



West of Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Board

Reading, West Berkshire & Wokingham

Annual Report 2024-25

If you would like this document in a different format, contact sabwestofberkshire@reading.gov.uk

Concerned about an adult?



If you are concerned about yourself or another adult who may be being abused or neglected, in an emergency call the Police on 999.

If you think there has been a crime but it is not an emergency, call the Police on 101 or contact Adult Social Care in the area in which the person lives.

In an emergency situation call the Police on 999.

If you think there has been a crime but it is not an emergency, call the Police on 101.

If you are concerned about yourself or another adult who may be being abused or neglected, contact Adult Social Care in the area in which the person lives, on the numbers, email address or by completed an online form below:

Reading – call 0118 9373747 or email at CSAAdvice.Signposting@reading.gov.uk or complete an online [form](#)

West Berkshire – call 01635 519056 or email safeguardingadults@westberks.gov.uk or complete an online [form](#)

Wokingham call 0118 974 6371 or email Adultsafeguardinghub@wokingham.gov.uk or complete an online [form](#)

For help out of normal working hours contact the **Emergency Duty Team** on 01344 351 999 or email edt@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

For more information visit the West of Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Partnership Board website:

<http://www.saberkshirewest.co.uk/>

Message from the Independent Chair

Welcome to the 2024-25 West of Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report. The board that I have the privilege of chairing consists of representatives from across the health and social care sector from the formal, informal and voluntary sector and its task is to oversee and help coordinate their efforts and responses to safeguard adults in the West of Berkshire area. This is a responsibility we take very seriously as we are aware that we are supporting and helping some of the most vulnerable members of our community and we recognise that the scale, impact and breadth of safeguarding issues is constantly growing. During the past few years society has witnessed an increased recognition of the impact of financial fraud and scams and an increasing recognition of domestic violence and exploitation of vulnerable adults. Members of the board and the services they represent work tirelessly to adapt, improve and develop services and support systems to best alleviate and prevent these issues against a backdrop of financial pressures and ever growing demands. I therefore want to extend my sincere thanks to every member of our community who dedicate their skills, energy and compassion to working in these complex areas. Some of these workers are volunteers who deserve even greater thanks, for example those people who run food banks and debt advice centres, are good neighbours or who simply look out and offer support to vulnerable citizens. Together with the employed health and social care staff they make a massive difference to many people's lives. Thank you all most sincerely.

Last year I was able to report that the board had been successful in seeking additional funding and I am pleased to be able to report that this funding has been used to appoint a new member of staff to the board to help us develop even more effective communication strategies and also to assist us with sourcing and analysing quality and assurance data, and I hope to be able to report on the impact of this in next year's report.

During the coming year we have new priorities to help protect vulnerable adults from exploitation and violence, and also to prevent financial exploitation more effectively. During this past year, as explained in this report, you will see how we as a board worked together to help embed a better understanding of the Mental Capacity Act within the practice of our statutory partners, and also to address the learning from the Fire Safety SAR from January 2024. The work undertaken in these and other areas is documented within this report and evidences the hard work and commitment of the board and its members.

As always, the work of the board could not happen without the commitment of colleagues who chair and attend the various subgroups and the board meetings; thank you to you all. It is also fair to say that the work of the board would come to a grinding halt without the energy and efforts of the board staff. In particular the Board Manager drives the work of the board and she does this skilfully and engagingly whilst being part time and thus I especially want to thank her for all she brings to the board.

People who elect to work in the health and social care field (and I wish to include our colleagues from the police and fire service) usually come into these professions because they want to make a difference to the lives of those in the communities that they serve. We do not always get it right every time and occasionally there are mistakes which we as a board necessarily end up focussing on, but I would like to end this foreword by highlighting the excellent demonstrations of care and compassion that occur on a daily basis, often simple acts of kindness which make such a significant difference to people. To all of us who came into these professions to make a difference and to 'do good', may we find energy and inspiration to keep going when things get tough, to support and look after ourselves and our colleagues, with the constant aim of ensuring our communities are served with the highest of standards

Professor Keith Brown MBE

Independent Chair, West of Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Board



About us

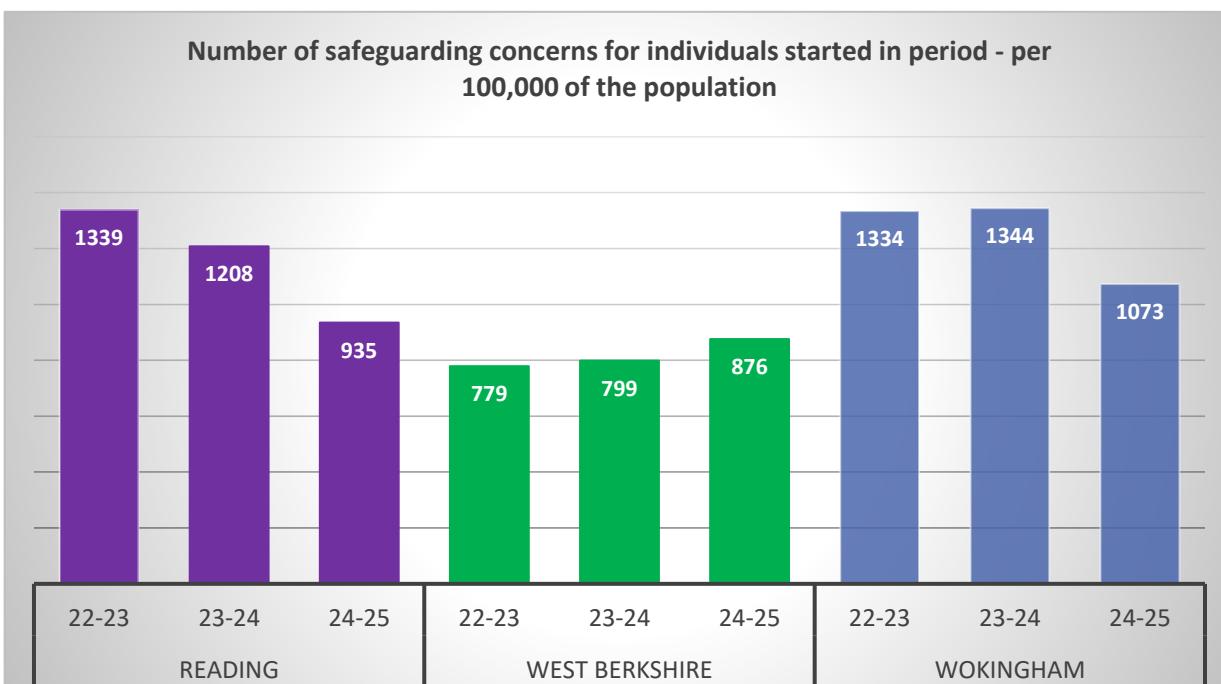
What is the Safeguarding Adults Board?	<p>The West of Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Partnership Board (SAB) covers the Local Authority areas of Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham. The SAB is made up of local organisations which work together to protect adults with care and support needs at risk of abuse or neglect. Mandatory partners on the SAB are the Local Authorities, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board and Thames Valley Police. Other organisations are represented on the SAB such as health services, fire and rescue service, ambulance service, HealthWatch, probation and the voluntary sector. A full list of partners is given in Appendix A the SAB structure in Appendix B.</p> <p>We work together to ensure there are systems in place to keep adults at risk in the West of Berkshire safe. We hold partner agencies to account to ensure they are safeguarding adults at risk and promoting their well-being. We work to ensure local organisations focus on outcomes, performance, learning and engagement.</p>
Who do we support?	<p>Under the Care Action 2024, statutory adult safeguarding duties apply to any adult aged 18 years or over:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • who has care and support needs (irrespective of the level of those needs, whether or not those needs are being met and/or who is funding any provision) • is experiencing or at risk of abuse or neglect and • as a result of those care and support needs, is unable to protect themselves from the risk or experience of abuse or neglect
Our vision	<p>Adult safeguarding means protecting people in our community so they can live in safety, free from abuse and neglect.</p> <p>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.</p>
What is safeguarding adults?	<p>Safeguarding adults means protecting others in our community who at risk of abuse and neglect and unable to protect themselves because they have care and support needs, regardless of whether or not they are receiving support for these needs. There are many different forms of abuse, including but not exclusively: Disability hate crime, Discriminatory, Domestic, Female genital mutilation (FGM), Financial or material, Forced marriage, Hate crime, Honour based violence, Human trafficking, Mate crime, Modern slavery, Neglect and acts of omission, Organisational, Physical, Psychological, Restraint, Self-neglect, Sexual and Sexual Exploitation.</p>
Safeguarding Adults Policy and Procedures	<p>Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Policy and Procedures are used in the West of Berkshire and their purpose is to support staff to respond appropriately to all concerns of abuse or neglect they may encounter: Berkshire Safeguarding Adults - Berkshire Policies & Procedures for Safeguarding Adults</p>

Number of safeguarding adult concerns and enquiries 2024-25

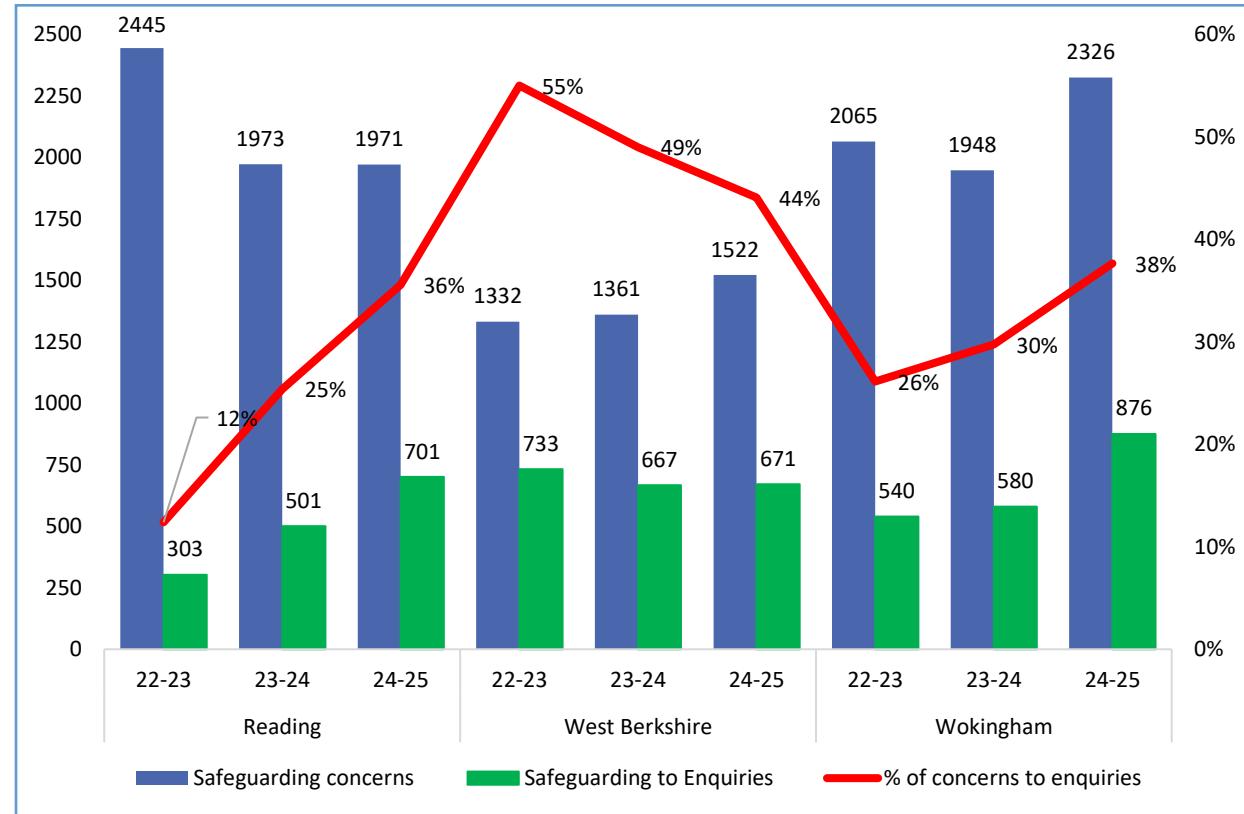
The chart below shows that in 2024–25, the total number of individuals with safeguarding concerns (per 100,000 population) has decreased by 14% in the West of Berkshire compared to 2023–24, and by 16% compared to 2022–23.

This is notable because it contrasts with the increase in the total number of safeguarding concerns raised. The key difference is that the chart only counts each individual once per reporting period, regardless of how many concerns are raised about them. In contrast, the total concerns data counts every instance a concern is logged, even if it's for the same person multiple times.

This suggests that while more concerns are being raised overall, they are increasingly about fewer individuals, possibly indicating repeat concerns for the same people.



The table below demonstrates the number of safeguarding concerns, safeguarding enquiries and conversion rate between safeguarding concern and enquiry over the last three years by local authority.



In 2024-25 there were a total of 2248 enquiries started in the West of Berkshire an increase of 29% when compared with 2023-24.

- 701 enquires in Reading an increase of 40% compared with 2024-25
- 672 in West Berkshire a increase of 1% compared with 2024-25
- 876 in Wokingham an increase of 51% compared with 2024-25

Safeguarding Concern Trends across the area 2024/25

Types of Abuse

As in previous years neglect and acts of omission was the most frequent abuse type, equating to 30% of enquiries. This was followed by financial (15%), psychological or emotional abuse (14%) and physical abuse (14%).

Safeguarding enquiries increased overall in 2024/25 compared to 2023/24, with all categories showing a rise except for Discriminatory enquiries, which fell by 17%, and Sexual Exploitation, which remained unchanged.

Organisational saw the largest increase, rising by 148% compared to 2023/24, from 21 to 52. Reading Borough Council accounted for 38 of these enquiries. This was followed by Modern Slavery at a 143% increase, the numbers remain small at 17 enquiries, 1% of the total enquiries over 24/25.

In 24-25 there was 99 enquiries with the abuse type of Sexual a 50% increase compared with the previous year.

For most enquiries (38%), the individual primary support reason was physical support, this is consistent with 2023/24. This was followed by no support reason (26%), Learning Disability Support (10%) and Mental Health Support (10%).

Support With Memory & Cognition has seen a 117% increase with 169 enquiries completed this year compared with 78 last year.

60% of enquiries relate to people over 65 years in age, this has seen a minor increase compared with last year (59%).

55% of enquires were in relation to women, this is consistent with previous years.

83% of enquires were for individuals whose ethnicity is White; this is a slight increase with last year (81%). The ethnicity of the remaining 17% of individuals is as follows: Not Known 7%, Asian 4%, Black 3%, Mixed 2%, Other 1%.

Location of alleged abuse

62% of enquiries completed were where the alleged abuse took place in the persons own home, this is a slight increase compared with 23/24 (64%). Care Homes has the second highest outturn at 23%.

There has been a 2% decrease in enquiries completed where the location of abuse was in Service within Community (commissioned service in community setting) equating to a total of 47 enquiries.

There was a 72% increase in Other (public places/homes of other people) with 189 enquiries, compared with 110 in the previous year.

Referrer's, 42% of concerns were raised by Social Care followed by Health 31% Compared with 23/24 the highest increases in referrer type was seen in:

- 50% Other service user, a total of 3 concerns.
- 25% Self referral, a total of 50 concerns.
- 18% Police, a total of 426 concerns.

The SAB have set the following priority for 25/26: Addressing the Impact of Diversity on Abuse and Neglect, to understand and mitigate the impact of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, disadvantage, and disability on abuse and neglect, and to develop effective strategies to address these issues.

Risks and Mitigations

Challenges or areas of risk that have arisen during the year are recorded on our risk register, along with actions to mitigate the risks. These are some of the potential risks that we have addressed:

Risk	Impact	Mitigation
Delay in Liberty Protection Safeguards implementation	People are not afforded the safeguards the legislation offers via an appeal route to the Court of Protection.	SAB requested assurance; 2/3 LAs provided data, SAB concluded that delays require regional/national support.
Non-compliance with QA Framework	There remains a risk that, despite robust assurance from certain agencies, the SAB/Partnership cannot fully evidence safeguarding quality across the partnership as a whole	Incorporated into SAB Business Plan, priority for the SAB .
Insufficient consideration of diversity	There is a risk of ineffective safeguarding and unequal outcomes.	Set as SAB priority for 25/26.
Limited lived experience integration	There is a risk of reduced relevance, trust, and effectiveness.	SAB to develop and implement a Lived Experience Strategy in 2025/26.
Challenges in cross-board collaboration with Community Safety partnerships, Children's Safeguarding Partnerships and Health and Wellbeing Boards.	Poor communication, missed opportunities, slower decisions.	SAB committed to strategic alignment; exploring joint meetings, protocols, and shared learning.

Our priorities for 2024/25 and outcomes to those priorities were:

Priority 1: Embedding a good understanding of Mental Capacity Act (MCA) within the practice of our statutory partners

Training & Awareness:

- MCA and Executive Function webinar held (11/06/24) with 128 attendees; [recording available on the SAB website](#) where there have been 251 views.
- MCA and Inherent Jurisdiction webinar delivered during Safeguarding Adults Week with 58 attendees; [recording available online](#), where there have been 40 views.
- SAB maintains a dedicated [MCA training calendar](#).
- MCA guidebooks purchased and distributed to all SAB statutory partners.

Partnership & Collaboration:

- Active involvement in the Integrated Care Boards Steering MCA Group; shared learning events.
- Promotion of MCA legal literacy training programme.
- SAB Chair engaged with local universities to encourage them to review MCA teaching content.

Public Engagement:

- MCA webpage launched for public access: [Mental Capacity Act 2005 – West of Berkshire](#).

Monitoring & Evaluation:

- MCA survey planned for January 2025 to assess impact; results presented to the SAB in June 2025 and [published](#).
- MCA-focused audit presented to SAB in June 2024.
- Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) waiting lists monitored by SAB

Resources & Communication:

- [SAB MCA webpage](#) reviewed and updated; resources shared across the partnership.
- MCA-related content integrated into SAB Business Plan, Risk and Mitigation Log, and Safeguarding Adults Review (SAR) Action Log.

Priority 2: Serious Violence and Exploitation, understanding the gaps from an adult safeguarding perspective.

Focus Area: Missing People – Exploring Application of the National Framework for England

Missing People Multi-Agency Response Guidance

- Launched in December 2023, developed from local learning in West Berkshire and national guidance.
- Guidance clarifies triggers for professional action, incorporating contextual risk factors.
- Guidance shared with Pan Berkshire Policy and Procedure Subgroup for consideration and potential wider implementation.
- SAB agreed in principle to signpost West Berkshire residents to a missing persons protocol. Decision pending on which platform will be used for signposting.

Carried over priority into 25/26 as it had been previously agreed by this SAB this will be a priority for several years the next action for this priority will be: Cuckooing – defining the problem and identifying solutions in response to the learning from the [Louis SAR](#). Followed by Sexual and Criminal Exploitation and Domestic Abuse and Stalking.

Priority 3: Fire Safety – to address the learning from the Fire Safety SAR in January 2024 and to improve awareness across the West of Berkshire around the increased fire risks for vulnerable people.

- [Fire Safety SAR](#) published January 2024 informed targeted partnership actions.
- [Fire Awareness webpage](#) relaunched with equipment info.
- [Safe and Well referral form](#) updated to clarify consent.
- [Safe and Well Visit and Training data](#) integrated into SAB Dashboard for monitoring.
- [Self-Neglect Policy](#) updated to include fire risk.
- [Commissioning assurance](#) confirmed fire safety in contracts.
- [Awareness campaign](#) plans agreed launched in August 25/26.

Achievements through working together continued....

Strengthening Safeguarding Assurance

- Renamed the Performance and Quality Subgroup to Scrutiny and Impact Group to better reflect its assurance and learning role.
- Reading Borough Council cleared its backlog of safeguarding concerns, demonstrating transparency and improvement.
- Introduced a multi-agency audit framework and began internal audits of Section 42 enquiries.
- Advocacy Audit process agreed; findings to be presented to the SAB in September 2025.
- Enhanced SAB dashboard with DoLS waiting list KPIs and service user feedback metrics.

Addressing Emerging Risks

- Reviewed advocacy arrangements for voluntary patients at Prospect Park Hospital; potential escalation to commissioners.
- Invited [Launchpad Reading](#) to represent rough sleepers, ensuring lived experience informs strategy.
- Escalated concerns to the [GLA](#) and government ministers regarding health and social care recruitment oversight.

Strengthening Governance and Partnerships

- Strengthened links with Community Safety Partnerships, Health and Wellbeing Boards, and West Berkshire Children's Safeguarding Partnership to address cross-cutting issues.
- Reviewed SAB Constitution to better integrate equality and diversity; endorsed a revised Health and Wellbeing Board Protocol Agreement.
- Assumed hosting of Pan-Berkshire Policies and Procedures Subgroup; initiated full policy review.

Embedding Trauma-Informed Practice

Explored trauma-informed training options; commissioning planned using underspend funds.

Improving Communication and Engagement

- Endorsed a revised Communication and Publicity Strategy, aligning safeguarding priorities across the tri-borough area.
- Updated strategy to improve accessibility for neurodiverse individuals and streamline governance during incidents.
- Planned relaunch of SAB newsletter and development of easy-read formats for the annual report.

Enhancing Learning from SARs

- SAR Subgroup maintained strong performance
- Developed a consolidated SAR Action Plan Tracker to monitor progress and accountability. Tracker showed 82% of SAR recommendations completed by year-end.
- [Bree SAR](#) led to system changes at Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, including a second opinion panel and enhanced training.
- Published SARs ([Vihad](#), [Louis](#)) using innovative formats like podcasts and presentation-style reports.
- Initiated peer review of SAR decision-making to improve transparency.

Operational Development

- Created and recruited to a new Project and Communications Officer post.
- Maintained budget contributions; allocated underspend to training and staffing.

Key Challenges in 2024/25

Workforce and Capacity Pressures

- National decline in nursing degree enrolment, with some courses only 50% filled, poses long-term risks to health and social care staffing.
- Increased safeguarding referrals, notably a 22% rise in West Berkshire, strained local authority teams.
- Health settings, including Royal Berkshire Hospital, faced sustained operational pressures.

Budget and Strategic Delivery

- Despite a budget underspend, recruitment delays impacted delivery of communications and training.
- The SAB newsletter was paused due to staffing constraints but is expected to resume mid-2025.

Subgroup Capacity and Engagement

- Attendance issues affected several subgroups, notably the Scrutiny and Impact Group and the Policies and Procedures Subgroup.
- Resource constraints made appreciative inquiry methods for audits unfeasible.

Advocacy and Information Sharing

- Inconsistent advocacy provision for voluntary patients at Prospect Park Hospital raised concerns; BHFT committed to further investigation and assurance was provided to the SAB.
- Awareness of the SAB's escalation process was found to be insufficient across the partnership. To address this, the SAB has committed to undertaking a comprehensive review and relaunch of the escalation process in 25/26.

Technology and Data Challenges

- West Berkshire Council's case file system lacked the flexibility required for SAB Quality Assurance compliance; replacement planned for 2025.
- Reading Borough Council experienced delays in DoLS data reporting due to system limitations.

Strategic Alignment with other Strategic Partnerships

- Efforts to strengthen links with other boards (Community Safety Partnerships, Berkshire West Children's Safeguarding Partnership) were hindered by scheduling and governance differences.
- Tri-borough structure can complicate decision-making and representation, especially on cross-cutting issues like homelessness and exploitation.

Safeguarding Adults Week 2024



Ran from 18th November 2024 to 22nd November 2024 the SAB delivered 7 webinars with 263 attendees, focusing on professional development and safeguarding practice. Topics included online safety, domestic abuse, autism, intelligence sharing, and the Mental Capacity Act.

Was coordinated by a Task & Finish Group in place April 2024, which was supported by the Learning & Development and Communications Subgroups.

Attendance was slightly down from 2023 (358), but feedback remained strong, 100% of surveyed attendees would recommend sessions to colleagues.

Confidence in knowledge scores increased across all webinars.

The most popular session was: Mental Capacity Act & Inherent Jurisdiction (56 attendees).

Practical, case-based learning preferred by practitioners.

Daily emails promoted SAB procedures and toolkits; 6 webinars recorded and published on the [SABs Website](#).

The Subgroup is a core part of the SAB, bringing together representatives from Healthwatch, advocacy services, and key voluntary sector organisations across Reading, West Berkshire, and Wokingham. The subgroup's purpose is to ensure that the voices, experiences, and expertise of the sector are heard and considered in the SAB's priorities and learning. The subgroup gathers feedback from across the sector on issues impacting safeguarding adults, and reports these to the SAB. As the group's feedback is based on the lived experience and perspectives of diverse organisations and communities, some of the issues raised may be subjective or reflect the views of particular groups, rather than objective data. This subjectivity is both a strength, ensuring real-world concerns are surfaced, and a challenge, as it requires careful interpretation and context when informing Board decisions and reporting.

Celebratory Points

- Considered Healthwatch's annual report and GP access report.
- Advocacy contract assurance was completed and raised at SAB.
- SAB Chair offered to attend local voluntary sector meetings
- Community sector representatives invited to join SAR panels; positive feedback shared by Reading Voluntary Action.
- New safeguarding forum launched in Reading to support voluntary sector engagement and training
- Local Authorities provided assurance on advocacy contracts and coverage.
- Agreement to improve annual feedback format to include both positive and constructive reflections.

Emerging Issues

- Language barriers preventing access to health and social care services (Healthwatch).
- GP appointments difficult to access due to app-only booking systems (Healthwatch).
- Advocacy representation inconsistencies across local councils (Healthwatch).
- High thresholds for mental health support (noted by subgroup).
- Reduction in adult safeguarding forums (noted by subgroup).
- Financial abuse and contextual safeguarding identified as emerging trends (noted by subgroup).
- Limited feedback from safeguarding teams on concerns raised (view expressed by voluntary sector representatives).
- Sector-wide concern over sustainability due to funding pressures (view expressed by voluntary sector representatives).
- Concerns about the effectiveness of the SAB's Escalation Policy (Reading Voluntary Action) – escalation policy has since been reviewed and relaunched

Website Engagement 24/25

The [SAB website](#) continues to be a vital tool for public engagement, professional development, and information sharing. The website saw: **6,621 total visits, 12,706 pageviews, 3,000 downloads.**

Traffic Sources

Source	Visits	Bounce Rate	Average Time
Search Engines	3,364	54%	1:57 min
Direct	2,659	52%	2:36 min
Referrals	554	23%	5:12 min

Through our Pan Berkshire arrangement there is a website dedicated to the Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Policies and Procedures

<https://www.berkshiresafeguardingadults.co.uk/>

Glossary of Terms

Term	Meaning
Visits	The number of times people visited the website.
Views	The number of times pages were looked at, includes repeat views.
Downloads	Files or documents saved from the website.
Bounce Rate	The percentage of visitors who left after viewing just one page.
Average Time	How long, on average, people stayed on the website.
Traffic Sources	How people found the website, e.g. via Google, direct link, or another site.
Referral	A visit that came from another website linking to the SAB site.

Top Pages Visited

Page	Views	Bounce Rate	Average Time
Practitioners	5,176	51%	1:28 min
Public	1,805	74%	1:03 min
Board Members	332	31%	2:04 min

Top Downloads

- [Learning from a Case: Ryan](#) – 121 downloads
- [SAR Bree Final Report](#) – 125 downloads
- [Case Study: RB](#) – 103 downloads

Geographic Reach

- UK visitors: 6,202
- Top international visitors: Belgium (84), USA (74), India (25)

Notable Trends

Compared to 23/24 year:

- /index page traffic increased by 34%
- [/report-a-concern](#) page saw a 133% rise
- [Safeguarding Adults Week](#) page traffic surged by 484%

Declines were noted in:

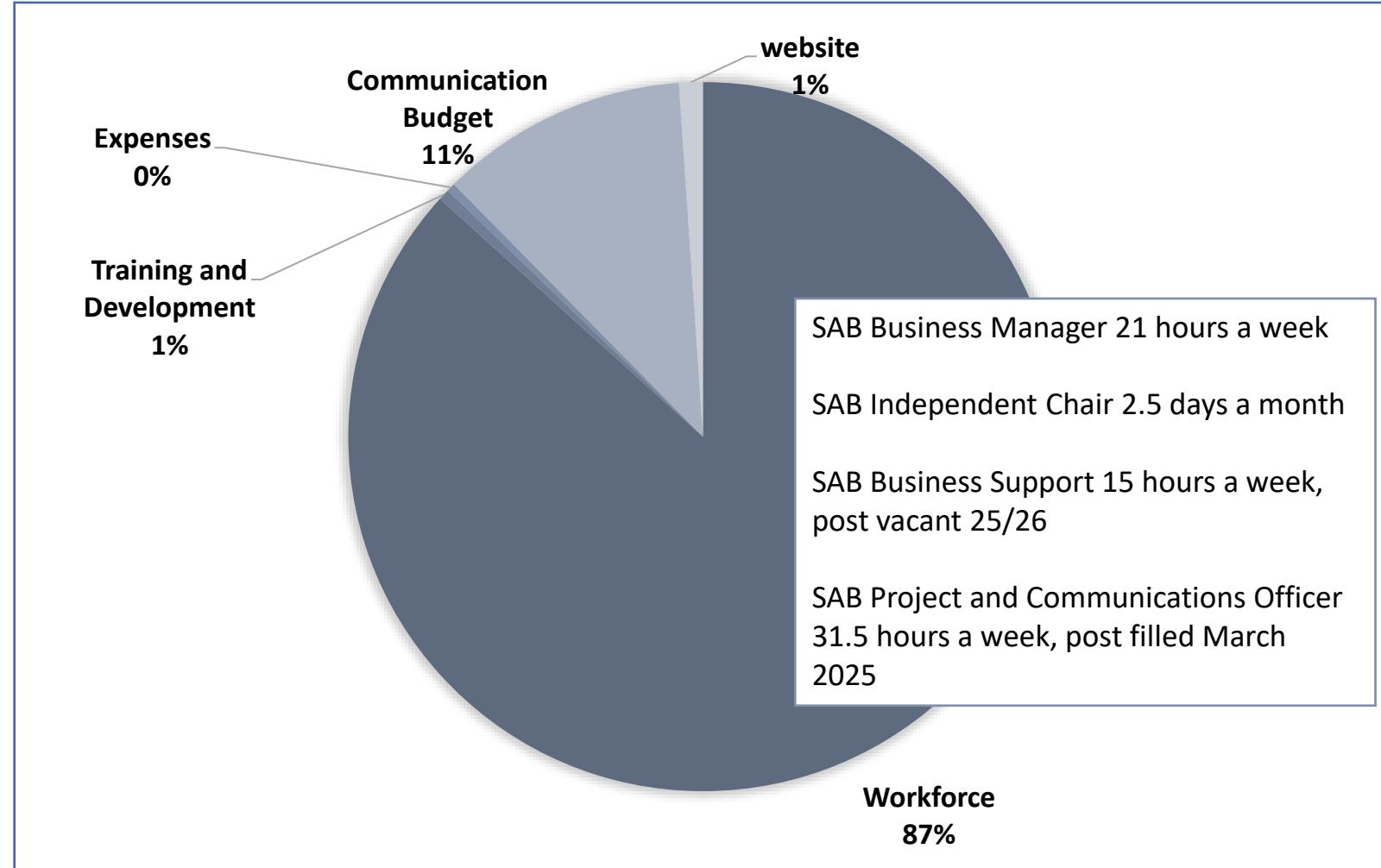
- [Types of Abuse](#) page: down 47%
- [Public section](#): down 39%
- [Workforce Development](#): down 99%

Annual Budget and Financial Contribution, 2024/25

The 2024/25 annual budget for the Board was £119k the annual budget is established through a financial contribution from statutory partners. The SAB also had £48k carry over from previous years. The name of the agency and their contribution; shown as a percentage of the overall cost in the table below and the pie chart demonstrates where the money was spent.

Partner	Agreed % Contribution
Reading Borough Council	16.07%
West Berkshire Council	16.07%
Wokingham Borough Council	16.07%
Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, West of Berkshire ICB	16.07%
Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust	9.52%
Royal Berkshire Hospital	9.52%
Thames Valley Police	16.66%

The 2024/25 expenditure was £75k and the SAB have carried over £84k 2025/26. Which will be used to support the SAB to achieve its priorities.



The SAB has a legal duty to carry out a Safeguarding Adults Review (SAR) when there is reasonable cause for concern about how agencies worked together to safeguard an adult who has died, and abuse or neglect is suspected to be a factor in their death; or when an adult has not died but suffered serious abuse or neglect. The aim is for all agencies to learn lessons about the way they safeguard adults at risk and prevent such tragedies happening in the future. The SAB has a SAR Panel that oversees this work.

During the reporting year, the SAR Panel has worked on five SARs, of which two have been endorsed and published. The remaining three SARs are due to go to the SAB for endorsement and publication in 2025/26. The SAR Panel Chair and SAB Business Manager also considered two notifications that were not discussed at SAR Panel as there was no evidence that they met the criteria for a SAR.

To strengthen the SAR process, the SAR Panel has reviewed and updated its notification form. The revised form now includes a specific requirement for referrers to clearly outline how they believe the case meets the SAR criteria as defined in the Care Act. This change aims to improve the quality and relevance of notifications received and ensure that the Panel can make informed decisions about whether a SAR is warranted.

The SAR Panel remains focused on ensuring that it produces learning from SARs that is helpful to the partnership and will support improved practice both locally and nationally. The SAB has a dedicated webpage for its SAR process and published learning: [Safeguarding Adults Reviews | West of Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Board](#)

Louis,

Louis, aged 37, died on his birthday after years of cuckooing and exploitation. He had complex mental health needs and was known to multiple agencies. Despite contact with services including police, housing, mental health, and primary care, Louis fell through systemic gaps. His vulnerability was not consistently recognised or acted upon. He was described variably by professionals, with some seeing him as “challenging” and others recognising his fear and vulnerability. His family consistently viewed him as a victim.

Louis had diagnoses including Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder and Societal Conduct Disorder, and a history of trauma, substance misuse, and mental health crises.

Key Learning

- **Safeguarding Failures**, Louis met the criteria for statutory safeguarding, but processes were not followed, and referrals were closed prematurely.
- **Multiagency Coordination**, agencies worked in silos, missing opportunities to share information and act collectively.
- **Unconscious Bias**, professionals’ perceptions of Louis may have been influenced by his mental health, substance use, and lifestyle, affecting decision-making.
- **Lack of Trauma Informed Care**, Louis’s care was overly medicalised, with little attention to his trauma history or holistic needs.
- **Strategic Disconnect**, safeguarding and community safety partnership boards lacked alignment, leading to conflicting processes and missed interventions.

Recommendations

- Addressing Unconscious Bias (UB), the SAB should develop guidance for UB shared through learning events and briefings. **Update**, learning materials to be published in the autumn 2025.
- Strengthen Strategic Integration and Multiagency Response to Cuckooing. **Update**, priority for SAB 25/26.
- The Community Safety Partnership, in collaboration with the SAB, should lead a strategic review of its process around anti-social behaviour to ensure it reflects the complex needs of vulnerable adults. **Update**, priority for SAB 25/26.
- Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Board to commission a multiagency tabletop review for key agencies to probe Thames Valley Police’s processes around the MASH, MIST and information sharing in relation to adults. **Update**, session held in August 2025, SAB will review the findings and agree next steps in 25/26.
- BHFT should confirm the review of 160 cases and implement measures to manage high caseloads to safeguard service quality and staff wellbeing. **Update**, signed off as completed August 2025
- The SAB should prioritise trauma-informed practice through ongoing training and development led by its learning and development group. **Update**, subgroup in the process of commissioning training.

Full report on the case of [Louis](#) and a [video](#) from the author.

Vihad

Vihad, a man in his mid-fifties with a diagnosed learning disability and mental health concerns, died after being struck by a vehicle shortly after discharge from hospital. His history included multiple missing person incidents, breaches of a Sexual Harm Prevention Order and inconsistent engagement with health and social care services. He had moved from supported living out of area to live with a cousin in Reading, which was not a suitable arrangement due to safeguarding concerns.

Key Learning Points

The SAR identified six thematic areas where improvements were needed:

- **Management Oversight**, there was a lack of coordinated oversight across agencies, which contributed to fragmented support and missed opportunities for timely intervention.
- **Understanding of Risk**, agencies did not consistently recognise or respond to the cumulative nature of risks associated with Vihad's behaviours and circumstances. Risk assessments were often treated in isolation, without a broader view of his history and needs.
- **Information Sharing**, communication between services, particularly across geographical boundaries was limited, which impacted the continuity and effectiveness of safeguarding interventions.
- **Use of Risk Management Pathways**, risk management protocols were not always applied consistently, and opportunities to escalate concerns or convene multi-agency responses were not fully utilised.
- **Culture**, a reactive approach to incidents often overshadowed a more holistic understanding of Vihad's needs, leading to short-term fixes rather than sustainable support.
- **Safeguarding System Limitations**, practitioners reported that existing systems did not always support proactive safeguarding, and that they felt constrained in their ability to coordinate care effectively.

Recommendations:

- Reading Borough Council should review the current structure of its adult social care community teams to establish if they are correctly staffed and resourced to meet the growing demands placed upon the service. **Update**, signed off by SAB as complete June 2025.
- The importance of Risk Assessments when dealing with vulnerable patients should be emphasised to staff as a priority. **Update**, reviewed and relaunched SAB escalation policy and updated multi-agency framework guidance July 2025. Risk assessment is prominent in the SAB's priorities for 25/26.
- The SAB, through the development of their prevention strategy, should promote the importance of holding multi-agency meetings to share information and develop multi-agency risk management plans to manage or mitigate the risks posed to vulnerable adults. **Update**, reviewed and relaunched SAB escalation policy and updated multi-agency framework guidance July 2025. Risk assessment is prominent in the SAB's priorities for 25/26.
- Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Board to commission a multiagency tabletop review for key agencies to probe Thames Valley Police's processes around the MASH, MIST and information sharing in relation to adults. **Update**, session held in August 2025, SAB will review the findings and agree next steps in 25/26.
- Ensure that carers needs in relation to Severe Multiple Disadvantage are recognised as part of the assessment and whole family process utilising a multidisciplinary approach to support people within this group and prevent high risk behaviours. Improve data recording to determine the impact of this area on carers and inform future service and support planning. **Update**, SAB audit scheduled for 25/26.

Full report on the case of [Vihad](#) and [podcast](#) from the author.

Key Priorities for 2025/26



The SAB acknowledges that there are reoccurring themes from local and national learning from SARs that must be addressed. As in previous years we will continue to consider what the obstacles are in implementing recommendations and sustaining improvement and there will be a focus on good practice to promote learning, alongside an emphasis on good quality care principles and the role of effective support and supervision of the workforce to embed learning and inform future practice.

It is possible that changes to priorities will be made throughout the duration of this year in light of national and local learning in order to ensure that there is capacity within the partnership to deliver on the most pressing priorities for the West of Berkshire. Any change in priorities will be approved by the SAB.

Through its reflective learning practice, the SAB have identified the following priorities:

Priority 1

Protection of Vulnerable Adults from Exploitation and Violence - understanding and addressing the gaps from an adult safeguarding perspective.

Priority 2

Preventing financial exploitation of adults with care and support needs

Priority 3

Addressing the Impact of Diversity on Abuse and Neglect, to understand and mitigate the impact of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, disadvantage, and disability on abuse and neglect, and to develop effective strategies to address these issues.

BAU

The Board will continue to carry out the following business as usual tasks in order to comply with its statutory obligations.

Appendices

Reference	Description
Appendix A	<u>SAB Member Organisations</u>
Appendix B	<u>SAB Structure</u>
Appendix C	<u>Achievements by partner agencies</u>
Appendix D	<u>2024/25 SAB Business Plan</u>
Appendix E	<u>2025/26 SAB Business Plan</u>
Appendix F	<p>Partners' Safeguarding Performance Annual Reports:</p> <p><u>Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire West Integrated Care Board</u></p> <p><u>Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust</u></p> <p><u>West Berkshire Council</u></p> <p><u>Wokingham Borough Council</u></p> <p><u>Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust</u></p> <p><u>Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service</u></p> <p><u>Reading Borough Council</u></p> <p>South Central Ambulance – submission pending as of publication date (17/12/25).</p>