

West of Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Partnership Board Annual Report 2025/26

1. Foreword from the Independent Chair

This will be my last foreword as the independent Chair of the West of Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Board. Two of the core members of the Board have decided to withdraw and set up their own Boards and so the current Board will transition into the Reading Safeguarding Adults Board and I will be completing my term of office as Chair.

I want to pay tribute to all the hard work and endeavours of the Board and its members over the past 4 years whilst I have had the privilege of being the Chair. Once again this annual report bears testimony to this and demonstrates the impact of the Board and its activities. We have also worked hard over the past few months to ensure a smooth transition to the new arrangements commencing in April 2026. The three new Boards will need to continue to work hard to ensure that lessons learnt are translated into practice across the West of Berkshire area and to build on the good examples of achievements made to date. My personal view is that there were and are many advantages of having a tri borough Board, given the relatively small size of the boroughs and this also reduced the complexity and need to attend multiple Boards for the members whose activity spans across all three boroughs and indeed wider afield. However, this decision has been made, and it is for the members of the new Boards to find ways to build on the obvious success of the current system and to ensure that effective processes are put in place to ensure Adult Safeguarding Practice is as safe as possible for its citizens that they have responsibilities for.

I want to pay tribute to those members who have been actively involved in the West of Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Board, acting as chairs and members of subgroups and contributing to its work streams and activities. This really has made a huge impact in ensuring that some of the most vulnerable members of our communities have been supported and protected. On their behalf I offer my sincere appreciation and gratitude.

In particular, we all owe a great deal to the sheer tenacity and skill of the Board Manager, Lynne Mason. She has been simply amazing and has helped to drive the Board forward in its business. She has been well supported recently by the Board's Project and Communications Office, Marcia Campbell. I want to offer and express my personal thanks to both of you, it really has been a delight to work with you. Thank you for all your dedication and hard work it really has been appreciated.

Prof Keith Brown MBE
March 2026

2. Introduction and Context

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the activities carried out by the West of Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Partnership Board (SAB) during the period from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. The report has been prepared in alignment with the SAB's statutory responsibilities as set out in Section 43 of the Care Act 2014.

In light of the scheduled discontinuation of the Tri-Borough safeguarding arrangements on 1st April 2026, the SAB determined that a streamlined annual report would be submitted in March 2026. Consequently, this report offers proportionate assurance and focuses on key areas such as strategic leadership, learning from incidents of serious harm, partnership effectiveness, and oversight. It does not include detailed operational or performance data.

The SAB recognised that this development would have a range of implications for all partner organisations, including those in health, the police, and the voluntary and community sectors. These included considerations around organisational capacity, the risk of overlapping work, and maintaining consistency in safeguarding oversight.

Throughout this transitional period, the SAB maintained robust engagement and collaboration with all partners. It was agreed that safeguarding responsibilities, including the conduct of Safeguarding Adults Reviews (SARs) and the pursuit of strategic priorities, would continue to be fully delivered until the transition arrangements had been formally completed.

This report covers SAB activity up to the agreed cut-off date of 31st January 2026. Any ongoing work, including SARs and long-term strategic priorities, will be transferred to successor safeguarding arrangements as part of the agreed transition processes.

a. Role and Purpose of the SAB

The West of Berkshire SAB serves as the independent strategic leadership body for adult safeguarding across the areas of Reading, West Berkshire, and Wokingham. The SAB is responsible for uniting statutory partners, representatives from the voluntary and community sectors, and other key agencies to ensure the protection of adults with care and support needs from abuse and neglect.

b. Core Functions

- **Assurance of Safeguarding Arrangements:** The SAB ensures that safeguarding arrangements across all partner organisations are effective and robust.
- **Promotion of Partnership Working:** The SAB actively fosters partnership working and shared accountability among all agencies involved in safeguarding adults.
- **Learning from Serious Incidents:** The SAB is committed to learning from serious incidents, including the undertaking and review of Safeguarding Adults Reviews (SARs).
- **Accountability in Safeguarding Practice:** The SAB holds all partner agencies to account for the quality and effectiveness of their safeguarding practices.
- **Promotion of Wellbeing and Safety:** The SAB promotes the overall wellbeing and safety of adults at risk within the community.

c. Vision

Adult safeguarding means protecting people in our community so they can live in safety, free from abuse and neglect. Our vision in West Berkshire is that all agencies will work together to prevent and reduce the risk of abuse and neglect to adults at risk of abuse or neglect, whilst supporting individuals to maintain control over their lives and make informed choices without coercion.

3. Achievements and Strategic Focus 2025/26

During 2025/26, the SAB continued to uphold effective governance, strong leadership and robust challenge in the face of ongoing system pressures and the complexities associated with the winding down of the Tri-Borough arrangements. The SAB's main achievements during this period were:

- Maintaining stable multi-agency safeguarding governance throughout significant organisational change
- Overseeing learning from Safeguarding Adults Reviews (SARs) and ensuring the delivery of agreed actions

- Strengthening partnership assurance through close scrutiny, audit activity and subgroup oversight
- Supporting collaboration across statutory, voluntary and community sector partners
- Commencing structured transition planning to guarantee continuity of safeguarding oversight beyond March 2026

a. Governance During Transition

Throughout the transition period, SAB meetings evidenced open, constructive challenge among partners on matters including system capacity, fragmentation of safeguarding arrangements, and the impact of multiple safeguarding SABs on shared agencies such as health, police and probation. The Independent Chair formally recorded concerns about duplication, fragmentation and the strain placed on system partners. In response, the SAB agreed that transition planning must prioritise safeguarding outcomes over organisational boundaries.

It was further agreed that:

- SARs would be completed wherever possible prior to April 2026
- Clear handover arrangements would be in place for any SARs or actions remaining open at the point of transition
- Decisions regarding paused or delayed priorities would be made transparently and recorded accordingly

b. Strategic Priorities for 2025/26

The SAB shaped its work in 2025/26 around three agreed strategic priorities:

- **Protection of Vulnerable Adults from Exploitation and Violence:** The SAB focused on understanding and addressing gaps from an adult safeguarding perspective, informed by local and national SAR learning, particularly from the [Louis](#) and [Vihad](#) SARs. Progress on issues such as cuckooing and exploitation was hindered by limitations in available data, especially from policing partners, and this was explicitly recorded within the Business Plan RAG status. The SAB debated the suitability of a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) model for West of Berkshire and, following careful consideration, formally decided against recommending to Thames Valley Police (TVP) its adoption. Instead, the SAB agreed to develop clear safeguarding process maps, clarify escalation routes and referral pathways involving TVP, strengthen training for police and partner agencies, and reinforce Care Act compliance. This approach reflects proportionate, evidence-based governance and the SAB's commitment to setting strategic direction.
- **Preventing Financial Exploitation:** The SAB made tangible progress against this priority, including direct oversight by way of a detailed session with TVP's Central Fraud Unit. The SAB scrutinised the relationship between criminal investigations and Care Act safeguarding duties, emphasising that vulnerability indicators should not result in inappropriate safeguarding concerns. Key activities included establishing a Task and Finish Group, developing dedicated [web resources](#) and a partnership-wide resource library, promoting the Reverse Banking Protocol, and facilitating learning events such as the "Behind Closed Doors: Unmasking Carer and Family Fraud" webinar with 191 attendees. This priority was consistently reported as on target and was signed off by the SAB as completed in December 2025, indicating strong multi-agency engagement and demonstrable delivery.
- **Addressing the Impact of Diversity on Abuse and Neglect:** Recognising the scale and complexity of this priority, the SAB acknowledged that meaningful progress would require research capacity, disaggregated data and sustained leadership and resourcing. Given the impending transition to new safeguarding arrangements, the SAB agreed to pause elements of this priority for review in early 2026, enabling successor SABs to determine appropriate ownership and resources. The SAB's decision reflects responsible governance, ensuring this work is not progressed in a fragmented or tokenistic manner.

c. Business as Usual Activity 2025/26

Alongside its agreed strategic priorities, the SAB continued to deliver a range of Business as Usual (BAU) activity to meet its statutory responsibilities under the Care Act 2014. Progress against these activities was monitored throughout the year via SAB meetings and subgroup assurance.

- **Lived Experience:** The SAB recognised the importance of embedding lived experience within safeguarding governance. During 2025/26, work progressed on the development of a statement of intent and implementation approach. In light of the planned transition to new safeguarding arrangements from April 2026, further delivery was paused to avoid fragmented or unsustainable activity, with clear handover expectations identified for successor SABs.

- **Communication Strategy:** Delivery of the SAB communication strategy continued through the Communication and Publicity Subgroup. This included publication of SAB newsletters, delivery of targeted safeguarding campaigns (notably financial abuse and fire safety), and communication activity aligned with SAR learning and Board priorities. Regular updates to the SAB provided assurance on reach, accessibility and impact.
- **Quality Assurance Framework:** Oversight of the SAB's Quality Assurance Framework was maintained by the Scrutiny and Impact Group. During the year, assurance activity focused on multi-agency peer audits, monitoring of SAR recommendations, PiPoT arrangements and dashboard intelligence. Refinements to assurance processes supported a continued emphasis on learning, impact and proportionality.
- **Safeguarding Adults Week 2025:** was delivered through a multi-agency Task and Finish Group, supported by the Learning and Development and Communication and Publicity Subgroups. The programme demonstrated strong engagement across the partnership and clear alignment with SAB priorities and SAR themes, with evaluation findings reported to the Board.
- **Policies, Procedures and Core Statutory Functions:** The SAB maintained oversight of Pan-Berkshire safeguarding adults policies and procedures, ensuring continuity during organisational transition. The SAB [escalation policy](#) was reviewed and relaunched in June 2025 to strengthen clarity and accessibility. Throughout the year, the SAB continued to deliver its core statutory functions, including commissioning and oversight of SARs, maintaining the SAB website, managing the SAB budget and monitoring performance through the SAB dashboard.

4. Implementation of Strategy

The SAB maintained a clear focus on impact rather than activity, using learning, scrutiny and partnership intelligence to identify areas of risk, test the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, and drive system improvement. Where assurance was incomplete or disproportionate, the SAB required further evidence, paused activity, or redesigned its approach to ensure safeguarding outcomes were not compromised.

The SAB's strategic priorities were supported by an evidence-led approach to communication, engagement and public awareness through its Communication and Publicity Subgroup. Safeguarding messages were disseminated, reviewed for reach, accessibility and impact, and adjusted where needed. Communication activity was closely aligned with SAR learning, SAB priorities such as exploitation, financial abuse and self-neglect, and the need to support practitioners and the public during organisational transition.

a. Learning and Development

During 2025/26, the Learning and Development (L&D) Subgroup provided effective strategic oversight of partnership learning, ensuring that activity was proportionate, evidence-led and aligned to SAB priorities, SAR learning and identified safeguarding risks. Throughout a period of organisational transition, the Subgroup maintained a focus on learning with demonstrable safeguarding impact and provided assurance that learning was embedded in practice.

The Subgroup oversaw the planning and delivery of [Safeguarding Adults Week 2025](#), delivered through a multi-agency Task and Finish Group. The programme was informed by SAB priorities and SAR learning and focused on prevention, early intervention and professional confidence. Oversight of programme design and evaluation arrangements provided assurance of strong multi-agency engagement and learning reach.

Learning from SARs remained central to the Subgroup's work. The Subgroup supported the development and quality assurance of accessible learning resources arising from SAR recommendations, including learning briefs such as [unconscious bias](#) and digital materials, ensuring that learning was translated into practical, partnership-wide application.

In response to SAR learning and workforce intelligence, the Subgroup progressed the commissioning of bespoke multi-agency trauma-informed training, providing assurance regarding delivery methods, audience and organisational responsibilities for staff support. This ensured learning activity was safeguarding-focused and proportionate.

The Subgroup also strengthened partnership assurance through oversight of the SAB Training Standards review, ensuring revised standards were informed by national guidance, subject to multi-agency challenge and applicable across all partner sectors, with partners required to provide assurance of implementation.

b. Scrutiny and Impact

The Scrutiny and Impact Group (SIG) played a key role in strengthening the SAB's assurance arrangements during 2025/26, providing robust professional challenge and clear oversight during a period of significant system change. The Group maintained a strong focus on impact and learning, ensuring that scrutiny activity went beyond compliance to test the effectiveness of safeguarding practice in real cases.

A notable achievement was the delivery of an enhanced multi-agency peer audit programme, which shifted assurance away from comparative performance data towards reflective, case-based learning. This approach enabled the SIG to assess the quality of decision-making, information sharing and multi-agency working, while explicitly testing the application of learning from SARs. The audits provided assurance on areas of strong practice and identified system-wide learning to support improvement.

The SIG also strengthened oversight of SAR recommendations and Persons in a Position of Trust (PiPoT) arrangements, securing clearer evidence of implementation, addressing gaps in assurance and ensuring accountability where further work was required. Scrutiny of performance intelligence and refinement of the SAB dashboard further enhanced the Board's ability to identify risk and seek proportionate assurance.

Overall, the work of the Scrutiny and Impact Group demonstrably strengthened the SAB's ability to evidence how scrutiny drives learning, improvement and safer outcomes for adults, reflecting a mature partnership committed to continuous improvement despite organisational transition.

c. Pan Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Policy and Procedures (P&P) Subgroup

During 2025/26, the West of Berkshire SAB maintained oversight of the Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Policy and Procedures (P&P) Subgroup, recognising its role in supporting a clear, consistent and legally compliant safeguarding framework across Berkshire.

The P&P Subgroup progressed a programme of work to review and update multi-agency safeguarding adults policies and procedures, following an agreed options appraisal and Task and Finish approach. Revised policies and procedures were endorsed during the year, providing greater clarity for practitioners and supporting consistent multi-agency safeguarding practice.

The Subgroup also oversaw the development of a Pan-Berkshire Safeguarding Adults' Information Sharing Protocol, intended to support lawful and proportionate information sharing between partner agencies. The protocol was developed through multi-agency consultation and provides a framework to support effective safeguarding practice, including Safeguarding Adults Reviews.

Alongside this, a rolling programme for the development and review of safeguarding guidance was agreed, prioritising areas of identified risk and learning. Throughout a period of organisational transition, the SAB was assured that governance, hosting and handover arrangements were in place to ensure continuity of safeguarding policies and procedures beyond March 2026.

d. Voluntary and Community Sector and Healthwatch Subgroup

During 2025/26, the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and Healthwatch Subgroup provided assurance that voluntary sector and advocacy perspectives were effectively represented within SAB.

The Subgroup strengthened engagement and communication between the SAB and the voluntary sector, improving understanding of safeguarding responsibilities and ensuring that community-based intelligence informed SAB discussions.

Voluntary sector representatives were embedded within Safeguarding Adults Review (SAR) Panels, including where organisations were not directly involved in cases. This strengthened system learning, ensured lived experience perspectives informed recommendations, and supported wider dissemination of SAR learning across the partnership.

Through regular partner updates, the Subgroup identified and escalated safeguarding risks affecting the voluntary sector, including financial abuse, contextual safeguarding, advocacy availability, language barriers, mental health thresholds and sector sustainability pressures. This intelligence supported SAB oversight and risk management.

The Subgroup contributed to the review and development of safeguarding adults policies, procedures and information-sharing arrangements, ensuring they reflected voluntary sector practice. It also supported safeguarding capability within the sector through ongoing training, advice and policy support.

In addition, the Subgroup contributed to the SAB's work to strengthen the use of lived experience within safeguarding governance, supporting future arrangements to remain informed by the voices of adults with care and support needs.

e. Communication and Publicity Subgroup

During 2025/26, the Communication and Publicity Subgroup supported the SAB's strategic priorities through targeted, evidence-led communication and engagement activity. The Subgroup provided assurance that safeguarding messages were accessible, proportionate and aligned with learning from Safeguarding Adults Reviews (SARs), while responding effectively to emerging risks and system transition.

A significant achievement was the delivery of a [multi-agency fire safety awareness campaign](#), informed by SAR learning. The campaign included leaflets and digital resources disseminated across statutory, health, fire and voluntary sector partners, with materials available in multiple formats and community languages, including Easy Read. Engagement data demonstrated impact, with **2,797 SAB website views, 65 leaflet downloads** and an increase in self-referrals for Safe and Well visits, particularly in West Berkshire. This work was formally reviewed and signed off by the Subgroup, with annual review arrangements agreed to maintain effectiveness.

The Subgroup also supported partnership delivery on **financial exploitation**, promoting dedicated [web resources](#) and consistent messaging aligned to the work of the Financial Abuse Task and Finish Group. Communication activity reinforced Care Act safeguarding responsibilities and contributed to the SAB's assurance that safeguarding responses were proportionate and evidence-based. This priority was reported as on track and formally closed following completion of agreed actions.

In addition, the Subgroup oversaw communication activity for [Safeguarding Adults Week 2025](#), supporting a multi-agency programme aligned to SAB priorities and SAR learning. Strong engagement was evidenced through registration figures and post-event evaluation, providing assurance on reach and learning impact.

The Subgroup strengthened continuous improvement through the use of **website analytics** as an assurance tool, informing improvements to accessibility, public engagement and SAR learning content. Risks relating to communication continuity during the transition from Tri-Borough arrangements were proactively identified and escalated to the SAB, ensuring safeguarding messages remained clear and consistent.

Overall, the Communication and Publicity Subgroup provided robust assurance that communication and engagement activity during 2025/26 was purposeful, accessible and demonstrably linked to safeguarding outcomes.

5. Safeguarding Adults Reviews (SARs)

The SAB holds a statutory responsibility to commission a SAR in circumstances where there is reasonable concern about the effectiveness of inter-agency working to protect an adult who has died, with abuse or neglect suspected as a contributing factor. This duty also extends to cases where an adult has not died but has experienced serious abuse or neglect. The overarching aim of SARs is to enable all agencies involved to reflect on their safeguarding practices, identify lessons to be learnt, and implement improvements to prevent future harm to adults at risk.

Oversight of the SAR process is provided by the SAB's dedicated SAR Panel. Throughout the reporting year, this Panel has managed six SARs. Of these, one, concerning an individual named [Ursula](#), has been fully endorsed and published. One further SAR is scheduled to be presented to the SAB for endorsement in March 2026, during which publication

arrangements will be confirmed in line with the new SAB structures. The remaining four SARs are to be transferred to the relevant successor SABs for further progression. In addition, the SAR Panel will have a clear exit strategy for the transition from the Tri-borough arrangement to the single agency arrangements, ensuring continuity, effective handover and preservation of learning through this period of organisational change.

During the same period, three SAR notifications were submitted but did not progress beyond the triage stage, as the SAR Panel Chair and SAB Business Manager found there was insufficient evidence to meet the SAR commissioning criteria. Additionally, one SAR notification is pending review by the Panel in February 2026.

There was one instance where a SAR initially met the criteria for review, but following a detailed evaluation of partner chronologies, it was determined that the criteria were not fulfilled. As a result, the SAR process was discontinued. Nevertheless, the learning identified during this process will be shared with the appropriate Local Authority SAB to determine what, if any, further action should be taken.

The SAR Panel remains committed to generating learning from SARs that is both valuable and actionable for the partnership, supporting enhanced safeguarding practice locally and contributing to national learning. Further information on the SAR process and access to published learning can be found on the SAB's dedicated webpage: [Safeguarding Adults Reviews | West of Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Board](#).

a. Quality, Learning and System Impact

The SAR Panel maintained a strong focus on quality and learning rather than process alone. Evidence from Panel minutes indicates detailed scrutiny of emerging themes and systemic issues, with active challenge to authors to ensure recommendations were SMART, proportionate and deliverable.

Statutory partners were actively involved in shaping learning events and recommendations.

Panel discussions considered cultural competence, legal literacy, transitions and multi-agency working.

Learning from SARs was embedded not solely through reports, but also via:

- Multi-agency learning events
- Learning briefs and digital resources
- Integration with learning and development priorities
- Influence on policy, procedure and guidance development

This approach demonstrates a whole-system commitment to learning from serious harm, ensuring that findings from SARs effectively inform practice, policy and workforce development.

b. Family Engagement and Transparency

SAR Panel activity provides evidence of a safeguarding culture that values family involvement, transparency and accountability. The Panel gave explicit consideration to family requests for review and explanation, adopting trauma-informed approaches to engagement and ensuring clear communication of decision-making and outcomes. This supports public confidence in safeguarding processes and aligns with national expectations for SAR practice.

c. Learning from SARs

SARs concluded during the year highlighted recurring themes, including the importance of effective multi-agency information sharing, recognition of cumulative risk and vulnerability, professional curiosity and trauma-informed practice, and timely escalation and coordinated responses. Learning from SARs was embedded into practice not only through professional learning events, but also through targeted communication and public awareness activity, such as:

- Translation of SAR learning into accessible messages for practitioners and the public
- Support for stigma-reduction, with a particular focus on self-neglect, hoarding and fire risk
- Reinforcement of key safeguarding principles, such as early identification, escalation and multi-agency working

This ensured that SAR learning was reflected across the partnership, not confined to policy or training settings.

6. Partner Contributions

Partner agencies supported the SAB through active participation at SAB meetings and subgroup levels, engagement in SARs, delivery of agreed actions, and provision of safeguarding assurance. Partners from local authorities, health services, police, fire and rescue, and the voluntary sector consistently demonstrated commitment despite operational pressures.

Due to the timing of this report and the end of Tri-Borough arrangements, individual partner reports are not included; ongoing assurance will transfer to successor governance structures.

7. Risks, Challenges and Transition

Throughout 2025/26, the SAB maintained a strong focus on monitoring and managing strategic risks. These included rising demand, increasing complexity of safeguarding concerns, and workforce pressures across all sectors. The SAB recognised that organisational changes during the year presented significant strategic challenges, warranting explicit recording and robust mitigation through structured planning.

Several actions set out in the 2025/26 Business Plan were rated RED. The SAB clarified that these ratings reflected the impact of transition and capacity constraints, rather than any lack of commitment from partners. All actions identified as RED are scheduled for review as part of the agreed handover arrangements, with responsibility for their completion transferring to the relevant safeguarding SABs as appropriate.

The SAB's Risk and Mitigation Log was updated to ensure that transition risks were accurately captured and addressed. SAB minutes documented clear agreement that this log should focus on risks within the current SAB's control, rather than attempting to manage risks beyond its direct remit. The SAB also agreed that open SARs, unresolved recommendations, and any paused priorities must be addressed through clear, structured handover plans. These included specific arrangements for family communication and ongoing oversight to ensure continuity and accountability.

Recognising that effective communication would be critical during periods of change, the SAB paid close attention to risks identified through subgroup discussions. Practical considerations included website ownership, continuity of safeguarding messages, and clarity for practitioners and the public. Rather than allowing these risks to persist at an operational level, the Communication and Publicity Subgroup formally escalated them to the SAB, ensuring that they were considered as part of wider transition planning. This approach provides evidence of early risk identification and appropriate escalation, supporting system stability throughout change.

8. Conclusion and Next Steps

During 2025/26, the West of Berkshire SAB demonstrated effective statutory leadership, underpinned by robust governance, meaningful learning, and proportionate challenge. The SAB's actions throughout the year ensured that safeguarding adults at risk remained a central focus, even amidst significant organisational transition.

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