Waltham Forest
Safeguarding
Adults Board

Annual Report 2025-26

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Safeguarding Partners' Opening Remarks

"As partners, we are committed to working together to provide leadership, challenge and oversight. This has helped us focus more clearly on our priorities and turn them into practical improvements in safeguarding. Over the past year, this has led to better joined up working across agencies, stronger oversight, and greater use of learning and data to guide improvements.

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection of Adult Social Care has provided helpful external feedback. It recognised strengths in safeguarding and partnership working, while also highlighting areas to improve, including access to services, waiting times and consistency. These findings reflect our own priorities and confirm the need for continued improvement across the system.

In response, partners are working together on a shared improvement programme, focused on early help, making services easier to access, and using data more effectively. The SAB will continue to support this work to ensure it leads to real improvements for residents.

While progress has been made, our focus remains on making practice more consistent and strengthening how we use learning, data and people's experiences to improve safeguarding."

London Borough of Waltham Forest

Marc Gadsby, Strategic Director of Adult Services & Quality Assurance

Metropolitan Police Service (North East London BCU)

Rhona Hunt, Borough Commander, North East Basic Command Unit

NHS North East London Integrated Care Board

Korkor Ceasar, Deputy Director for Safeguarding and Rob Nicholls, Director of Nursing and Safeguarding

Purpose of this Report

This Annual Report sets out the work and impact of the Waltham Forest Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB) during 2025-26. It is a statutory report under the Care Act 2014 and explains how partners have worked together to protect adults with care and support needs, at risk of abuse or neglect.

It describes how the SAB has carried out its core role by providing strategic leadership, overseeing local safeguarding partnership arrangements, and checking how well agencies are working together. It also outlines progress against the SAB Strategic Plan 2025-28 and how priorities have been taken forward during the year.

The report shows how local arrangements align with the new London Multi-Agency Adult Safeguarding Policy, Practice Guidance and Procedures (November 2025), including a focus on proportionate, person-centred approaches and effective joint working.

It also highlights learning from statutory reviews, partnership challenges, and where further work is needed to continue strengthening safeguarding across the partnership.

Partners

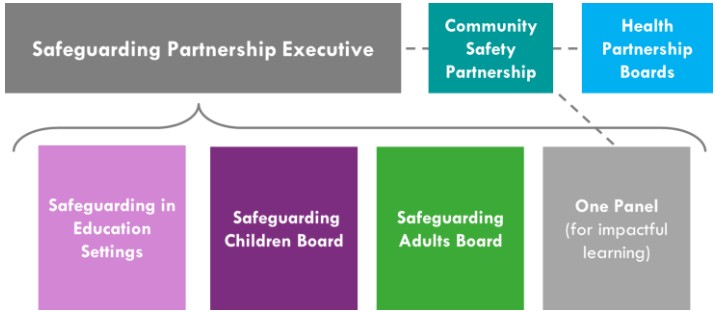
The SAB's statutory safeguarding partners in Waltham Forest are the Metropolitan Police, NHS North East London Integrated Care Board (NEL ICB) and local authority, London Borough of Waltham Forest.

Relevant agencies contributing to local safeguarding arrangements include His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, Barts Health NHS Trust, North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT), Department for Work and Pensions and London Fire Brigade.

Governance

During 2025–26, we introduced a new governance approach through our three-year strategic plan. This is designed to improve shared accountability and reduce duplication across the system.

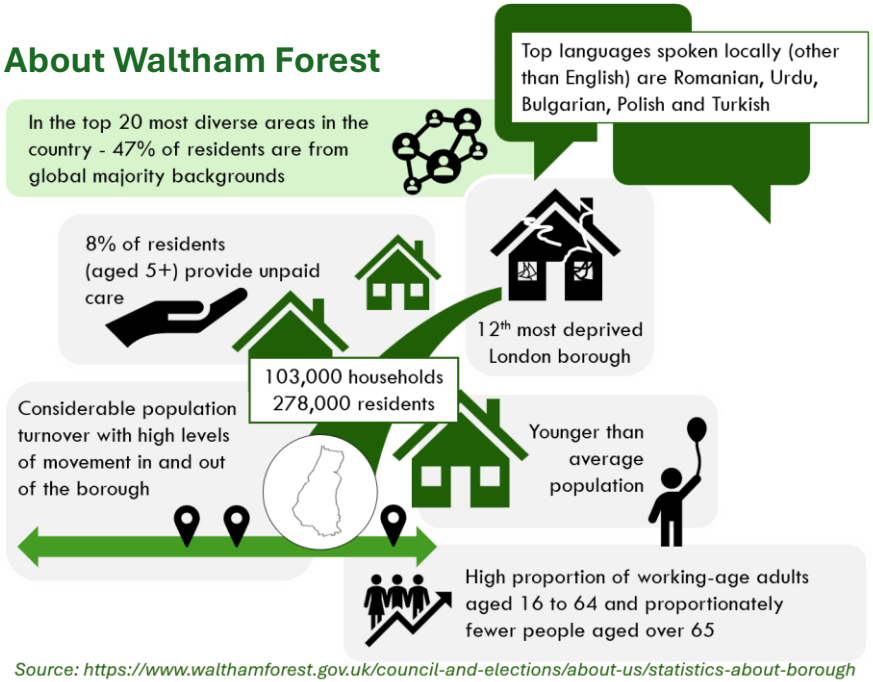
Our work is guided by four key principles: assurance through scrutiny, equitable safeguarding, impactful learning and commitment to collaboration. These principles have shaped how we set our priorities and focus our work.



With a simpler meeting structure, the SAB plays a central role in coordinating multi-agency safeguarding, led by the Safeguarding Partnership Executive. Our governance is closely aligned with other partnerships, including the Safeguarding Children Partnership, Community Safety Partnership and Health and Wellbeing Board, supporting a joined-up, whole-system approach.

Our SAB provides strategic leadership, oversight and challenge, helping to drive progress against our priorities. In 2025-26, the Board met five times, with a stronger focus on reviewing progress and improving safeguarding practice.

About Waltham Forest



Source: https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/council-and-elections/about-us/statistics-about-borough

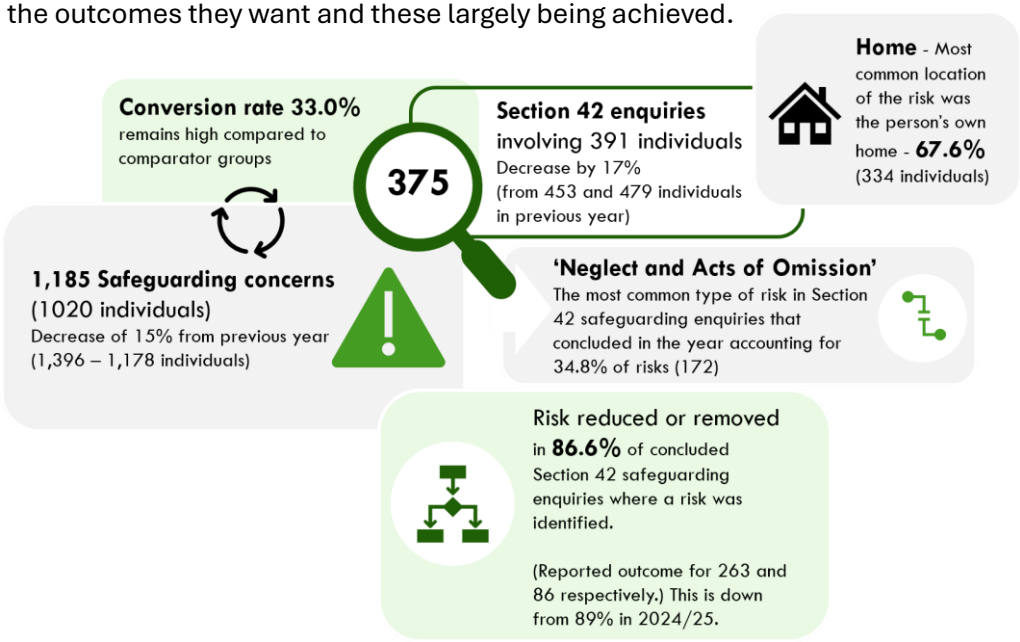
Waltham Forest is a diverse London borough in the north east of the city, home to an increasingly growing population. The borough is characterised by strong communities alongside significant inequalities, with variation in health outcomes, housing stability and access to services across neighbourhoods, all of which influence the safeguarding landscape for adults with care and support needs.

While Waltham Forest has a relatively young population, it also has a growing number of older residents and adults living with long-term health conditions, disabilities, mental ill-health, substance misuse and experiences of exclusion or disadvantage. Pressures linked to the cost of living, insecure housing and homelessness, alongside ongoing capacity challenges across health and social care, continue to impact residents' safety, wellbeing and ability to protect themselves from abuse or neglect.

A Picture of Safeguarding Adults in Waltham Forest

On review of Waltham Forest's provisional Safeguarding Adults Collection data return for 2025-26, fewer safeguarding concerns and enquiries were recorded, although this is likely influenced by service pressures rather than a reduction in need. Overall activity remains lower than regional and London averages, but a relatively high proportion of concerns still progress to formal enquiries.

Most safeguarding risks relate to neglect and occur in people's own homes. In the majority of cases, action taken reduces or removes the risk. Older adults are more likely to be affected and to require a full enquiry. Practice continues to be person-centred, with most people asked about the outcomes they want and these largely being achieved.



Data source: Waltham Forest Safeguarding Adults Collection 2025-26

Impact and Effectiveness of Arrangements

Partnership Priorities

Over the past year, we have been clearer about our priorities and tried to turn them into real improvements within safeguarding. We have sought to make better use of learning, evidence and data to focus our work where it is most needed. Stronger governance and independent scrutiny have also helped to increase challenge and accountability. Together, this shows a more joined-up and effective partnership working in line with our safeguarding duties.

Priority One: HOMELESSNESS AND SAFEGUARDING
Leads: Housing, NEL ICB, NELFT and Public Health

This reflects the national priority to better protect people who are homeless, which has been highlighted by government in recent guidance to Safeguarding Adults Boards. Locally, homelessness remains a serious and often overlooked risk, with people more likely to experience abuse, neglect, poor health, and die younger. People who are homeless are often not in touch with services, and barriers in the system can make it harder for them to get help when they need it.

As a SAB, we are committed to making sure that adults experiencing or at risk of homelessness receive timely, coordinated safeguarding responses that are trauma-informed and address root causes of risk and harm. During this year, we have taken steps to strengthen both frontline support and partnership working:

- Strengthening housing support and capacity: Investment in the Council's Homeless Service has enabled the recruitment of additional staff, including a new Triage Team, helping to improve how quickly people are identified and supported. Improvements to casework systems, alongside ongoing staff training, have reduced backlogs and led to faster assessments and advice for residents.

- Improving coordination and oversight: Regular strategic meetings between senior managers in housing and adult social care have strengthened information sharing and joint oversight, particularly in relation to people with safeguarding needs.

- Developing workforce knowledge and practice: Frontline staff have received training on housing and homelessness, and a network of 'Homeless Champions' across Early Help and Adult Social Care has been established to share learning and good practice.

- Targeting support for people with complex needs: A 12-month pilot led by NELFT began in 2025-26, focusing on people with mental health and substance misuse needs (dual diagnosis) who are at high risk. This pilot aims to provide more joined-up and targeted support. In addition, funding has been secured for an NHS Project Officer to lead a wider dual diagnosis programme from April 2026.

- Strengthening partnership working: A multi-agency Homeless Forum has been established to agree a shared vision and improve how partners work together to support people experiencing homelessness.

- Working more closely with NHS partners: Through the NHS NEL ICB Safeguarding and Inclusion Health Self-Assessment Framework pilot,

we have strengthened links with health partners and tested more coordinated approaches for adults with complex needs, including those facing homelessness. This work has also improved how we collect and use data to inform future service improvements.

- Responding to external scrutiny and learning: The CQC inspection of Adult Social Care found that some people struggled to get the information and advice they needed, found the system difficult to understand, and had to wait too long for Care Act assessments. In response, Adult Social Care is developing a new way of working, designed together with partners and people who use services. This includes a new practice framework, better use of data to understand equality and access issues, and more engagement with communities whose voices are not always heard. The aim is to make services easier to access, more inclusive, and more focused on early support, improving the information, advice and help available to people, including those experiencing homelessness.

Looking ahead to 2026-27

There is still more to do to strengthen how housing, homelessness, outreach and substance misuse services work together, both strategically and in day-to-day practice. While progress has been made, including clearer safeguarding pathways and initial training for staff, further improvements are needed.

Our focus will be on strengthening joint working, improving early help, and making better use of data and learning. This includes creating more opportunities for professionals to connect and work together, expanding early intervention approaches in housing, and strengthening links to prevention activity. We will also raise awareness of the 'duty to refer', increase joint training with Adult Social Care and NHS partners, and use data more effectively (including through the council-commissioned Newton programme) to identify need and drive improvement. Safeguarding adults will also be embedded more consistently in wider transformation work and senior leadership discussions.

Alongside this, we will continue to develop how we measure and demonstrate the impact of this work on outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.

Priority Two: SAFER PROVIDERS

Leads: NEL ICB and LBWF Integrated Commissioning.

Our Strategic Plan sets out our ambition to take a supportive, partnership-led approach that identifies risks early, enables timely and coordinated action, and strengthens shared accountability for safe, high-quality, person-centred care.

During this year, we have strengthened how we work together across the system to oversee the quality and safety of providers. This includes clearer processes for sharing information, managing risks, and taking action earlier when concerns arise.

We have clarified roles and responsibilities across safeguarding, commissioning and regulatory partners, helping ensure a more consistent and proportionate response to provider concerns. Weekly multi-agency intelligence meetings now support real-time information sharing and early identification of risks, while a monthly provider risk management board provides oversight of more complex issues and coordinates joint action. A provider concerns tracker is also in place to monitor issues, spot patterns and ensure actions are followed through.

Joint assurance work has been strengthened through coordinated contract monitoring, quality audits and joint visits, providing a more complete picture of provider performance and ensuring that concerns are quickly shared and addressed.

We have also strengthened our approach to learning and improvement. Where concerns are identified, safeguarding and commissioning teams work together with providers to develop clear improvement plans, with ongoing monitoring to track progress. In parallel, we have reintroduced a programme of provider engagement events and forums to share good practice and promote learning; these have been well attended and have supported stronger relationships across the sector.

Governance and oversight have been strengthened through regular reporting to senior leaders, reinforced by a new market oversight dashboard.

These improvements are supported by strong partnership working with organisations including the CQC, the ICB, and regional networks. This helps ensure a shared understanding of risk and a more joined-up approach to keeping people safe. Overall, this work is helping us to identify risks earlier, prevent harm, and support providers to deliver safe and sustainable services.

Looking ahead to 2026-27

Building on progress this year, the CQC inspection highlighted that while commissioning arrangements are improving and there is a strong range of provision, further work is needed to reduce delays in accessing services and strengthen how placements are arranged.

In response, our focus for 2026/27 is to continue strengthening commissioning and market management. This includes implementing a new Market Position Statement to support the development of high-quality, local provision, particularly for people with more complex needs. We will also finalise the Accommodation with Care and Support plan to guide future commissioning priorities.

We will review and improve brokerage processes to make them more efficient and transparent, supported by better data and reporting. This will be underpinned by clear guidance, training and standard operating procedures to support consistent practice and stronger oversight.

Alongside this, a review of the Provider Concerns Policy is underway to ensure it reflects current practice and aligns with strengthened partnership arrangements. This will be completed by April 2026.

From 2026-27, quarterly thematic reviews will also be introduced to provide deeper insight into patterns and risks across the provider market, helping to target improvement activity more effectively.

Together, this work will support a more responsive and sustainable local care market, reduce delays, and ensure people can access safe, high-quality support when they need it.

Priority Three: EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING AND MENTAL CAPACITY

Leads: LBWF Adults Social Care and NHS NEL ICB

Our Strategic Plan aims to improve how we support and safeguard adults whose decision-making may be affected by difficulties with executive functioning or changing mental capacity, particularly people who are seldom heard. These issues continue to come up in Safeguarding Adults Reviews (SARs), both locally and nationally. While awareness has improved, there is still more to do to make sure all services respond in a consistent way especially when working with people who may disengage or whose needs are less visible.

The CQC inspection found that safeguarding systems are generally strong, but that staff confidence and consistency in applying the Mental Capacity Act varies. This highlights the need to continue strengthening knowledge and practice across all partners.

During 2025-26, we improved shared understanding of how executive functioning affects people's ability to make decisions and manage risk. This has led to more balanced and thoughtful practice, including better use of mental capacity assessments and clearer decision-making. There is also a stronger focus on being curious, understanding people's lived experiences, and using trauma-informed approaches, particularly where risks may be hidden. We have supported this through joint learning, case discussions and closer partnership working across adult social care, health, housing, police and voluntary organisations. Adult Social Care has also introduced a monthly 'Safeguarding Adults Managers Forum' to share good practice and support learning across teams.

However, partners recognise that we do not yet have the right measures in place to show the impact of this work. In line with wider CQC findings about improving how we use data and insight we are developing a clearer baseline. This will include tracking things like referrals to advocacy, use of the Court of Protection, and how risks escalate across the system.

Feedback from partners also highlighted the need for more advanced training, particularly for police and health colleagues, to build confidence in complex situations. We are also looking at learning from initiatives such as Right Care, Right Person to better understand how need and risk are presenting locally. Alongside this, we are beginning to develop a more flexible "trusted assessor" approach for people who may struggle to engage with services, such as those experiencing homelessness or trauma. The aim is to build trust and make it easier for people to get the right support.

Looking ahead to 2026-27

While we have made progress, more work is needed to make practice consistent across all services. In 2026-27, we will focus on:

- Putting in place clearer measures to track progress and impact
- Strengthening training so staff feel more confident in applying the Mental Capacity Act
- Improving how we identify and respond to escalating risk
- Using learning from Right Care, Right Person and local experience
- Developing better ways of working with people who are seldom heard, including the trusted assessor approach
- Undertaking a multi-agency audit focused on self-neglect, particularly where there are concerns about a person's executive functioning and capacity

This will help us provide more consistent, person-centred support and better protect adults whose needs and risks can be harder to recognise.

As this report was being produced, we were taking on board the biggest change in deprivation of liberty safeguards (DoLS) law since "Cheshire West" (2014). We will work together to understand and apply these changes consistently, moving from a broad "acid test" to more balanced, case-by-case decisions about liberty, consent and context, while ensuring people's rights remain central and protections are applied proportionately.

Priority Four: SAFER DISCHARGE FROM HOSPITAL
Lead: Barts Health NHS Trust

Our Strategic Plan sets out our aim to ensure that people of all ages are discharged from hospital into safe and appropriate environments, with risks identified early and managed effectively. This includes discharge from both acute and mental health services.

Nationally and locally, hospital discharge continues to present safeguarding risks. A recent SAR highlighted risks in same-day discharge without adequate support, including gaps in communication, lack of follow-up, and people returning to unsafe environments. This reinforces that safe discharge is a shared responsibility across health, adult social care, housing and voluntary sector partners.

During 2025-26, we strengthened our approach by improving joint working, clarifying roles, and embedding safeguarding into discharge planning. Discharge pathways and coordination hubs now place a stronger focus on identifying and managing risk early, helping to ensure people are discharged safely and with the right support in place.

Learning from SARs has led to clearer tools and expectations for practice, including improved discharge checklists, clearer escalation routes, and stronger expectations around professional challenge. This is helping staff to recognise and respond to risks more consistently.

We have also strengthened oversight. Progress is monitored through audit activity and key indicators, such as safeguarding concerns linked to discharge and how well risk is recorded and managed. Multi-agency forums, including discharge coordination hubs with safeguarding input, support oversight of more complex cases and enable partners to learn and improve together.

Looking ahead to 2026/27

While progress has been made, we will continue to focus on ensuring consistency and sustaining improvements over time. In 2026/27, we will:

- Strengthen the consistency of safe discharge practice across all pathways, including mental health services
- Continue to embed safeguarding into discharge planning and frontline practice
- Use a programme of multi-agency audit to test the quality of discharge arrangements, track improvement over time, and provide assurance to the Safeguarding Adults Board
- Use learning from audits, data and Safeguarding Adults Reviews to drive ongoing improvement and reduce risk

This will help ensure that people are discharged safely, with the right support in place, and that risks are identified and addressed at the earliest opportunity.

Priority Five: SAFEGUARDING INFORMAL CARERS AND THOSE THEY CARE FOR

Leads: LBWF Adults Social Care and Carers First

Our Strategic Plan recognises the need to protect the wellbeing and safety of both unpaid carers and the people they care for, acknowledging the pressures that caring roles can create.

Carers play a vital role in keeping people safe, but they can also be at risk themselves particularly where there is stress, isolation, poor housing, financial hardship or domestic abuse. Without the right support, caring situations can also lead to unintentional neglect or harm.

During this year, we strengthened our focus on carers within safeguarding practice. This included improved joint working between adult social care, health, housing, community safety and carers' services, helping to identify risks earlier and respond more effectively. We also reinforced the importance of recognising carers as partners in safeguarding, while ensuring their own needs and rights are properly assessed and supported.

Learning from across the partnership has highlighted the need to better recognise the vulnerability of carers, particularly where there are multiple or complex needs such as housing issues, debt or inequalities. It has also shown the importance of professional curiosity, especially where caring relationships may mask risk.

We have also identified the importance of better understanding and reflecting the lived experience of carers. Strengthening the "voice of carers" will be a key part of how we improve services and safeguarding responses. Alongside this, there is more to do to ensure carers are consistently reflected in safeguarding training and practice. Data from carers' services also suggests we need to better understand who is accessing support, and to target communities who are currently underrepresented.

Looking ahead to 2026/27

In the coming year, we will strengthen our approach by:

- Increasing how we capture and use the views and experiences of carers to inform service improvement and safeguarding practice
- Improving how carers are identified, offered assessments, and supported, including better tracking of the number of carers' assessments offered and completed
- Using data, including demographics, to understand gaps in access and target underrepresented groups, with a particular focus on young carers and links with the Safeguarding Children Partnership
- Coordinating learning for professionals to better recognise and respond to risks involving carers
- Strengthening links with housing, community safety and financial support services to address wider risks such as poor housing, debt and domestic abuse
- Embedding practical safeguarding tools and clear guidance within assessments and reviews to support early identification of risk
- Continuing multi-agency learning and workshops to build confidence and consistency in practice

This will help ensure that carers and the people they support are better protected, their voices are heard, and that support is more targeted and effective.

Priority Six: TRANSITIONAL SAFEGUARDING
Leads: LBWF Adults Social Care and Early Help

Our Strategic Plan aims to ensure that young people moving into adulthood, especially those who do not meet the threshold for adult statutory services still have access to the right support to keep them safe. This is a priority for the SAB, but equally important for the Safeguarding Children Partnership. By working together, we are taking a more joined-up approach, helping to manage risks that cross over from childhood into adulthood and ensuring young adults experience more consistent and coordinated support.

Over the past year, we have strengthened this approach through a more joined-up, system-wide model. This includes expanding the Adults Early Help offer for young adults aged 18-25, with clearer referral pathways from children's services, adult MASH, education, housing, health and probation. Family Group Conferencing has been central to this, supporting earlier, strengths-based intervention and helping young people stay connected to their support networks.

We have seen strong progress in how young people are accessing support. The number of young adults supported through link workers and family group conferencing has increased significantly from 25 in 2023-24 to 107 in 2025-26. Community drop-in services have also grown, rising from 32 to 160 over the same period. This suggests improved visibility of services, stronger partnership working, and growing trust among young people and families.

Despite this progress, partners recognise that there is more to do. Transition points, particularly from Youth Justice to Adult Probation and from CAMHS into adult mental health services, remain high-risk, with support often changing and engagement becoming more dependent on the individual. There are also gaps in awareness and access to services, particularly among colleges, universities and some communities, and more needs to be done to reach young adults who are not known to services.

Looking ahead to 2026/2027
In the coming year, we will build on this progress by:

- Developing a clearer picture of how young adults use services, including better data on access, demographics and need
- Reviewing our current offer to identify gaps and strengthen support, particularly at key transition points
- Improving pathways between services, including CAMHS, youth justice, probation and adult services
- Strengthening work with the voluntary and community sector to better reach young adults who are not known to services
- Increasing focus on trauma-informed practice and ensuring the voices of young adults shape how services develop
- Continuing to raise awareness of transitional safeguarding across the partnership and wider community
- Introducing a multi-agency audit approach to provide assurance, track progress over time, and drive improvement

This will support a more consistent and joined-up approach, helping young adults to move safely into adulthood with the right support in place.

Strengthening Our Ways of Working

DATA-INFORMED SAFEGUARDING

We have established a SAB performance dashboard, providing a strong foundation for improving how we use data to understand and respond to safeguarding needs.

During 2025-26, we strengthened our focus on using data to support our priority areas and decision-making. This reflects our commitment to more evidence-based practice. However, we recognise that data systems are changing across the partnership, particularly within Adult Social Care, where much of our data comes from and this has affected consistency.

Feedback from partners shows that, while data is being used, it is not yet fully joined up or consistently informing practice. Current approaches can feel fragmented, with limited integration between systems and some reliance on basic tools. There are also ongoing challenges around data sharing, including system differences and building confidence across organisations.

Looking ahead to 2026-27

We are continuing to develop a more joined-up approach. Improvements to the partnership dashboard are helping us better understand safeguarding trends, patterns and inequalities, and track progress against priorities. We are also using multi-agency forums more effectively to bring data into discussions and support shared learning.

There is a clear opportunity to strengthen how we use data to identify risk earlier, understand who may not be accessing support, and improve how we work together. While progress is being made, further development is needed to create a more consistent and fully integrated multi-agency approach.

We will ensure that each of our priority areas is supported by clearer data and analysis, so that progress can be tracked more effectively, discussions are better informed, and the SAB is able to strengthen its oversight and assurance of impact.

EMBEDDING VOICES OF LIVED EXPERIENCE

Listening to people with lived experience is central to effective safeguarding. It helps us understand how services are working in practice and whether they are making a real difference.

During this year, we have strengthened how lived experience informs our work. For example, feedback from patients has helped shape improvements to safer hospital discharge, ensuring that changes reflect what matters most to people. We have also used learning from SARs, alongside data and practitioner insight, to inform our priorities and improvement work.

We are increasingly encouraging partners to include lived experience in partnership updates, helping to bring real examples into discussions and support more informed decision-making.

However, feedback from partners shows that this is not yet consistent. While there are examples of good practice, lived experience does not always shape board-level discussions or decision-making in a meaningful way. There is also more to do to ensure that a wider and more diverse range of voices are heard, particularly from people who are yet to be convinced to engage with services.

Looking ahead to 2026/2027

In the coming year, we will:

- Strengthen how we capture and use the views of people with lived experience, including bringing more real-life examples into Board discussions
- Ensure that lived experience is routinely considered alongside data and professional insight in multi-agency forums
- Improve how we engage with a wider and more diverse range of residents, including those who are seldom heard
- Learn from areas of good practice across the partnership to embed this approach more consistently
- Strengthen feedback mechanisms so that we can better understand the impact of safeguarding from the perspective of residents

This will help ensure that safeguarding is shaped by the people it affects, leading to more responsive, inclusive and effective services.

A STRONG LEARNING CULTURE

In April 2025, we reflected on how well learning from reviews is making a difference and used this to shape our new strategic plan. This highlighted the need for a more joined-up approach and led to changes to how we work within our cross-partnership 'One Panel' (a forum responsible for oversight of SARs, Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews), so learning leads to real improvement.

From July 2025, we introduced a new way of working, with meetings alternating between identifying learning and putting that learning into practice. This has strengthened accountability for review action plans and helped us find common themes across cases.

At the start of the year, eight statutory reviews (including two SARs) were in progress. Three were completed during 2025-26, with five (including both SARs) continuing into 2026-27.

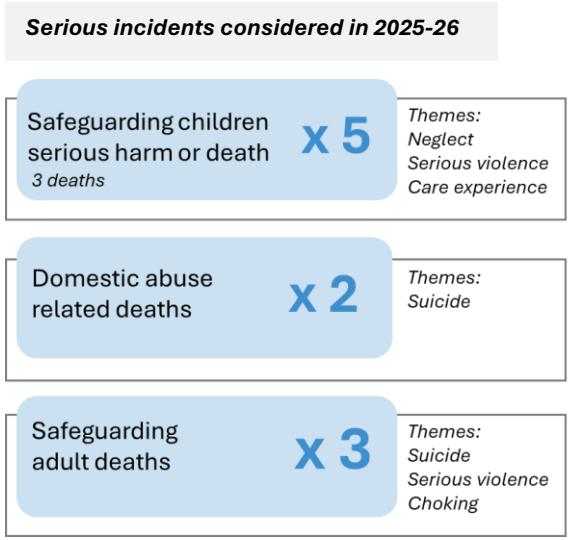
Statutory review carried over from 2025/26	*Status of review*
Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review into Restrictive Practices	Active – remains in progress
Thematic Review into Violence Affecting Black Boys	Published in October 2025
Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review for Children L	Published in April 2025
Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review for Children M	Published in October 2025
Safeguarding Adults Review for Katie	Active – remains in progress
Safeguarding Adults Review for Lloyd	Active – remains in progress
Domestic Homicide Review for B	Active – remains in progress
Domestic Abuse Related Death Review for A	Active – remains in progress

Learning from these reviews, along with wider incidents and partner feedback, has directly shaped our priorities. Key themes we agreed to particularly focus on were escalation and the quality of referrals.

Learning from serious incidents

Between April 2025 and March 2026, 16 One Panel meetings were held. Five focused on putting learning into practice, five were for children's rapid reviews, and the remaining meetings looked mainly at incidents involving adults.

During the year, 10 serious incidents were reviewed. Most reflected themes we are already addressing through our strategic priorities or existing learning, so they did not lead to further statutory reviews. One domestic abuse-related death met the criteria for review and is ongoing.



In November 2025, strengthened challenge between partners led to more consistent decision-making about which incidents meet the threshold for review, supported by a revised process.

We have also made better use of national learning. This includes reflecting on reports such as "It's Silent": Race, racism and safeguarding children and the review into Sara Sharif. While these are from a children's perspective, we have applied the learning across both adult and children's safeguarding and shared key insights with frontline practitioners.

Partnership Training

Multi-agency training is shaped by the partnership's priorities and learning from reviews and audits. However, financial pressures have limited what we can offer, meaning we rely heavily on staff from partner organisations to deliver training. Capacity has also reduced, following the loss of one coordinator in the team.

Between April 2025 and March 2026, partners worked together to deliver training across both adults' and children's safeguarding. While this shows strong collaboration, organising sessions remains resource-intensive and largely manual.

Although some data has been collected, it is difficult to fully measure the impact of training. In children's training, only 13% of attendees completed evaluation forms making it harder to understand outcomes and improve future sessions. Strengthening how we capture and use feedback is a key priority.

2024-25 Training *Adults*	**Measures**	**2025-26 Training**		
		Totals	*Adults*	*Across*
4	**Total learning sessions delivered**	**11**	7	4
230	**Professionals attended**	**383**	212	171
291	**Professionals registered**	**674**	405	269+
79%	**Rate of attendance** (attending / registered)	**57%**	52%	64%
N/A	**Evaluation forms completed**	**77**	77	N/A
N/A	**Participants reporting improved knowledge / understanding**	**N/A**	N/A	N/A

Overall attendance was low at 57% and reinforces the need to consider other ways of sharing learning in future. Engagement was strongest from Adult Social Care and health partners, but lower from other parts of the wider system, highlighting gaps in reach.

Multi-agency audits

Multi-agency audits continued to present a challenge for the Partnership during 2025-26. While this was an agreed area of focus, competing service pressures meant that planned audits were not delivered as intended.

Looking ahead to 2026-27

Changes to the One Panel have improved how we learn as a partnership. We now take a more structured approach, with clearer themes emerging over time, and growing confidence in decision-making. We are also making better use of national learning, although this needs to be strengthened further in adult safeguarding.

However, feedback shows that learning is not yet consistently shared or embedded into practice. While there are good examples, including Safeguarding Adults Reviews, learning does not always reach all partners or lead to lasting change. There is also a need to make learning a shared responsibility across the whole system.

We recognise that providers need more support to engage with and apply learning, and that opportunities should be more accessible beyond statutory services.

In response, our focus for 2026–27 will be to:

- improve how learning is shared so it is accessible, relevant and reaches all partners
- link learning more clearly to training, audit and quality assurance
- develop better ways to measure the impact of learning on practice and outcomes
- strengthen how learning is reported to and overseen by the SAB
- support partners and providers to apply learning in practice
- make better use of data to identify themes and track improvement

We will also continue to strengthen our audit and assurance work, so we can clearly show whether learning is leading to real and lasting improvements.

PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGE AND ESCALATION

During 2025-26, we strengthened our approach to professional challenge and escalation, recognising its importance in preventing delay and ensuring risks are addressed quickly.

The introduction of our Multi-Agency Escalation and Professional Challenge Guidance has helped clarify how concerns should be raised and resolved. This is supporting greater confidence among practitioners, clearer expectations, and more timely escalation when needed. Learning from reviews has also reinforced that challenge should be respectful, solution-focused and part of everyday safeguarding practice, not just a last resort.

However, feedback from partners shows that practice is still inconsistent. While professional challenge works well in some areas, it is not applied as

consistently across the partnership as it should be. There are also questions about how well guidance is being used in practice, and whether information sharing is always leading to effective challenge or better outcomes.

We recognise the need to strengthen a culture of constructive challenge at all levels, including at SAB level, where discussions can at times feel too comfortable. Overall, this is an area where there is some strong practice, but more needs to be done to embed consistency and confidence across the system.

Looking ahead to 2026/2027

In the coming year, we will:

- strengthen a culture of constructive challenge across all partners, including at Board level
- improve consistency in how escalation and challenge processes are applied in practice
- use training and audit activity to test how well guidance is being followed and where improvement is needed
- ensure that information sharing leads to effective challenge and better outcomes
- review and streamline risk management and escalation forums to improve efficiency and oversight
- improve partners' understanding of each other's roles, services and responsibilities, including developing a clear overview of what each organisation can offer. This will help partners make better use of each other's expertise and strengthen confidence in raising and resolving professional challenge

This will help ensure that concerns are raised, challenged and resolved promptly, reducing risk and improving safeguarding outcomes.

PROPORTIONATE APPROACHES TO ADULT SAFEGUARDING

The Care Act 2014 highlights the importance of strong partnership working, clear roles, and effective information sharing to support good safeguarding practice.

Our current thresholds guidance (from 2019) no longer fully reflects how services are working or the challenges we face today. It needs updating to support a more consistent, proportionate and person-centred approach to safeguarding across all agencies.

In response, we will work with partners, including service providers, to review and refresh the guidance. The aim is to support better shared decision-making, improve consistency in how safeguarding concerns are managed, and ensure that responses are proportionate while keeping people safe.

This work will also help strengthen a learning culture, so that safeguarding focuses not only on managing risk but also on understanding what works well and where practice can improve.

Independent Scrutineer Reflections

In Waltham Forest, we have aligned safeguarding arrangements across children's and adults' services by adopting an Independent Scrutineer role. Building on the children's safeguarding model, this approach retains the most strategic elements of an independent chair, providing a cross-partnership view to support effective challenge, assurance and leadership.

"The 2025-26 reporting year reflects a learning and improving SAB in Waltham Forest, with a clear strategic direction, strengthened governance, and a focused partnership approach. I joined the SAB for Waltham Forest in January of 2026 in the role of Independent Scrutineer. From this independent perspective, and with insight gained from earlier reports from the first part of the year, I have been assured through the evidence provided, that the Board has undertaken significant development and made impressive progress.

The introduction of a refreshed strategic plan and governance model has brought greater clarity of purpose and improved alignment across system partners. The Board has been increasingly exercising its role in scrutiny, assurance, and constructive challenge, supported by better-defined priorities and stronger multi agency engagement.

There are clear signs of a learning culture present within the interchanges between services. Changes as to how learning is identified, shared, and embedded, particularly through SARs and multi-agency forums, indicate a commitment to reflective practice and continuous improvement.

There has been progress across several priority areas which demonstrates the partnership's ability to translate strategy into action.

Work on safer providers and hospital discharge shows a more coordinated, intelligence-led system, with improved oversight, earlier identification of risk, and clearer accountability. Similarly, the development of a preventative, multi-agency approach to transitional safeguarding and early help reflects a shift toward earlier intervention and improved reach to vulnerable groups. This progress is further assuring when considering the challenges that faced the partnership during the period of this report. This period witnessed the biggest policy and structural change for health and wellbeing services for at least 40 years, and this current year is seeing a consolidation and continued implementation of those changes.

The year that will follow, will introduce further change, with the expected outcome of Baroness Casey's "Independent Commission on Adult Social Care", which the Baroness predicts will be a moment of reckoning for Adult Social Care. If this is to be the case, these changes will not be contained within local authority services, they will require changes across all partners within the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.

I have considered the practice, audit, governance and strategy currently in place across the safeguarding arrangements. I am confident from the evidence I have seen and witnessed firsthand, that the Board and it's partnership of services have the experience, the relational culture, the shared endeavour and the commitment to meet and address these forthcoming challenges. I look forward to working with partners to further assure our practice serves the needs of our most vulnerable adults within Waltham Forest."

Rob McCulloch-Graham

Conclusion

This annual report has given us the opportunity to reflect on progress made over the past year. The Strategic Plan has been instrumental in refining our focus on those areas requiring the greatest attention, and this period of reflection has enabled us to take stock, learn from experience and update our priorities accordingly.

As we move into 2026-27, we will build on the progress made this year to further strengthen the effectiveness, consistency and impact of local safeguarding arrangements. A key focus will be improving how we use data, alongside learning from reviews, to drive measurable and sustained improvement.

Our priority focuses for the year ahead are set out throughout this report. We remain committed to delivering against them, supported by strong local governance, statutory partnership arrangements and independent scrutiny. Together, these provide a clear framework for mutual accountability, assurance and continuous improvement across the safeguarding system.

Appendix 1 – Funding and resources

The ICB, Police and Local Authority have a legal responsibility to fund the Partnership, ensuring that resources are allocated to the development and delivery of safeguarding initiatives, training, and response mechanisms. In addition to statutory partners, some relevant agencies also provide financial support.

These collective contributions enable the Strategic Partnerships Unit to carry out the work of the Safeguarding Partnerships (covering adults and children) to coordinate local safeguarding efforts and drive continuous improvements in service provision, alongside the other partnerships.

Strategic Partnerships Team Income	**£328,300**
NHS NEL Integrated Care Board	£100,000
North East London Foundation Trust	£10,000
Barts Health NHS Trust	£10,000
Police *(Nationally agreed)*	£10,000
National Probation Service *(Nationally agreed)*	£1000
London Borough of Waltham Forest	£100,000+ £97,300

Strategic Partnerships Team Expenditure	**£328,300**
Strategic Partnership Unit Staff	£295,700
Independent Scrutiny *(December to March)*	£8,000
Professional Services *(Statutory Reviews)*	£15,800
Professional Services *(Other – Neglect toolkit)*	£2,800
Miscellaneous other	£6,000