



Serving You

Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

20 August 2025

Addressing Safeguarding Adults Waiting List Backlogs

Report from: Jackie Brown, Assistant Director, Adult Social Care

Author: Laura Sowkhee, Head of Specialist Services and Safeguarding

Summary

Waiting lists within safeguarding contradict the ethos and values associated with supporting individuals to be safe and protected from abuse and neglect.

Delays with responding to safeguarding can result in repeat referrals, placing additional pressure onto a frontline safeguarding team that is already under immense strain.

Experiencing abuse or neglect is very distressing for individuals and can lead to long recovery times and long term physical and emotional trauma.

Additionally, delays in responding to safeguarding can result in crisis situations arising which can increase pressure on the Adult Social Care budget, hospital beds, emergency services and commissioned providers.

Safeguarding was scored 2 'Requires Improvement' by the CQC, with waiting lists being raised as an area of concern.

This report provides the Health & Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee with information relating to the continued increase in demand for adult safeguarding services. Additionally, this report informs Members of the risks associated with the current waiting lists and provides an overview of the actions being taken to mitigate the risks and actions being taken to reduce and remove the waiting lists.

1. Recommendations

1.1 The Committee is requested to note the report.

2. Budget and policy framework

- 2.1. The Care Act 2014 is the key piece of legislation in England that outlines the responsibilities of local authorities and other agencies in relation to safeguarding adults.
- 2.2. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/23/contents>
- 2.3. The key safeguarding sections within the Care Act 2014 are:
- 2.4. **Section 42 – Enquiry by local authority**
Requires local authorities to make enquiries if they believe an adult is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect and is unable to protect themselves.
- 2.5. **Section 43 – Safeguarding Adults Boards (SABs)**
Mandates the establishment of SABs in every local authority area to help and protect adults in its area.
- 2.6. **Section 44 – Safeguarding Adults Reviews (SARs)**
Requires SABs to arrange a review when an adult dies or is seriously harmed as a result of abuse or neglect, and there is concern about how agencies worked together.
- 2.7. **Section 45 – Supply of information**
Gives SABs the power to request information from organisations or individuals to support safeguarding work.
- 2.8. **Section 1 – Wellbeing principle**
Although not specific to safeguarding, this section underpins all care and support decisions, including safeguarding, with a focus on promoting individual wellbeing.
- 2.9. **Sections 6 & 7 – Cooperation**
Emphasises the duty of cooperation between local authorities and other organisations in safeguarding matters.
- 2.10. **Section 11 – Refusal of Assessment**
An adult with mental capacity can refuse a care needs assessment.
However, the local authority must still carry out an assessment if the person is experiencing, or at risk of abuse or neglect.
- 2.11. Medway Council is a statutory partner of the Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adult's Board. (KMSAB) Medway Council work in line with the policies of the KMSAB to support effective safeguarding responses and arrangements be in place: <https://kmsab.org.uk/>

- 2.12. The Safeguarding Adult Service's budget comes from the overall Adult Social Care budget and comprises of a staffing budget as well as utilising the service delivery budget to implement interventions and risk mitigations.

3. Background

- 3.1. Adult safeguarding has seen a year-on-year increase over the past 5 years, resulting in a total of 100.6% increase between 2020 and 2025.
- 3.2. Staffing resource within safeguarding was not increased between 2017 and 2024 and therefore the Safeguarding Service has been unable to keep pace with the rising demand.
- 3.3. A Safeguarding Concern is the term used when a referral is made to Adult Social Care when there is suspected risk of or actual abuse or neglect taking place.
- 3.4. A Safeguarding Enquiry is the term used to describe the formal legal process initiated by the local authority when it has reasonable cause to suspect that an adult:
- Has needs for care and support (regardless of whether those needs are being met),
 - Is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect, and
 - Is unable to protect themselves from that abuse or neglect due to their care and support needs.

- 3.5. Table 1 below demonstrates the increase in demand over the past 5 years:

Metric Type	Value Type	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Predicted Outturn 2025/26
Safeguarding Concerns Raised	Count	1629	2053	2345	2717	3267	3792
Safeguarding Enquiries	Count	630	844	794	808	849	978

Table 1 – 2024-25 Safeguarding Adults Collection

- 3.6. The table above demonstrates that the predicted outturn for new safeguarding concerns for 2025-26 is an increase of a further 525 concerns against the previous year. (16.06%) This equates to an overall increase of 132.78% since 2020.
- 3.7. The table also shows that the predicted outturn for new safeguarding enquiries for 2025-26 is an increase of 129 enquiries against the previous year. (15.19%) This equates to an overall increase of 55.23% since 2020.
- 3.8. There has been an 18% increase in the number of concerns raised per 100,000 adults in Medway from 2023-24 to 2024-25. At 1,484 it is now above the National figure for 2023-24 of 1361.

- 3.9 Neglect and Acts of Omission has remained the highest category of abuse over the past 5 years. The year 2024-25 saw this category of abuse rise from 31.2% the previous year to 39%. The second highest category of abuse for 2024-25 was self-neglect at 16.6%. The location of risk was in the alleged victim's own home in 57.5% of closed enquiries in 2024-25. Cases of neglect and self-neglect in the community are often challenging and are labour intensive. The turnaround for safeguarding enquiries of this nature is slower paced due to the complexities that present, including non-engagement, mental capacity challenges, co-occurring conditions and mental health conditions.
- 3.10 To support Adult Social Care deliver on statutory safeguarding duties, investment was made into the staffing establishment in 2023/2024, and again in this financial year. The investment took the frontline establishment from:
- 3 x FTE Senior Social Workers
 - 9 x FTE Social Workers
 - 1 x FTE Social Care Officer
- To
- 6 FTE Senior Social Workers
 - 18 x FTE Social Workers
 - 3 x FTE Social Care Officers
- 3.11 The service has also undergone a major restructure, which was implemented on 1 March 2025. This restructure saw the move from three individual locality based safeguarding hubs into one overall cohesive safeguarding service.
- 3.12 The restructure also included both operational and strategic safeguarding responsibility move to one Head of Service. Additionally, the restructure introduced one dedicated Operations Manager and two dedicated Team Managers to ensure that there is sufficient management oversight available to support the service move forward. Further to this, the restructure has implemented two Business Support Officer roles.
- 3.13 Increasing the staffing establishment, better equips the Council to fulfil its statutory safeguarding duties in a timelier manner, however, the service continues to see increased demand and is still not able to keep pace. This has resulted in waiting lists for both safeguarding concerns and enquiries.

4. Waiting Lists

- 4.1. Table 2 provides an overview of the waiting lists within the Safeguarding Service as of 12/08/2025.

Type of Work	Waiting list
Safeguarding Concern	93
Safeguarding Enquiry	106

Table 2 – Safeguarding Service Waiting Lists

- 4.2 Table 3 demonstrates the number of concerns and enquires that are allocated to the service and being actively worked on as of 12/08/2025.

Type of Work	Allocated
Safeguarding Concern	113
Safeguarding Enquiry	193

Table 3 – Safeguarding Service Allocated Work

- 4.3 This table demonstrates that there are currently 306 pieces of active safeguarding work allocated within the service and 199 pieces of unallocated work.
- 4.4 The waiting lists continue to grow larger, despite the increase in staff, more robust management oversight and focus on closures.

5. Risk management

- 5.1 A number of actions are in place to mitigate the risks associated with increased demand and associated waiting lists detailed in the table below.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Prolonged exposure to abuse or neglect for adults at risk.	Due to not responding in the expected timescales, interventions to safeguard are delayed.	All safeguarding concerns are screened upon receipt. Concerns are rag rated, and all red rated cases are responded to on the day. Cases with immediate risk have risk mitigation implemented promptly. Cases held on the waiting list are reviewed regularly to ensure the individual remains safe and to establish whether the risk has increased.	All
Staff Burnout/turnover	Increase in staff sickness and leavers, reducing capacity. Locums not converting to permanent or leaving at short notice.	Regular staff wellbeing check-ins. Regular review of caseloads. High management presence. Continuing with recruitment and retention strategies.	All

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
New ways of working impacting on throughput.	Increased management oversight has identified that previously the service was not undertaking phone calls and visits and required.	<p>Continued review of ways of working to ensure service delivery is at the required standards.</p> <p>Continued analysis of demand and feedback of analysis to Quality Assurance and Performance Improvement Board and the Health and Adult Social Care Oversight Board.</p>	All
Not able to meet increasing demand	Adults remain at risk of or continue to experience abuse due to not having capacity to meet demand in real time.	<p>All vacant posts are filled via locum. There are currently 14 locums in post. 7 FTE permanent social workers have been recruited, and recruitment efforts are ongoing. It is acknowledged that having locums to deliver services increases the pressure to the budget.</p> <p>The Safeguarding Service is taking on 2 Newly Qualified Social Workers as part of their latest permanent recruits. This has not been done before and is taking place to support the service grow and develop social workers in the to safeguarding role.</p> <p>Analysis of the driving factors for the continued increase is underway. Once analysis is complete work will be undertaken to try and reduce the demand, for example identifying partners who refer in high numbers that do not meet the safeguarding threshold and undertaking intensive educative work</p>	All

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
		<p>around what constitutes a safeguarding concern.</p> <p>Fortnightly meetings with HOS and Safeguarding Operations Manager and Team Managers to review position and risk management strategies.</p> <p>Introduction of Magic Notes. This will significantly reduce the number of admin hours required for the Safeguarding Team.</p> <p>Safeguarding Team is going to trial Artificial Intelligence BeeBot. This AI aims to filter, redirect and prioritise work.</p> <p>Daily review of the Safeguarding Dashboard by HOS.</p> <p>Regular review of waiting list and RAG rating.</p> <p>Scoping out the possibility of introducing an Adult Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub, (MASH) in a similar model to Children's Services. This will enable more resource by partners and a more holistic, robust response to safeguarding adults.</p> <p>Continued audit cycle with findings shared with senior managers and portfolio holder.</p> <p>Review of current process and policies with a view to updating and strengthening these.</p>	

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Increased complaints	<p>Increase in dissatisfaction of safeguarding service delivery.</p> <p>Reduced management capacity due to time spent investigating and responding to complaints.</p>	<p>Introduction of a safeguarding specific complaints tracker.</p> <p>HOS has oversight on complaints and responses and collating themes in order to make service improvements.</p>	AIII

For risk rating, please refer to the following table:

Likelihood	Impact:
<p>A Very likely</p> <p>B Likely</p> <p>C Unlikely</p> <p>D Rare</p>	<p>I Catastrophic</p> <p>II Major</p> <p>III Moderate</p> <p>IV Minor</p>

6. Climate change implications

6.1. This report has no climate change implications.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1. To reduce waiting lists, additional investment continues to be made in additional staffing, digital tools, to improve referral systems and support decision making, case management software and analytics. These investments are being made from the Adult Social Care Transformation Budget.
- 7.2. As referenced in the risk management comments in section 5 of the report, the team currently has significant levels of locum staff. Although we have seen success in recruitment, the remaining locums do adversely impact the staffing budget forecasts. The forecast cost of the locum staff in the Safeguarding team prior to these permanent appointments was c£1.3million which was offset by an underspend of £478,000 on permanent staffing, a net pressure of c£800,000. This will be monitored and updated during the budget monitoring process. The costs of the safeguarding team are met from the council's revenue budget for Adult Social Care.

8. Legal implications

- 8.1. The Council has a statutory duty pursuant to S.42 of the Care Act 2014 to make enquiries if they believe an adult is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect and is unable to protect themselves.
- 8.2. The Council must comply with this and its other statutory duties set out in the Care Act 2014.

Lead officer contact

Laura Sowkhee – Head of Specialist Services and Safeguarding

laura.sowkhee@medway.gov.uk

Appendices

None

Background papers

None