow a *No Wrong Door* approach and work collaboratively to create opportunities and environments for victim-survivors to disclose that they are experiencing abuse.
- We will ensure that victim-survivors receive appropriate support at the earliest opportunity.
- We will work collaboratively to protect and support victim-survivors and their children within safe accommodation, including in their own home where it is safe to do so.
- We will provide dedicated, specialist support for children and young people experiencing domestic abuse.

### How we will achieve this:

- We will build capacity across the system to inquire and respond appropriately to domestic abuse; this may be a referral to a specialist domestic abuse service or safeguarding and use of appropriate legislation, policies and procedures.
- We will learn from pilot programmes such as in the NHS, where primary and secondary care to create the right environment for victim-survivors to feel empowered to disclose.

- We will work to implement pathways to ensure access to timely, confidential support within and across organisations and specialist services.
- We will provide specialist domestic abuse services to offer age-appropriate support to victim-survivors.
- We will provide good quality safe accommodation for victim-survivors and their children that meet their individual needs - including emergency, out of area, move-on and permanent options.
- We will facilitate access to support in safe accommodation for victim-survivors and their children, including in their own home (where it is safe to do so), emergency, out of area, move-on and permanent options.

## Priority 4 – Stop repeat domestic abuse

Too many victim-survivors are experiencing domestic abuse again and again. 40% of domestic abuse incidents in Stockton-on-Tees involve a repeat victim.

### **We will break the cycle of repeat domestic abuse**

- We will use our collaborative intelligence to prevent repeat domestic abuse.
- We will ensure the continued safety and support of victim-survivors following an incident of domestic abuse.

### **How we will achieve this**

- We will support families and couples to live their lives free from abuse.
- We will work with criminal justice and police to provide immediate protection to victim-survivors by enacting Domestic Abuse Protection Notices and disruption of behaviour by 48hr removal of a perpetrator.
- We will support victim survivors of domestic abuse in the process to prosecute their abuser.

## Priority 5 - Hold perpetrators to account and prevent harmful behaviours

Perpetrating domestic abuse is a crime and perpetrators are accountable for their behaviours. Abusive and harmful behaviours should be addressed through challenging and supporting individuals to understand and change their behaviours at an early stage as well as through criminal justice procedures. Criminal justice partners have powers to disrupt behaviours of perpetrators; to pursue justice, and to prevent subsequent and/or serial perpetration of domestic abuse.

### **We will address abusive and harmful behaviours**

- We will work as a system to ensure that abusive and harmful behaviours are disrupted and addressed at the earliest opportunity through a range of appropriate interventions.
- We will learn from Domestic Homicide Reviews to inform local approaches to prevention and addressing abusive, violent behaviours.

### **How we will achieve this**

- We will jointly commission and implement programmes and interventions to divert perpetrators from re-offending.
- We will work with perpetrators to achieve sustained behaviour change.

## **Priority 6 - Ensure data and intelligence are smart and shared**

High quality data and intelligence that are interpreted and applied in context, are important to understand local challenges, to inform the development and improvement of local interventions and services and to monitor the effectiveness and impact of interventions. Sharing data and intelligence at the right level supports our aim to keep people safe from the harms of abuse and the collation of evidence for a statutory response.

### **We will share data and intelligence**

- We will use an intelligence-informed approach to planning, implementing and monitoring local approaches, programmes and interventions.
- We will collaborate and share data and intelligence appropriately to support a joined-up response to domestic abuse.

### **How we will achieve this**

- We will use our collective intelligence across the local system to understand need, assets and impact against our strategic outcomes.
- We will improve local service and system data with a focus on information about stalking, victim-survivors with protected characteristics and perpetrators.
- We will use national and local information and data to inform the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.
- We will collaborate and navigate data sharing and governance protocols at the right level. This may be across Stockton-on-Tees, Tees, Integrated Care Board or other geographies.



## Next Steps

We will work with partners to implement the strategy through the development of a detailed action plan managed by a domestic abuse coordinator. Regular progress updates will be provided to the Domestic Abuse Steering Group and the Health and Wellbeing Board. In the context of this we will continue to respond to emerging requirements, guidance, and evidence to deliver our vision.

Our work will continue so that the voice of victim-survivors and their families affected by domestic abuse are heard. Victim-survivors and perpetrators who are interacting with local organisations and services will inform our actions.

We are focused on delivering real change, strengthening the co-ordination of services, learning from the latest research, and continuing to develop and respond to the needs of the communities within Stockton-on-Tees.

## Acknowledgements

\*The figures given here are an accurate reflection of the information held in police data systems at the time of extraction. However, as this information is subject to continual quality assurance checks which may result in the source record being updated, the figures may differ in any subsequent publication (Cleveland Police).

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<sup>i</sup> Tackling domestic abuse plan 2022. [Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan – CP 639 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>ii</sup> Domestic abuse. Statutory guidance 2022. [Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Statutory Guidance Consultation: Government response \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>iii</sup> Delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse in domestic abuse safe accommodation services 2021

[Delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse in domestic abuse safe accommodation services - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>iv</sup> Tackling Violence against women & girls 2021 [Tackling violence against women and girls \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>v</sup> Violence Against Women and Girls National Statement of Expectations 2022. [\[Title\] \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>vi</sup> Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022

[Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>vii</sup> Multi- agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA): Guidance 2014 (updated 2021). [Multi-agency public protection arrangements \(MAPPA\): Guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>viii</sup> Multi-agency risk Assessment conference (MARAC) protection plans: requests for evidence 2014. [Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference \(MARAC\) protection plans: requests for evidence - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>ix</sup> Multi- agency task and coordination protocol (MATAC). Cleveland Police. [MATAC | Middlesbrough Council](#)