



# Gwent Safeguarding Board

## Annual Report

### 2023 –2024

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Gwent Safeguarding Board published a three-year strategic plan, covering the period between 2023/24 to 2025/26. This incorporates the work of both the Gwent-wide Adult Safeguarding Board (GwASB) and the South-East Wales Safeguarding Children Board (SEWSCB). This report provides an updated position against Year One (2023/2024) of this Strategic Plan and remains an important means by which the Gwent Safeguarding Board is publicly accountable for reviewing their effectiveness.

Our strategic plan was prepared with the significant backdrop of the growing cost-of-living crisis and its considerable challenges for citizens, practitioners, service providers and communities. The impact and associated safeguarding implications are still being fully understood in terms of increased poverty, neglect, mental health and resounding service challenges across all sectors. In the face of this, Gwent Safeguarding Board partners continue to work collaboratively and diligently to ensure that essential safeguarding services provide support and protection to children and adults.

During its preparation, all Board member agencies were offered the opportunity to inform this annual report, primarily through discussion, reflection and input at the Safeguarding Board Development Session in February 2024. In addition, this report has been produced using routine information sourced from subgroup chairs and members, wider stakeholders, and practitioners.

The content of the report will cover all fourteen functions in relation to the implementation of Safeguarding Board objectives as set out in the Social Care Wales, Safeguarding Boards (General) (Wales) Regulations 2015. The purpose of this report is set out in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the accompanying Welsh Government Guidance - Working Together to Safeguard People Volume 1:

*The purpose of annual plans and reports is twofold; it is to be a useful tool of accountability and evaluation. In this context, accountability has three components. They are:*

- *Accountability to the public;*
- *Accountability to the statutory agencies from which the Safeguarding Board's partners are drawn;*
- *Accountability to the inspectorate bodies.*

For this period, we worked towards achieving our joint overarching strategic vision, underpinned by three joint strategic priorities as follows:

## **One Joint Overarching Vision:**

To ensure that children and adults, in Gwent, are safeguarded.

## **Three Joint Strategic Priorities:**

1. To better protect children and adults from neglect, physical, emotional, sexual and financial harm.
2. To better protect children and adults at risk of exploitation.
3. To improve and maintain the effectiveness of regional safeguarding arrangements.

In that context, this report will review the progress made by both the South-East Wales Safeguarding Children Board (SEWSCB) and the Gwent-wide Adult Safeguarding Board (GwASB), over the past year, giving a

summary of the activity of the groups, work streams, as well as the learning that serves to support the strategic safeguarding framework of the region. We will also indicate where amplified safeguarding concerns have been identified for greater focus over the forthcoming period, to ensure the wellbeing and safety of citizens.



**Gareth Jenkins**

**Head of Children's Services – Caerphilly C.B.C**  
**SEWSCB Chair**



**Jane Rodgers**

**Director of Social Services – Monmouthshire C.B.C.**  
**GwASB Chair**

## 2. LIST OF GWENT SAFEGUARDING BOARD MEMBERS

- **Membership**

The membership of each Board is as follows:

### SOUTHEAST WALES SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD

<b>Chair / Head of Children's Services</b>	Caerphilly C.B.C.
<b>Paediatrician</b>	A.B.U.H.B
<b>Designated Doctor</b>	A.B.U.H.B
<b>Head of Safeguarding</b>	A.B.U.H.B.
<b>Lead Consultant</b>	A.B.U.H.B (Public Health Team)
<b>Assistant Director</b>	Barnardo's
<b>Service Manager</b>	Blaenau Gwent C.B.C
<b>Head of Children's Services</b>	Blaenau Gwent C.B.C.
<b>Corporate Director of Education</b>	Blaenau Gwent C.B.C.
<b>Head of Community Services</b>	Bron Afon Community Housing
<b>Service Manager</b>	Caerphilly & Blaenau Gwent YOS representing Gwent YOT's
<b>Chief Officer Education</b>	Caerphilly C.B.C
<b>Senior Solicitor, Legal Services</b>	Caerphilly C.B.C
<b>Service Manager Safeguarding</b>	Caerphilly C.B.C.
<b>Chief Executive Officer</b>	GAVO
<b>Head of Operations</b>	GDAS
<b>Head of PPU</b>	Gwent Police
<b>Head of PDU</b>	Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service
<b>Head of Children's Services</b>	Monmouthshire C.C.
<b>Safeguarding Service Manager</b>	Monmouthshire C.C
<b>Housing &amp; Communities Manager</b>	Monmouthshire C.C.
<b>Chief Education Officer</b>	Monmouthshire C.C.
<b>NISB member</b>	National Independent Safeguarding Board
<b>Children's Services, Service Manager</b>	Newport C.C
<b>Chief Education Officer</b>	Newport C.C.
<b>Head of Children's Services</b>	Newport C.C.
<b>Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner</b>	Office of Gwent Police & Crime Commissioner
<b>Designated Nurse</b>	National Safeguarding Service, Public Health Wales
<b>Business Manager</b>	Regional Safeguarding Business Unit
<b>Group Manager</b>	Torfaen C.B.C
<b>Head of Children's Services</b>	Torfaen C.B.C
<b>Head of Resources &amp; Planning, Education</b>	Torfaen C.B.C
<b>Senior Executive Officer</b>	Torfaen Voluntary Alliance
<b>Regional Adviser</b>	VAWDASV Regional Team
<b>Head of Safeguarding</b>	Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

**GWENT-WIDE ADULT SAFEGUARDING BOARD**

<b>Chair / Director, SSD</b>	Monmouthshire C.B.C.
<b>Vice Chair / Head of Safeguarding</b>	A.B.U.H.B.
<b>Lead Consultant</b>	A.B.U.H.B. (Public Health Team)
<b>Service Manager</b>	Blaenau Gwent C.B.C
<b>Head of Adult Services</b>	Blaenau Gwent C.B.C.
<b>Service Manager Safeguarding</b>	Caerphilly C.B.C.
<b>Head of Adult Services</b>	Caerphilly C.B.C.
<b>Head of Active Ageing</b>	Derwen Cymru (part of POBL Group)
<b>Chief Executive Officer</b>	GAVO
<b>Head of Operations</b>	GDAS
<b>Head of PPU</b>	Gwent Police
<b>Head of Residence and Safety</b>	H.M.P. Usk
<b>Head of PDU</b>	Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service
<b>Safeguarding Service Manager</b>	Monmouthshire C.C
<b>Head of Housing</b>	Monmouthshire C.C.
<b>Head of Adult Services</b>	Monmouthshire C.C.
<b>NISB member</b>	National Independent Safeguarding Board
<b>Service Manager</b>	Newport C.C
<b>Head of Adult Services</b>	Newport C.C.
<b>Deputy Crime Commissioner</b>	Gwent Police & Crime Commissioner
<b>Designated Doctor</b>	National Safeguarding Service, Public Health Wales
<b>Designated Nurse</b>	National Safeguarding Service, Public Health Wales
<b>Business Manager</b>	Regional Safeguarding Business Unit
<b>Safeguarding Officer</b>	South Wales Fire Service
<b>Group Manager</b>	Torfaen C.B.C
<b>Head of Adult Services</b>	Torfaen C.B.C.
<b>Regional Adviser</b>	VAWDASV Regional Team
<b>Head of Safeguarding</b>	Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

### **3. HOW DOES THE BOARD EXECUTE ITS STATUTORY DUTIES AND ACHIEVE AGAINST ITS STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

As we review our progress within the first year of our three-year strategic plan, this report will consider the Board's joint strategic priorities and accompanying focus areas, which are listed below in Section 4. We will also consider any achievements and gaps against the Board's priority focus areas, as well as its fourteen statutory functions and core responsibilities<sup>1</sup> of Safeguarding Boards which are listed within the Welsh Government document 'Working Together to Safeguard People Volume 1 – Introduction and Overview'. Section 4 will set out what work has been started against each strategic priority focus area and what has been achieved or is intended to carry over into the next period. By way of an introduction to the Board diagram below and to Section 4 itself, we want to use this section to outline how the Board maximises its structure to execute its statutory duties and achieve its strategic priorities. Gwent Safeguarding Board continues to reap the benefits from its strong partnership networks. This past year, we have worked closely with new members in key personnel across both Board and subgroups, to establish strong alliances and to ensure a sustained and effective collaboration across the strategic regional safeguarding partnership structure.

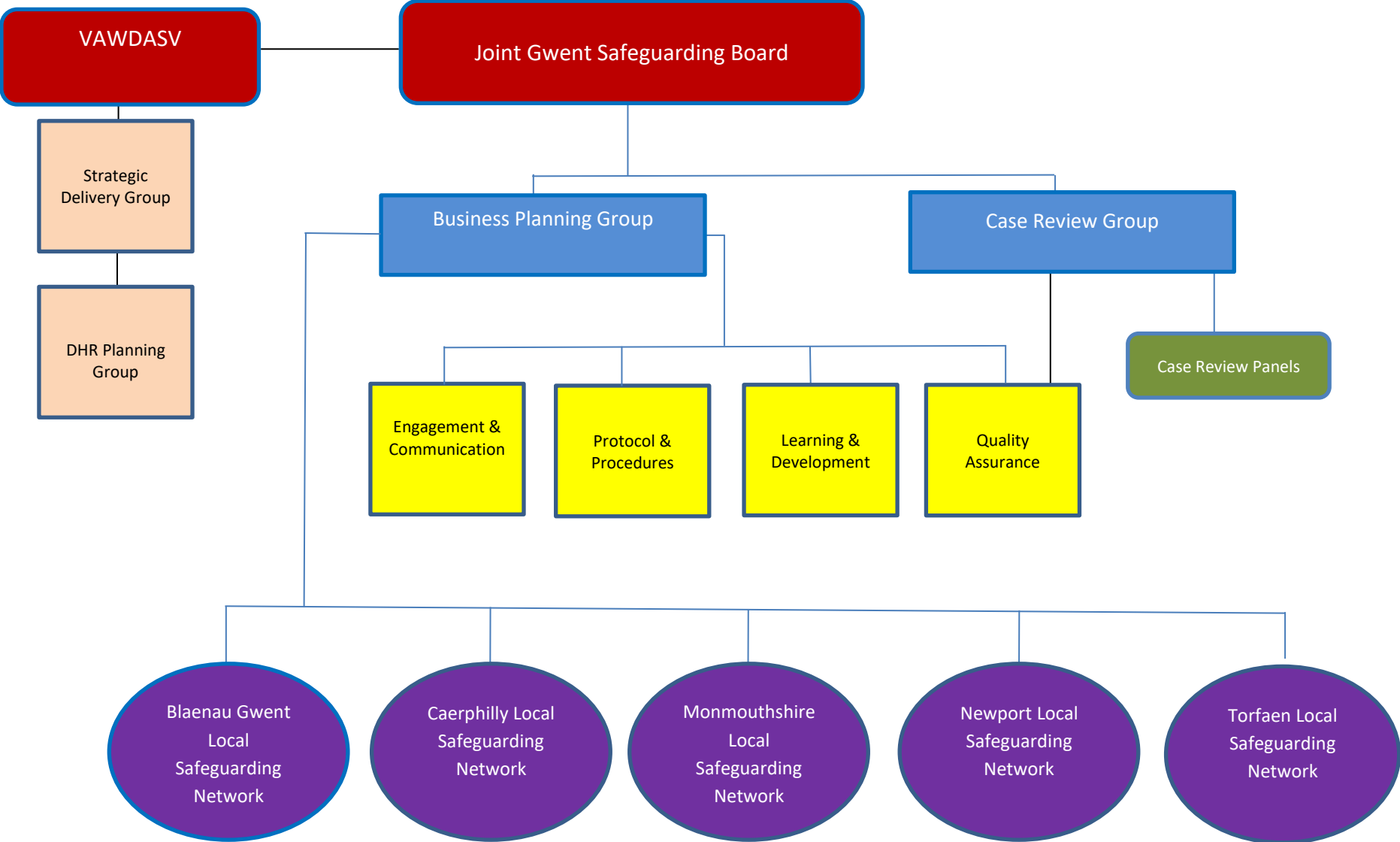
With reference to the diagram below, the structure enables the Safeguarding Board to devolve certain statutory duties to dedicated Board subgroups. For example, the Case Review Group, which as a senior subgroup, supports the Board by delivering on the statutory function to consider all referrals for child and adult practice reviews. This group ensures that all reviews are appropriately resourced and that strategic and operational action plans are co-ordinated and managed effectively. A further example is the Business Planning Group which is another senior subgroup and provides support to the Board by overseeing the progress against the relevant subgroup work plans, across the region. This group is critical in facilitating a free flow of communication between local groups, subgroups and Board. Our four subgroups provide oversight for specific Board statutory functions. Examples include the Protocols and Procedures subgroup and the Engagement and Communication subgroup, with each of the four subgroups having clear terms of reference and work plans, which link directly to the three-year strategic plan. Our Local Safeguarding Networks also remain critical in providing the Board with an understanding and reach into local areas. Quarterly updates are reported from all subgroups through the Business Planning Group to the Board. This ensures that the Board's core statutory responsibilities and strategic priorities are overseen and acted upon by a dedicated, multi-agency group of key safeguarding partners.

Our Strategic Plan and Implementation Plan ensures that there is clear direction for each of the Board's subgroups on who will achieve what against each of the strategic priority focus areas. There will often be multiple activities undertaken by various subgroups against each priority focus area and at times, where emerging or amplified safeguarding priorities appear, then these are built into the overall programme of work. A significant amount of activity takes place between each Board and sub-group meeting, where a number of multi-agency task and finish groups strive to achieve its stated outcomes. This continues to be successful as wider, more specialist groups of practitioners can then contribute to the work of the Board. Further, this allows for progress against the key objective of increased participation by encouraging service users to be involved in consultation process where appropriate.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/working-together-to-safeguard-people-volume-i-introduction-and-overview.pdf>

- **Gwent Safeguarding Board's Strategic Structure**





## 4. HOW WE HAVE IMPLEMENTED OUR ANNUAL PLAN AND ACHIEVED OUR OUTCOMES

There are three joint strategic priorities which set the direction of work that is undertaken by Gwent Safeguarding Board during the course of its three-year plan. Beneath these three joint strategic priorities sit a total of ten priority focus areas against which action is taken to achieve the objectives and outcomes. The priorities and focus areas for the three-year period between 2023 and 2026 are listed below, along with the achievements or identified areas for continued work. For more information on the priorities and focus areas, please follow this link to our Strategic Plan. [GWENT SAFEGUARDING Strategic Plan 23-26 Yr 2 REVISED](#)

- **Joint Strategic Priority 1 – To better protect children and adults from neglect, physical, emotional, sexual and financial harm.**

### **Safeguarding Focus Area 1 - Child Sexual Abuse**

To ensure an ongoing improvement in relation to child sexual abuse, the Board have maintained a programme of work that continues to be overseen by a strategic task group and includes regional awareness-raising, training and audit work. Using the quarterly data reports which are provided by Local Authorities to the Quality Assurance subgroup, the Board remains aware that the numbers of children who are registered under the category of sexual abuse have remained consistently one of the lowest registration categories this year. We are aware from awareness-raising workshops with the CSA Centre of Expertise that this is largely the case across Wales although the prevalence of child sexual abuse remains high, despite potentially being under-reported or under-identified. Therefore, this work remains an important priority focus, given the region's commitment to improve our service response to child sexual abuse. This year, we have concluded a regional, multi-agency audit of child sexual abuse to examine both good practice and opportunities for learning / improvement. We plan to draw out the key points and develop our next steps as a response to this in the coming period.

As demonstrated by the training summary table in Section 12, this year, the Board has commissioned a series of practitioner workshops from our partners who are subject experts. We know from research that a child is unlikely to recognise that what is happening to them is abuse and is also unlikely to disclose directly to professionals. The purpose of this training is to support multi-agency practitioners to improve their understanding of child sexual abuse within the family environment and to better identify signs and indicators and respond effectively to protect children. This year, we have commissioned training to increase awareness of the child protection medical process for practitioners who might be working with children and families where child sexual abuse has occurred. We have used training events to promote the CSA Centre of Expertise Signs and Indicators template and in the coming period we intend to carry out an audit of its use by practitioners. In May, our Local Safeguarding Networks delivered online practitioner events with the theme of sexual abuse, with input from the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, New Pathways, Barnardo's, A.B.U.H.B. medical professionals and other experts in the field of CSA.

The steps taken to achieve our outcomes in improving awareness of this harm and identifying areas for further practice / system development will help to improve the identification, prevention and response to child sexual abuse, in Gwent.

## **Safeguarding Focus Area 2 - Neglect**

A data dashboard continues to enable the Board to understand the numbers of neglect referrals and categories of registration by Local Authorities. This has enabled the Board to confirm the prevalence and persistence of neglect cases in the region. Last year, our focus was on the development of a regional neglect toolkit and access to a neglect training resource, which both support practitioners to understand the types and consequences of neglect and be equipped to work with children, young people and adults who are at risk of, or experiencing, neglect. This year, we have engaged in discussions with a neighbouring regional safeguarding board and their academic partners to consider the potential pilot of a recently developed, validated child neglect assessment tool. These discussions will continue into the next period, and we hope that they will enable us to supplement our practitioner tools for those working with neglect.

As noted in Section 12, our existing Working with Child Neglect training course was launched this year as a blended, multi-agency learning resource for future delivery. This section also demonstrates that this year, we commissioned specialist sessions in relation to Self-neglect, Mental Capacity Act and Hoarding to continue to learn from experts in this field and to ensure that our resources are current in terms of research. Our data dashboards tell us that neglect remains one of the most reported / most prevalent types of abuse for both children and adults. Combined with the lasting impact of the cost-of-living crisis, the impact upon families is likely to be significant and so we will ensure that neglect continues to be responded to as a safeguarding concern for our region.

## **Safeguarding Focus Area 3 - Mental Health**

The learning themes from Immediate Response Groups and child practice reviews suggests that child or adolescent suicide / self-harm remains a concern. As a response, we carried out a comprehensive review of the Partnership Protocol for the Immediate Response to Critical Incidents Involving Children and Young People. This revised multi-agency protocol now contains useful resources for any partners involved in the support of young people following a critical incident. The revised protocol, which was published this year, now includes community psychology services from the outset. This offers a more universal, medium-term support provision to manage the impact of the incident, once the immediate response has concluded. It is acknowledged that our collaborative working with our regional suicide and self-harm prevention steering group partners has provided us with necessary input from the sector experts, in order to complete this valuable work. In the coming period we plan to conduct an audit of the effectiveness of the updated protocol.

Our Board's website continues to promote the work and available resources from our steering group partners in order to adopt a genuine collaborative approach to this area of our work.

This year, as outlined in Section 12, we have commissioned training to support practitioners who work with the Mental Capacity Act, across a variety of target groups. These include Self-neglect, Mental Capacity Act and Hoarding, Mental Capacity Act for Children and Young People and Mental Capacity Act, Domestic Abuse, Coercive Control and Adults at Risk. This range of training is aimed at supporting practitioners when working with children and adults who are experiencing mental health issues. This assures us that work is on track to achieve the intended outcome of improving the understanding of suicide / self-harm across a multi-agency workforce in order to better safeguard citizens.

## **Safeguarding Focus Area 4 – Whole family domestic abuse**

This year, Gwent Safeguarding Board has continued to work collaboratively with the VAWDASV Board to maximise our multi-agency approach and finding opportunities to work together to identify, prevent and respond to safeguarding concerns relating to domestic abuse. This has been demonstrated in many ways this year. The first example is through our joint regional response to the Single Unified Safeguarding Review draft statutory guidance which will bring together safeguarding reviews under one framework. Additionally, this was demonstrated through our collaborative efforts to support World Elder Abuse Day and by facilitating a communities of practice event with Gwent Police during National Safeguarding Week to highlight changes in Firearms Licensing procedures to better support those at risk of VAWDASV.

As outlined in Section 12, we commissioned a specialist provider to develop and deliver Mental Capacity Act, Domestic Abuse, Coercive Control and Adults at Risk Training. This enabled us to improve practitioner awareness of the connections between adult safeguarding and domestic abuse. In conjunction with our VAWDASV colleagues, we have plans for the forthcoming period to undertake a development session to bring together our Area Planning Board, VAWDASV Board and Gwent Safeguarding Board members to consider cross-cutting and inter-dependent themes which feature heavily for all three regional partnership boards, such as domestic abuse, mental health and substance misuse.

- **Joint Strategic Priority 2: To better protect children and adults at risk of exploitation**

## **Safeguarding Focus Area 1 – Exploitation**

Gwent partners continue to utilise the Child Exploitation Measurement Toolkit as a regional framework and toolkit to support practitioners in understanding and responding to exploitation. Our Board partner agencies have continued to invest in and benefit from the multi-agency, integrated safeguarding hub arrangements across the region. This intends to promote early consultation with relevant agencies, more effective information-sharing as well as timely, 'live' decision-making in relation to all those who may be at risk of harm, including potential exploitation. This year, all five Local Authorities in Gwent have continued to be involved in a Home Office National Referral Mechanism (NRM) pilot to test and promote local decision-making about children who are victims of modern slavery in a way which complements existing safeguarding structures.

As demonstrated in Section 12, this year we have commissioned and delivered a number of specialist training sessions relating to child and adult exploitation. As an identified outcome indicator for this focus area, this has offered a wide range of practitioner learning experiences within the region, including online harm, NRM Awareness and exploitation of adults. The regional Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) meetings continue to provide oversight of child exploitation cases. These meetings enable the region to share intelligence on linked cases, locations of concern and case escalations. The Board's Business Planning Sub-Group continues to receive quarterly reports in relation to the regional MACE meetings, outlining the numbers of children being considered as part of these meetings as well themes and emerging trends. One example of a theme which has emerged this year relates to Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, who will now be included as part of MACE meetings, in order to promote strong partnership support for this cohort of children.

These steps have enabled us to achieve against the outcome indicators within this priority area, by enabling a better-equipped and better-informed workforce, with access to robust forums and resources which are designed to help protect children and adults from exploitation in Gwent. However, we intend to continue to focus on exploitation in the next period.

## **Safeguarding Focus Area 2 – Transitional Safeguarding**

Transitional safeguarding sets out the importance of providing support and protection for children who are approaching the age of 18 to ensure that critical services and help remains available to them as, overnight, they become young adults. This is particularly pertinent for exploited children who can often be poorly served by a binary approach to children or adult services. Learning continues to emerge from our Immediate Response Groups to highlight the issue of transitional safeguarding and the associated challenges for vulnerable children and young people who need enhanced support from adult services.

One Local Authority in our region, in conjunction with Gwent Police and other partners, is preparing to pilot a transitional safeguarding model to test out this approach. This will involve the age threshold for MACE meetings being extended to around 25 years to enable services to continue to support young people for a longer period, to divert them away from harm and reduce the opportunities for them to become exploiters. This will enable the Safeguarding Board to support the drive and implementation of a transitional safeguarding approach within this local area and more broadly once the lessons are shared.

Although the Board has made steps in achieving its outcomes to bring agencies together to better safeguard young people into adulthood, it recognises that there is more to be done. This is particularly in relation to supporting partners to be better equipped in working with children who are transitioning into adulthood in order to create more enduring opportunities to divert children away from exploitative harm and therefore having a greater impact and outcome rate.

- **Joint Strategic Priority 3 – To improve and maintain the effectiveness of the Regional Safeguarding Board**

## **Safeguarding Focus Area 1 – Participation / Voice of the service user**

Our Engagement and Communication Subgroup has worked hard to identify opportunities to improve citizen involvement in the work of the Board in order that service user voices can help to plan and shape safeguarding practice and process, in Gwent. We have used opportunities through our other subgroup activities to engage organisations such as the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) to inform the development of our leaflet for families who are involved in the child protection conference process. We have plans in place as part of our Local Safeguarding Network practitioner events in the coming period for NYAS to raise awareness on the importance of the child's voice and understanding lived experiences. This will coincide with the planned launch of a multi-agency guidance document, which our Protocols and Procedures subgroup is developing as a recommendation from regional and national review learning, to promote the importance of understanding the lived experience of the child.

Our multi-agency safeguarding training courses all emphasise person-centred practice and advocacy, promoting engagement and the voice of the child or adult, throughout the safeguarding process. Gwent Safeguarding Board partners completed a self-assessment this year using the multi-agency Safeguarding Maturity Matrix, to assist partners in measuring their own effectiveness in safeguarding adults and children. One of the six standards within this tool, relates to person-centred practice and process. There are a number of indicators, some of which asked how the voice of the service user informs safeguarding policy, process, and training. Partners carried out this self-assessment providing evidence or examples to the Board of existing practice or improvement plans to ensure that this remains a priority.

Our plans for the coming period are to collaborate with Gwent Drug and Alcohol Service (GDAS) and the regional Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy (IDVA) team to invite feedback from service users on their experiences of child protection processes within the region. This will enable us to better understand the voice of the service user, as a priority in the next period.

### **Safeguarding Focus Area 2 – Workforce resilience: capacity, competence and confidence**

This year, Gwent Safeguarding Board has been working with the National Independent Safeguarding Board and its partners to scope and agree national metrics in relation to safeguarding, including workforce capacity, that will enable an improved regional lens, and serve as a national comparison mechanism. This work remains in its developmental stage and will continue in the coming period.

The launch of the National Safeguarding Training Standards and Framework last year has prompted a review of our regional safeguarding board's training offer to ensure that it complies with the new standards and framework. As well as ensuring that our Board's complementary training offer corresponds to the national framework, we will be supporting our partners in the coming period to ensure that their workforce undertakes the necessary training as required within the framework. In addition, this year we have worked hard to develop Multi-Agency Practice Guidance for Safe Recruitment and Safe Employment with specialist input from DBS colleagues, to support our partners in making their recruitment and employment practices and processes safer.

As highlighted in the previous section, multi-agency self-assessments were completed this year, which has enabled partners to assess their own safeguarding arrangements. One of the six standards within this tool, relates to a confident and competent workforce. There are seven indicators, which relate to staff training, staff wellbeing and staff recruitment processes. Partners carried out this self-assessment providing evidence or examples to the Board of existing practice or improvement plans to ensure that this remains a priority. The responses enabled the Board to be assured that partners assessed their safeguarding arrangements as largely sufficient or compliant in this area. However, the Board is keen to introduce a 'peer scrutiny' stage to enable constructive assurance and to ensure that all agencies respond routinely.

### **Safeguarding Focus Area 3 – Poverty**

This year, as part of National Safeguarding Week, we held practitioner events on the theme of the cost-of-living crisis and its impact on safeguarding. We heard directly from our partners about the challenges which were being faced by services and service users in respect of the context of poverty and its effect on safeguarding. We learned from our partners about gambling-related harms, budget strains which are potentially limiting services and the neglect of children and adults at risk which can occur when there are significant economic and financial challenges for society as a whole. At these events, Gwent Safeguarding Board was able to raise awareness that poverty creates 'stresses' on families, and the associated themes of neglect, social isolation, domestic abuse / financial abuse can also increase as a result. Partners, including Age Cymru, the Department of Work and Pensions and the Gwent Police Domestic Abuse Survivor Coordinator, all highlighted increases in, and the extensive impact of, financial abuse, in the past year.

In order to continue to highlight the growing concerns in relation to this issue, our DWP partners are now well-established members of our five Local Safeguarding Networks and as part of the Board's training offer this year, we have commissioned training on Poverty Awareness. We will continue to build this into the Board's training offer in the coming period.

#### **Safeguarding Focus Area 4 – Performance Outcomes**

The Board has a range of assurance processes, both routine and responsive, which enable partners to demonstrate their effective safeguarding arrangements and for the strategic Board to identify or monitor any areas for development. Some examples of our routine assurance processes are quarterly Local Authority data collection, multi-agency audits and the monitoring of PRUDiCS (Procedural Response to Unexpected Deaths in Childhood). Some examples of responsive assurance processes are practice reviews / multi-agency professional forums, complaints panels and Immediate Response Groups. These processes enable the Board to understand the nature and extent of safeguarding issues in Gwent and to identify where safeguarding practice or process is working well or where there is a need to improve.

As a routine process, Gwent Safeguarding Board receives data reports from all five Local Authorities, which is scrutinised by partners in order to understand any differences or quarterly trends. For example, the data includes the numbers and categories of children on the child protection register and the numbers and primary categories of referrals for adults at risk of abuse and neglect. The Board uses these reports to request context, and potentially further examination, from Local Authorities, where spikes or unexpected trends have emerged. This year, we have worked closely with the National Independent Safeguarding Board and other regional safeguarding boards to inform the development of a National Multi-agency Safeguarding Performance Framework (NMSPF) prototype. This is intended to establish a national benchmark of measures for regional safeguarding boards to be able to demonstrate assurance or to concentrate their efforts in terms of further development work, if required. Gwent partners carried out a small pilot of the NMSPF prototype during the final quarter of this year and we look forward to working with NISB and their partners to further develop this important area of work.

As previously mentioned, the Safeguarding Maturity Matrix self-assessment work this year has enabled partners to review their own safeguarding arrangements and to report this to the Board. The Board was able to review the themes which emerged from this work at its development session, and to agree on how to further refine this process. With greater clarity within the guidance and additional peer scrutiny we believe that this process will become an important part of the Board's assurance framework.

Overall, these activities have helped us to work towards our intended outcomes within the plan to satisfy the Board that safeguarding activities carried out by its partner agencies are effective and help to support and safeguard citizens. However, there is more to be done in terms of building a multi-agency quality assurance and performance framework across the Gwent region. We will continue to work closely with our partners to achieve this.

## 5. ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE SAFEGUARDING BOARD IN THE PAST YEAR

These are some examples of Gwent Safeguarding Board's achievements for 2023/2024 which highlight our 'good news' stories and continue to demonstrate the breadth of its work over the past year:

1. Gwent Safeguarding Board partners undertook a self-assessment to measure their own effectiveness in safeguarding adults and children using the adapted, multi-agency **Safeguarding Maturity Matrix** tool. Response themes were reviewed by Safeguarding Board

2. Board members came together in person, at a **Development Session**, to reflect on achievements and areas for further work. This provided Board partners with the chance to consider the opportunities, challenges and learning of the past year and to reflect upon the Board's future focus

3. During 2023/2024, we undertook adult and child **practice reviews** in line with one of our core statutory functions. We completed and disseminated the learning from a number of reviews and Multi-Agency Professional Forums, which are outlined in further detail in section 12 of this report. We have ongoing, and newly commissioned reviews / MAPFs which will continue into the next financial year.

4. Gwent Safeguarding Board continued to support and inform the development of the national **Single Unified Safeguarding Review** programme throughout the year. The benefit will be a less onerous process for families and more timely learning for practitioners.

5. As part of **National Safeguarding Week**, our region collaborated with police, Age Cymru, the Bevan Foundation, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), Welsh Government and other partners to deliver a series of virtual multi-agency events, under the theme of 'The Impact of the Cost-of-Living Crisis.' This raised awareness of the impact the crisis is having on people in Wales looking at who is most affected and outlining some of the challenges families are likely to face.

6. We continue to deliver core business for the Board. This includes taking a coordinated, **active role in the consultation, adoption or implementation of any newly developed initiatives or procedures.** Examples of this include our strong regional input into the development of the new National Safeguarding Training, Learning and Development Standards and Framework. We continue to adapt our Board's training offer to comply with these standards, to ensure that practitioners within our region have access to high-quality, multi-agency safeguarding training.

7. Our online **Local Safeguarding Network** meetings and six-monthly practitioner forum events continue to be popular. These events are critical to the work of the strategic Safeguarding Board as they ensure a local connection exists with our local practitioners and service providers. We take pride in listening to our Local Safeguarding Network partners to ensure that the subject areas are most pertinent to the local area. We have plans to test out face-to-face sessions in the next period.

9. Gwent Safeguarding Board commissioned **research to explore experiences of racism** and to gauge the reasons why learners may be under-reporting incidents of racism that occur within their school environment. Recommendations were made to help to build awareness and robust systems for support, interventions and reporting and to increase opportunities to reduce incidents of racism within schools, in future.

8. We have maintained, and continue to develop, a viable delivery group for **offering 'in-house' training** this year and we continue to commission **specialist training.** This has enabled us to offer training on **10 different safeguarding topics.**

10. A **multi-agency review of the regional processes relating to children who are searched by police.** This enabled Gwent Safeguarding Board to identify any potential learning, to ensure that the processes included appropriate referrals to Social Services and to ensure effective monitoring is in place.



## 6. NATIONAL MULTI-AGENCY SAFEGUARDING PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK – 5 DOMAIN QUESTIONS

This year, Gwent Safeguarding Board have worked closely with the National Independent Safeguarding Board (NISB) and partners, to develop and test a national multi-agency safeguarding performance framework, in order to provide a coherent picture of safeguarding effectiveness in Wales. The aim of the pilot is to use metrics which are already collected wherever possible to reduce resource implications and to ensure that what is collected is meaningful. Gwent Safeguarding Board took part in the national pilot by sharing metrics from our regional partners who work to safeguard children, with future plans for similar activity within adult services. Nationally, the next steps will involve more targeted developmental work with regional safeguarding boards to further develop, refine and re-test the framework. We welcome the opportunity to develop a rich and multi-agency safeguarding performance framework to ensure a balance of responses from all safeguarding board partners. However, Gwent Safeguarding Board recognises the future challenges for many social care partners as the existing data recording system is closed down and users are migrated over to a new technology within stringent timescales.

Within the Framework, there are 5 domains which contain a number of questions for regional safeguarding boards. Some of these questions have been addressed throughout the main body of this report. However, for ease of reference Gwent Safeguarding Board has set out below, how existing processes, activities or work areas can provide some response to these questions:

### 1. Safeguarding Process

- How is the board assured that arrangements are effective in **identifying** and **responding** to safeguarding concerns?.
- What are the **outcomes** of regional safeguarding processes and interventions?

#### a. Safeguarding Performance Data

Gwent Safeguarding Board and its subgroups consider safeguarding information from a range of sources on a quarterly basis to provide assurance on safeguarding arrangements in the region. For example, our Quality Assurance subgroup receives quarterly reports from Local Authority partners on safeguarding processes and responses, across Gwent. Trends, anomalies and context are then scrutinised before being shared with the Board. Further developmental work is planned to enhance this process. Our Business Planning Group receives quarterly updates in relation to the regional multi-agency child exploitation meetings and our Case Review Group receives quarterly information relating to both expected and unexpected child deaths, in Gwent. This enables the Board to monitor patterns, to make comparisons between quarters or years and it provides some reflection of the child or adult protection process and any emerging themes. These multi-agency discussions have generated assurance and learning opportunities and partners have also benefited from sharing good practice.

#### b. Self-assessment – Safeguarding Maturity Matrix (SMM)

This year, Gwent Safeguarding Board asked partners to complete a self-assessment of their own effectiveness in safeguarding adults and children. One of the six standards within the multi-agency self-assessment tool relates to safe care. There are several indicators, asking agencies to evidence how they comply with national legislation or guidance, cascade learning from child and adult practice reviews or domestic homicide reviews,

as well as having robust complaints processes. Partners provided evidence to the Board of existing practice or improvement plans, such as cascading learning in respect of safeguarding more widely within their organisations beyond social care, using their Designated Safeguarding Person. The Board has committed to refining this self-assessment process to include peer scrutiny which will add a critical element of constructive challenge to this assurance process.

### c. Routine audits

As outlined in the statutory guidance, Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 Working Together to Safeguard People, Volume I – Introduction and Overview, audits are one of the Board’s core functions in improving safeguarding policy, systems and practice. This year, we have completed two multi-agency audits. The first was a financial abuse audit which highlighted the extent of this type of harm amongst our adult at risk community. Over 86% of the audit cases were rated positively, with the voice of the victim being well represented throughout the majority of the cases. For the remaining cases, a limited number of improvements were required in relation to better recording. The audit highlighted that financial abuse was most frequently perpetrated by a person acting in a trusted capacity, such as a family member or friends and neighbours. Good practice was shared with partners including the establishment of more routine meetings with partners to share regular police updates. One Local Authority highlighted good links with local banks as a strength in working with financial abuse cases. The second audit was a child sexual abuse audit which highlighted areas of good practice and areas of learning and development and a report will be presented to the Safeguarding Board in the coming period. Our Quality Assurance subgroup has a programme of routine audits planned for the coming period to continue to generate both assurance and learning in respect of safeguarding, for our partners.

#### 2. Multi-agency Activity and Data

- How does the board assure itself that existing **protocols between agencies work effectively**, when individuals are identified as at risk from harm?
- What **data** is collected around this, how is it shared and what evidence has emerged in the period?

### a. Safeguarding Performance Data

The Board routinely collects data from a number of partners, including Local Authorities, police and Health. In the previous domain, we set out examples of this and how this moves through the multi-agency sub-groups and into the Safeguarding Board. One example of multi-agency activity and data which is routinely shared with the Board is the regional Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) quarterly updates. The MACE reports enable the Board to identify or track trends in the numbers of children being supported as well as any important context, emerging themes and improvement plans. The tracking of this data enables the Board to monitor the numbers of children who are at high risk of child sexual or criminal exploitation and are being supported as part of this cohort. Any change in trends is supported by context which is provided by the police leads along with a full description of what action is being taken by each partner to respond to this. This year, the MACE process was adapted to include Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and the Board was assured that using this forum will promote improved multi-agency working in respect of this matter. In the coming period, the Board welcomes the plans for a pilot to extend the age that young people remain eligible for MACE meetings to 25 years. This will enable the Safeguarding Board to support the drive and implementation of a multi-agency transitional safeguarding approach within this local area and across the region once the lessons are shared, to support better outcomes for young adults who are at risk of exploitation.

## **b. Self-assessment – Safeguarding Maturity Matrix (SMM)**

As outlined above, this year Gwent Safeguarding Board partners completed a self-assessment of their own effectiveness in safeguarding adults and children. One of the six standards relates to multi-agency partnerships. Within their responses, partners highlighted strong links and representations on Gwent Safeguarding Board and its subgroups. Other evidence included attendance at MAPPAs, MARACs and MACE with some holding chairing responsibilities, strong links with VAWDASV, representation at groups such as the Channel Group and National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and important third sector / advocacy provider relationships. Many partners reported that they follow regional safeguarding protocols and provided evidence to the Board of existing practice or improvement plans, such as working on a more coordinated response to adults at risk of exploitation.

## **c. Routine audits**

Audit work is an important part of the Safeguarding Board business as it provides an opportunity for multi-agency scrutiny of safeguarding practice and process and enables the Board to identify and promote good practice and areas for improvement. As mentioned earlier, two multi-agency audits have been conducted this year and the analysis is underway with reports to the Safeguarding Board taking place in the coming period. Our Quality Assurance subgroup has future plans to carry out surveys in order to understand how widely used and effective practitioners find our regional safeguarding protocols, using our Local Safeguarding Network Forums.

### **3. Thematic Hotspots**

- What **key thematic sources of harm** which require a safeguarding response locally are evidenced in Board data?
- What **steps** have been identified to respond to this thematic evidence?

## **a. Practice reviews (regional and national)**

Key thematic hotspots are a key focus for Gwent Safeguarding Board's annual development session. This session enables Board members to review the annual work of the Board and to consider any emerging themes from a range of sources. As outlined in Section 12, regional practice reviews provide a source of significant learning and enable Gwent Safeguarding Board to identify thematic hotspots and to respond collaboratively. This year, we were in touch with our Child Death Review Programme colleagues, in Public Health Wales, to consider whether there was an emerging national theme in relation to severe constipation or impaction for children, as had been considered regionally by our Case Review Group members. Any future findings in relation to this will be shared regionally and nationally with the other regional safeguarding boards. Our relationship with national organisations provides Gwent Safeguarding Board with an opportunity to consider regional and national thematic hotspots. This was reflected in the Board's development of an assurance tool, as a regional response to the CIW Child Protection Rapid Review and the NISB Risk, Response, Review CPR Thematic reports which were both published this year.

## **b. Immediate Response Groups (IRGs)**

Our IRGs convene when there has been a critical incident involving a child and a multi-agency response is required to manage an impact upon a community. This year, we held a number of IRGs and we used 'live' learning to improve our IRG process so that partners and affected families will benefit from an enhanced

process at this traumatic time. The IRGs provide a mechanism for the Board to understand and monitor key thematic hotspots in respect of safeguarding issues in Gwent. For example, this year we understood from regional IRG data that we needed to improve the awareness of school-aged children about the dangers that can result from misadventure when cords are placed around the neck. As a result, our Health colleagues are working with our Education leads to help with this work.

### c. 'Hot Topics / Emerging Issues'

As part of the Safeguarding Board's standing agenda, partners are invited to raise any thematic safeguarding concerns. This can range from a predicted challenge for partners in responding to forthcoming legislative changes, such as the anticipated Jade's Law impact for some social workers, or an identified gap in a regional policy, such as our recently developed Safeguarding Children's Thresholds Guidance. Gwent Safeguarding Board partners are keen to learn and improve where any opportunity presents itself. This year, this was evidenced by the Board's proactive, multi-agency response to the Children's Commissioner for Wales in respect of children who had been subject to police searches, as well as the risk of racial bullying within educational settings, both of which resulted in identified actions for improvement.

#### 4. Service User Feedback

- What are the RSB's **objectives regarding collecting service user feedback** in relation to direct safeguarding activity?
- What do the **metrics** that capture this feedback tell the Board?
- How does the Board plan to respond to this evidence and over what timescale?

### a. Strategic Priority Focus Area

The Voice of the Service User remains one of the ten strategic priority focus areas for Gwent Safeguarding Board. As outlined in Section 10, Board members identified it as an amplified focus area at their development session this year. Gwent Safeguarding Board has recognised the parallels of this within the CIW Child Protection Rapid Review and the NISB Risk, Response, Review CPR Thematic reports which were both published earlier this year. As a result, Gwent Safeguarding Board has developed an assurance document which maps out all of the thematic connections so that planned work can be better coordinated. One of our responses to this has been to develop a multi-agency guidance document to promote the importance of understanding the lived experience of the child. In addition, the Board's multi-agency safeguarding courses all promote and emphasise person-centred practice, engagement and voice throughout the safeguarding process and are aligned with the new National Safeguarding Training Standards and Framework in relation to this subject.

### b. Self-assessment – Safeguarding Maturity Matrix (SMM)

As part of the multi-agency self-assessment using the SMM, one of the six standards is person centred. Within their responses, partners highlighted participation strategies and consultation activities, active offers of advocacy and trauma-informed services. Partners provided evidence to the Board of existing practice or improvement plans.

### c. Targeted service user survey

This year, we have used our Local Safeguarding Network events to ask practitioners about their awareness and use of regional safeguarding protocols. This enables us to receive direct feedback from those practitioners who work with families about how effective they are as practice tools and guides. This year, the Board has agreed to undertake a pilot in the coming period with a number of third sector organisations to ask service users who are engaged in the Child Protection Process about their experiences. This will inform the development of resources to support parents through future Child Protection Processes.

#### 5. Workforce Information

- What is known about **the profile** of the safeguarding workforce?
- How is **recruitment and retention** affecting delivery of safeguarding duties?
- To what extent is **multi-agency training** provided to and taken up by the safeguarding workforce (as profiled)?
- What evidence is available to assure the Board that agencies understand and respond to the **well-being and support** of the safeguarding workforce?

### a. Strategic Priority Focus Area

Workforce resilience remains a key priority focus area for Gwent Safeguarding Board, specifically in relation to capacity, competence and confidence. Although partners do not currently report workforce profile information to the Board, it is aware that recruitment and retention continues to affect all partners. As part of the routine reporting arrangements, the Board's subgroups are required to identify any safeguarding issues or lessons learned as part of their update to our more senior Business Planning Group. We note that considerable discussion takes place in our Quality Assurance Group around workforce and how this may impact on safeguarding arrangements for our partners to ensure that the Board is aware of the workforce challenges which may be affecting safeguarding duties.

As outlined earlier, Gwent Safeguarding Board has worked closely with the NISB and other partners to pilot a National Multi-Agency Safeguarding Performance Framework (NMSPF) this year to test out what workforce information partners currently collect or report. Gwent Safeguarding Board looks forward to continuing to further develop the NMSPF in the coming period to ensure that Board members have the opportunity to seek assurance in relation to regional workforce information, in the future.

### b. Self-assessment – Safeguarding Maturity Matrix (SMM)

As part of the self-assessment work, which was undertaken by Gwent Safeguarding Board this year, one of the standards relates to a confident and competent workforce. Partners responded with evidence which included DBS compliance, safe recruitment policies and adhering to Section 5 of the Wales Safeguarding Procedures in respect of safeguarding allegations / concerns about practitioners and those in positions of trust. Partners were also asked to provide assurance to the Board about opportunities for safeguarding reflection or debrief forums as well as established processes for staff to raise safeguarding concerns about themselves. The majority of responders reported well-established systems, including a dedicated page on the intranet relating to safeguarding and well-being policies in place for staff to ensure support of the safeguarding workforce.

### c. National Safeguarding Training Standards and Framework

Gwent Safeguarding Board is proud to offer multi-agency safeguarding training to its partners in Gwent. Section 12 displays the range of training, which was available this year, the numbers of practitioners it reached

and whether it was externally commissioned or offered by our in-house Delivery Group. As highlighted earlier, the launch of the National Safeguarding Training Standards and Framework has prompted a review of our Board's training offer to ensure that it complies with the new standards and framework. Board members identified this as a priority work area for the Safeguarding Board in the coming period. As well as ensuring that our Board's complementary training offer corresponds to the national framework, we will be supporting our partners to ensure that their workforce undertakes the necessary training as required within the framework.

## 7. WHO WE HAVE WORKED COLLABORATIVELY WITH TO SAFEGUARD PEOPLE IN GWENT

We continue to work collaboratively with a range of agencies, other partnerships and forums to enable us to deliver our objectives to date. These include:

- Gwent Police;
- Aneurin Bevan University Health Board;
- Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service;
- Public Health Wales;
- Prison Services;
- Fire and Rescue Service;
- Gwent Drug and Alcohol Services;
- Office of the Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner;
- Gwent Registered Social Landlords.

From our Five Local Authority Areas – Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen

- Education;
- Children's Services;
- Adult Services;
- Statutory Housing Providers;
- Youth Offending Services.

We have strong working links with other regional and national partnerships:

- Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV);
- Regional Partnership Board;
- National Independent Safeguarding Board (NISB);
- Welsh Government;
- All Other Welsh Safeguarding Children and Adult Boards.

Gwent Safeguarding Board and the subgroups continue to receive a number of online presentations and briefings from a diverse range of partners. This demonstrates our consistent efforts to work collaboratively with others and to remain informed and engaged with other parallel safeguarding agendas across the region. These include:

- Single Unified Safeguarding Review (SUSR) Consultation – National SUSR Team
- Postvention Response Pathway for actions following an Immediate Response Group meeting – A.B.U.H.B.
- Alcohol Related Deaths and Drug Related Deaths in Gwent – Gwent Area Planning Board
- Safeguarding, Education & Race Research / Review – Director of Education, Newport
- Domestic Abuse Protection Order / Domestic Abuse Protection Notice (DAPO / DAPN) – VAWDASV leads
- NHS Wales Safeguarding Network Annual Report 22/23 – Public Health Wales
- Serious Violence Duty – Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner's Office
- Jade's Law – Director of Social Services, Newport

## 8. BOARD MEMBER AND AGENCY CONTRIBUTIONS

Our Gwent Safeguarding Board partners continue to demonstrate their commitment and dedication to the work of the Board through their consistent and active participation in Board and subgroup meetings. This has enabled the Boards to continue to respond to the challenges faced by its partner agencies. By maintaining strong relationships with other strategic partnerships, the Board ensures that safeguarding remains a priority consideration when working through significant challenges, such as the cost-of-living crisis and workforce capacity, which remain ever-present obstacles for service providers within our region.

We continue to use resources from all constituent Board agencies and many other partners to support the work of the Board throughout the past year, which is in turn driven by its strategic priorities and implementation plan. In addition, we continue to rely on agencies to provide individuals to work with the Gwent Safeguarding Business Unit and to provide Chairs and Vice-Chairs for our groups.

Chairing and Vice-Chairing arrangements for our groups throughout 2023/2024<sup>2</sup> was sourced from:

<b>SEWSCB</b>	<b>GwASB</b>
Blaenau Gwent Social Services Caerphilly Children’s Services	Monmouthshire Social Services Aneurin Bevan University Health Board
<b>CASE REVIEW GROUP</b> Gwent Police Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service	<b>BUSINESS PLANNING GROUP</b> Caerphilly Safeguarding Team Newport Safeguarding Team
<b>PROTOCOL AND PROCEDURES</b> Torfaen Children’s Services Monmouthshire County Council	<b>JOINT QUALITY ASSURANCE GROUP</b> Monmouthshire Safeguarding Team Caerphilly Adult Services Caerphilly Children’s Services
<b>ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION</b> Monmouthshire Children’s Services	<b>LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT</b> Monmouthshire County Council

Gwent Safeguarding Board continues to offer a suite of safeguarding training to its partners. Our Training Delivery Group uses our partner resources to develop, review and facilitate our joint Board’s generic training programme. We continue to rely upon these resources to ‘do more with less’ in respect of the amount of training that we are able to deliver to practitioners. Partners invest considerable time into the re-development of our training programme to ensure that it can provide a blended learning experience, be delivered virtually where required and comply with the Wales Safeguarding Procedures. This enables us to continue to offer a range of safeguarding training, delivered by multi-agency partners, to cross-sector practitioners working with children and adults at risk and to commission bespoke training where priority needs are identified. All partner agencies of the Board have committed to this resource, which we count as a major contribution to the Board’s

<sup>2</sup> There have been a small number of changes in chairing and vice chairing arrangements for some Board groups towards the later stages of the year which will be reflected in our 2024/2025 Annual Plan.



business. This year, partners have invested considerable energy to ensure that the Board's training offer complies fully with the National Safeguarding Training Standards and Framework. This work remains ongoing.

We continue to rely on the resources provided by agencies and partners to chair and provide reviewers for both child and adult practice reviews and Multi Agency Professional Forums (MAPF). We have been fortunate to utilise staff from Gwent Police, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board Safeguarding Team, all five Local Authority Safeguarding Teams, Monmouthshire and Torfaen YOS, and Children's and Adult Services in the review processes.

We continue to depend heavily on the help and support of the Safeguarding Service Managers from the five Local Authority areas across Gwent as they each Chair their own Local Safeguarding Network (LSN) Meetings and facilitate their six monthly LSN Practitioner Forum events. The LSN events continue to be integral to National Safeguarding Week, in Gwent. These present opportunities for the Board to showcase learning, raise awareness, and seek practitioner views on Board resources using practitioner surveys.

Across Gwent, the way that the Board and its subgroups operate remains a real example of multi-agency working at its best. Without the commitment and contribution from Board members, agencies and partners, the work of the Board at its current level would not be possible.

## 9. USE OF RESOURCES

The Board is funded by contributions from statutory partner agencies who have agreed the funding formula as set out in the Welsh Government document 'Working Together to Safeguard People Volume 1 – Introduction and Overview', the guidance which accompanies the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

This funding resources a regional safeguarding business unit consisting of a Business Manager, Development Officers and Administrative staff who provide support for both Children and Adult Boards, the subgroups, and the Local Safeguarding Networks.

The Board also provides an extensive multi-agency regional training programme. This consists of generic safeguarding courses, which enable free access for practitioners and volunteers across the region. They are designed to complement and add value to the training provided by workforce development teams in the region.

The specific costs for this support during 2023/2024 are set out below:

<b>Total costs</b>	<b>£446,846</b>
<b>Staff costs</b>	<b>£ 368,780</b>
<b>Day to day running costs</b>	<b>£ 24,044</b>
<b>Provision of Multi-Agency Training and Practice Reviews</b>	<b>£ 43,585</b>
<b>Engagement / Websites &amp; Publicity / Professional events (Including National Safeguarding Week)</b>	<b>£ 10,437</b>

It is acknowledged that resources used to support the work of the Regional Safeguarding Boards are not confined or restricted to financial contributions from statutory partner agencies. The Regional Safeguarding Board Chairs, Board Members, Subgroup Chairs and members provide a significant amount of their time to support the Board and its work. This is often in addition to their identified professional roles and day to day responsibilities. The variable and diverse nature of the Board's work makes this difficult to report on within a quantifiable and measurable resource context and it is not always obviously visible to other professionals and agencies. The resourcing, coordination and publication of child and adult practice reviews, the routine development and revision of regional protocols and policies to supplement the Wales Safeguarding Procedures and the re-development of multi-agency training packages are just some examples of safeguarding board work which requires high levels of professional commitment, knowledge and expertise.

## 10. IDENTIFIED SAFEGUARDING THEMES

Our three-year strategic plan enables our priorities to be targeted incrementally, intending to effect change in a more systematic approach. The plan sets out three Joint Strategic Priorities which have a total of ten priority focus areas that aid the Board's strategic direction to flex in accordance with local, regional or national emerging themes, within the parameters of the overarching priority. This has enabled Board members to agree that the priorities remain unchanged for the duration of the three-year period. However, we recognise that throughout the course of this three-year period, certain safeguarding themes may be particularly amplified at times. This has helped us to identify where to target or prioritise our attention. As we consider this first year of our three-year strategic plan, we are keen to reflect upon some examples of those priorities or focus areas which have emerged or have become more amplified. We continue to monitor the emergence of local, regional and national safeguarding themes, to ensure that our ongoing focus is appropriate.

In light of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, **poverty** has remained prevalent as a safeguarding theme over the course of the last year. The enduring cost-of-living crisis and resulting poverty are likely to have a significant and long-lasting impact on families and services. In addition, the nature of poverty has posed resultant stressors and safeguarding concerns, for example in relation to the associated themes of neglect, social isolation, mental health and domestic abuse / financial abuse. Partners, including Age Cymru, the Department of Work and Pensions and the Gwent Police Domestic Abuse Survivor Coordinator, all highlighted increases in, and an extensive impact of financial abuse in the past year. Early learning from our financial abuse audit told us about the prevalence of financial abuse for adults at risk, where family members or friends can be often perpetrators. We continue to work with our partners to anticipate, and mitigate with preventative services, the impact of the cost-of-living crisis impact upon families and the associated safeguarding implications.

One of the Board's long-standing strategic focus areas has been building resilience. This remains particularly acute, and our partners continue to face great challenges in terms of service delivery, with emerging concerns relating to safeguarding and workforce capacity, competence and confidence. The persistent factors such as **workforce resilience**, combined with the environmental factors such as cost of living and poverty implications continue to present concerning implications for service delivery and service resilience. The pressures faced by service providers are considerable, working with families with increasingly complex needs, often within teams where significant staff vacancies exist. This year, we have endeavoured to identify opportunities to ensure that practitioners feel equipped to work with children, young people, parents and families. We have reviewed and updated our Board's multi-agency training offer to ensure that it complies with the National Safeguarding Training Standards and Framework. In the coming period, we intend to provide increased support to our partners to ensure that practitioners receive appropriate safeguarding training, which is compliant with the new standards and framework, in order to bolster competence and confidence. Our focus on promoting a professionally curious culture will continue in the coming period, through the work of our subgroups, to enable practitioners to learn lessons from national and regional reviews and to feel safe, supported and confident in their safeguarding practices.

Another enduring priority focus area is the **mental health** of children, young people and adults who may be at risk. Throughout the last year, we have continued to recognise the theme of child / adolescent suicide or self-harm from both our practice review work and our Immediate Response Groups. We responded by working collaboratively with the Gwent Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Steering Group leads and the ABUHB Public Health leads. This helped us to improve our immediate, multi-agency response to a critical incident involving a child in order to manage the impact upon other children or community members.

**Transitional safeguarding** continues to be a prevalent theme in our region. Our Immediate Response Groups and practice review work has helped to shine a light on the complexities of safeguarding young people who need enhanced support from services as they move into adulthood. As we outlined earlier, one Local Authority in our region, in conjunction with partners, is preparing to pilot a transitional safeguarding approach, which will enable services to continue to support young people for a longer period, to divert them away from exploitation and reduce the opportunities for them to become exploiters. This will enable the Safeguarding Board to support the drive and implementation of a transitional safeguarding approach within this local area and more broadly, once the lessons are shared.

**The voice of the service user** remains an amplified theme this year, as reflected through our Immediate Response Groups, practice review learning and regional audits. This is particularly the case when there are complexities in terms of communication. For example, with children and young people who are non-verbal, are part of a larger sibling group or are prevented from being seen alone by parents/carers. This has been echoed within the national Child Protection Rapid Review published this year by CIW and the 'Risk, Response, Review' thematic review which was published by the NISB too. As a result, Gwent Safeguarding Board has started work to develop a multi-agency guidance document to promote the importance of understanding the lived experience of the child. In addition, the Board's multi-agency safeguarding courses all promote and emphasise person centred practice, engagement and voice throughout the safeguarding process and are aligned with the new National Safeguarding Training Standards and Framework in relation to this.

Over the course of the last year, regional safeguarding concerns continue to be identified either as a result of Board partner discussions, stakeholder interactions, practice review learning or Immediate Response Groups, which has helped us to undertake targeted activities in response. Some examples of this include an examination of the prevalence of racist bullying and abuse within educational settings, with support from an externally commissioned research team. Another example has been our focus on improving regional, multi-agency practices in respect of police searches of children in Gwent. We have committed to a regional approach to the routine sharing of data in respect of searched children, as well as ensuring that multi-agency partners are appropriately informed or involved throughout the process. These emerging issues are not necessarily themes, but they do present opportunities for Board partners to respond efficiently, using a multi-agency, regional and coordinated approach.

The Board's work against its strategic priorities, focus areas and statutory responsibilities, as presented in Section 4, along with the amplified safeguarding themes listed within this section, have all helped to direct our focus for the coming period in respect of **our ongoing** strategic priorities, listed below:

**One Joint Overarching Vision:** To ensure that children and adults, in Gwent, are safeguarded.

**Three Joint Strategic Priorities:**

- 1. To better protect children and adults from neglect, physical, emotional, sexual and financial harm.**
  - Child Sexual Abuse
  - Neglect
  - Mental Health
  - Whole Family Domestic Abuse
- 2. To better protect children and adults at risk of exploitation.**
  - Exploitation – Criminal, Sexual, Financial
  - Transitional Safeguarding

**3. To improve and maintain the effectiveness of regional safeguarding arrangements.**

- Participation / Voice of the Service User
- Workforce resilience
- Poverty
- Performance outcomes

For more information on the priorities and focus areas contained in the **Strategic Plan 2023-2026** please follow this link [GWENT SAFEGUARDING Strategic Plan 23-26 Yr 2 REVISED](#)

# 11. PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVING CITIZENS IN THE WORK OF THE SAFEGUARDING BOARD

Gwent Safeguarding Board considers it a priority to involve citizens, service users, children and young people, parents, carers and survivors, wherever possible to help us to set the strategic direction. We continue to seek opportunities from our partners to ensure that the voice of the citizen continues to inform the work of the Board.

Our Engagement and Communication Subgroup has started to review its membership to ensure that it has the most appropriate level of expertise and influence into existing forums. This year, we have continued to identify where other Board subgroups, for example Protocols and Procedures and Quality Assurance, may use opportunities to consult and engage with targeted consultation exercises with practitioners or service users. For example, we intend to target practitioners who attend our online Local Safeguarding Networks to undertake a survey of protocol awareness and use. We also intend to engage service users to better understand their experience of the safeguarding process in the coming period. This will assist us in applying practitioner and service user views to the development and promotion of resources which we develop and publish, and in shaping the way we most appropriately disseminate these. This will ensure that the practitioner voices are heard and can influence and inform a range of Board work.

Through our Engagement and Communication Sub-Group we continue to make links to a number of existing forums and groups. This enables us to utilise these groups for specific pieces of consultation or engagement work, as necessary. We can then ensure that we involve the most relevant group of individuals within each project we undertake. Some examples include:

- Local Safeguarding Network meetings are scheduled to take place during National Safeguarding Week each year. Workshops and presentations, relating to the theme of the 'Impact of the Cost-of-Living Crisis' were delivered using a series of virtual multi-agency events this year. These intended to raise awareness in relation to the context of poverty in Wales and its impact upon older people, children and families. Some of the workshops were developed in collaboration with service users who shared lived experiences of the impact of both financial abuse and gambling, which helped to improve practitioner insight into survivors.
- We continue to involve families as a matter of course in our child and adult practice reviews. This has ensured that families feel involved and can influence the learning as part of the review process.
- We continue to utilise citizen forums in order to inform our work. An example of this is our work with People's First Forums in respect of our Easy Read leaflets on What is Abuse & What is Safeguarding across the region. This helps us to target service users at the most appropriate venues in order to share resources on abuse, safeguarding and healthy relationships.
- During our online forums in the coming period, we intend to take the opportunity to consult on or evaluate published Board resources or guidance documents. We learn a lot from practitioners through this feedback process in order to increase awareness of regional guidance, across all agencies.

We maintain effective links with other regional partnerships, including the Regional Partnership Board, the Area Planning Board and the Public Service Board. This has helped us to consider the governance processes and reporting mechanisms together with representation at Board meetings to attempt to streamline and reduce duplication. This work will continue in the coming period.

We continue to work closely with our regional suicide and self-harm prevention leads to respond, in a coordinated way, to themes emerging from IRGs and child practice reviews which relate to suicide and self-harm.

We maintain a close working relationship with our VAWDASV colleagues. Examples of this include routine updates at respective Boards, sharing a website and collaborative efforts in relation to mutual priorities, such as events during National Safeguarding Week. In addition, we have had a range of guest speakers from partner agencies who have engaged with the Board, either at Board, subgroup level or within our Local Safeguarding Network meetings. This enhances our strategic awareness of parallel priorities and helps to identify opportunities for a more collaborative approach to safeguarding in order to improve positive outcomes for more citizens in the region. Partnership working remains at the heart of all of the work we will do in the next period.

## 12. INFORMATION, LEARNING AND TRAINING

- **Information**

Gwent Safeguarding Board's weekly Information Exchange is now embedded into routine business and is a reliable method for disseminating safeguarding news, resources and training offers to our network. We continue to regularly use social media in order to communicate and stay connected through the exchange of short, frequent messages to our Safeguarding Board followers. Our Engagement and Communication subgroup oversees a programme of campaign work which enables the Board to develop and deliver its own campaigns or to support those developed by other partnerships or organisations. This group is also planning to develop a series of themed podcasts in the coming period to enhance our methods of reaching wider audiences about key safeguarding topics. In addition, our website continues to be reviewed and has been improved in a number of ways. For example, we have enhanced the signposting of partnership safeguarding training opportunities including mental health and Mental Capacity Law. We have also ensured great clarity and access to information on the National Safeguarding Training Standards and Framework to benefit our partners.

- **Learning**

Gwent Safeguarding Board places learning at the heart of its business. A source of significant learning emerges from our child and adult practice reviews. Gwent Safeguarding Board is proud that it continues to consistently resource its own practice reviews using chairs and reviewers from neighbouring Local Authorities or partners within the region. In the past year, there have been:

- **one** adult practice review and **three** child practice reviews which were **published**; and,
- **one** child practice review, **one** adult practice review and **one** adult multi-agency professional forum (MAPF) which are **ongoing** and will conclude in the forthcoming period.

The subjects or contexts of the practice reviews which we have undertaken over the last year have helped to inform the Board's focus for the new period. These contexts have included child suicide and neglect for adults and children. Learning themes which have emerged from these practice reviews will enable us to identify specific work areas using the distilled action plan recommendations.

Some examples of these learning themes are:

- Missed opportunities to consider and analyse the historical and wider family context on the **child's lived experiences**.
- Missed opportunity to capture patient's views wishes and feelings, which may have improved compliance. Voice of the service user not evident in assessment, **lost the sense of the person**, feeling of process / equipment led rather than person centred;
- A number of **professional differences** were evident, professionals did not escalate concerns;
- Missed opportunities identified to see and **speak to child alone** and outside of the home;
- Missed opportunities to **submit safeguarding referrals**.



- **Training**

As one of its statutory requirements, Safeguarding Boards are to review and analyse the training needs of practitioners in the area, and to remain informed so that they can monitor the training activities provided, identify the training required and ensure agencies provide it. Gwent Safeguarding Board continues to provide an extensive multi agency regional training programme, with an appropriate mixture of both online and face-to-face interactions to enhance the learning experience. This enables free access to a range of safeguarding courses for practitioners and volunteers across the region. They are designed to complement and add value to the training provided by workforce development teams in the region.

The joint Boards' Delivery Group is made up of multi-agency professionals, identified by their agencies for their ability, knowledge and expertise in aspects of safeguarding practice and this Group contributes significantly to the delivery of our regional training programme. Gwent Safeguarding Board acknowledges the ongoing support of statutory and non-statutory agencies in enabling the continued roll-out of regional multi-agency safeguarding training. As outlined earlier, this year partners have invested considerable energy to ensure that the Board's training offer complies fully with the National Safeguarding Training Standards and Framework and this work remains ongoing.

We continue to commission training across a number of specialised safeguarding topics, which includes briefings and training from a number of providers on a range of subject areas, listed below. This year the number of attendees and sessions being delivered has remained high and is a demonstration of the increasing confidence and capability of Gwent Safeguarding Board in continuing to function effectively in respect of its training offer.

The following is a summary of the training provided by Gwent Safeguarding Board in 2023/2024:

<b>Delivered By</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>No of Sessions Delivered</b>	<b>Total No Trained</b>
Delivery Group	Introduction to Safeguarding (Children and Adults)	11	231
Delivery Group	Safeguarding Children: The Safeguarding Process	11	228
Delivery Group	Working with Child Neglect	2	25
Barnardo's	Harmful Sexual Behavior	1	19
Barnardo's	Online Harm Training	2	31
Barnardo's	Responding to Child Sexual Abuse	2	26
Dr Elizabeth Nickerson	Colposcopy	1	41
JMG Training and Consultancy	Mental Capacity Act for Children & Young People Practitioners	2	34
NRM Coordinator	NRM Awareness	3	70
Action for Children	Poverty	2	28
Gwent Police	Spot the Signs – Exploited Children & Young People	2	33
Gwent Police	Spot the Signs – Exploited Adults	1	16
Edge Training	Self-neglect, Mental Capacity Act and Hoarding	3	58
JMG Training and Consultancy/Stori	Mental Capacity Act, Domestic Abuse, Coercive Control and Adults at Risk	4	62
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>47</b>	<b>902</b>

**Sessions Currently in Development**

<b>Delivered By</b>	<b>Title</b>
Delivery Group	Group B –Safeguarding Children and Adult Training
Delivery Group	Group C – Safeguarding Children Training
Delivery Group	Group C – Safeguarding Adult Training

## 13. OTHER BOARD ACTIVITIES

### Adult Protection and Support Orders (APSOs)

The statutory guidance issued under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 sets out arrangements for these civil orders to be used by a local authority to enable an authorised officer to speak in private with a person suspected of being an adult at risk.

The Gwent region has authorised officers in place. In 2023/2024, there were no Adult Support and Protection Orders executed in the Gwent region.

### Guidance and Advice received from Welsh Ministers and / or the National Independent Safeguarding Board

We have continued to work closely with our Welsh Government colleagues and welcomed the more frequent interactions with the Safeguarding and Advocacy Team and the other Regional Safeguarding Boards across Wales, in order to maintain this national connection.

Representatives from the Gwent Safeguarding Board have continued to participate fully in national events. This has included the Project Board for the ongoing review of the Wales Safeguarding Procedures and dedicated national task groups. Our region participates fully in the All-Wales Regional Safeguarding Board chair meetings and the All Wales Safeguarding Business Managers network events and meetings. Annual Plans and Reports continue to be produced using a format which was agreed with other Board regions to ensure a consistent All Wales approach.

We continue to value the opportunity of working in conjunction with the members of the National Independent Safeguarding Board (NISB). Throughout 2023/2024, our Board received regular updates from the designated link member of the NISB who has remained a consistent and committed member of Gwent Safeguarding Board for several years now which has served to strengthen the union.

### Section 137 requests for information

Section 137(1) of the Act provides a Safeguarding Board with the power to request specified information from a qualifying person or body, provided that the purpose of the request is to enable or assist the Board to perform its functions under the Act.

During the year 2023/2024 the Gwent Safeguarding Board did not use their Section 137 powers to access information.