



Thinking the unthinkable

7-minute learning briefing

Safeguarding Adults Review – June 2026

A concise system-learning briefing for safeguarding partners and care-setting professionals.

Background

What the review set out to understand and why it matters

Concerns of sexual assault in care settings

The review considered how agencies recognise and respond when concerns arise in places intended to keep people safe, supported and free from harm.

Why vulnerability and cognitive impairment are central

A core learning theme is that assumptions about vulnerability, capacity or credibility can minimise disclosures, reduce professional curiosity and delay safeguarding action.

How the review approached the learning

The work focused on system-wide learning, trauma-informed practice, role clarity, evidence preservation, transferable risk and the voice of lived experience.

Key message: disclosure should trigger belief, curiosity and prompt multi-agency action — not doubt or delay.

Lessons Learned

The recurring themes that should shape practice

Belief and prompt action

- Take all disclosures and indicators seriously, regardless of diagnosis.
- Escalate concerns promptly and maintain professional curiosity.

Shared safeguarding responsibility

- Clarify roles across providers, ASC, Police, health partners and regulators.
- Manage evidence and transferable risk from the outset.

Capacity, credibility and bias

- Assess capacity on a decision-specific basis under the MCA.
- Challenge confirmation and optimism bias; impairment increases vulnerability, not disbelief.

Recovery must stay central

- Keep the person's trauma, safety, dignity and best interests at the centre.
- Use continuity, advocacy and accurate records to preserve the lived experience.

Action Points

Practical priorities for strengthening the multi-agency response

- 1 Strengthen multi-agency guidance**
Set out clear expectations for recognising, reporting and responding to sexual assault disclosures in care settings.
- 2 Embed accessible reporting pathways**
Make escalation steps, evidence-preservation actions and safeguarding thresholds visible and understood by all staff.
- 3 Use timely strategy discussions**
Convene proportionate multi-agency discussions early, including Police, ASC, providers, health and regulators where relevant.
- 4 Train for complex decision-making**
Use case studies on MCA, unconscious bias, trauma-informed practice, transferable risk and role clarity.
- 5 Assure closed environments**
Commissioners and partners should test how risk factors are identified, challenged, monitored and shared.

Good Practice

Existing strengths to retain and build on

The review identifies practice foundations that can support safer, more consistent responses:

- Lived experience was gathered and used to shape learning and recommendations.
- A bespoke multi-agency SAR panel brought together ASC, health, Police, SARC and CQC perspectives.
- The review focused on system-wide learning rather than individual performance.
- Professional curiosity, trauma-informed practice and person-centred safeguarding were consistently emphasised.
- There is a clear commitment to strengthening guidance, training, reporting pathways and staff support.

Build on what works

Partnership working is strongest when information is shared early, roles are explicit and the person's recovery remains visible alongside safeguarding and criminal justice processes.

Reflection – Questions to consider

Use these prompts in team briefings, supervision and learning discussions

1. Would I treat a disclosure from someone with cognitive impairment as credible and urgent?
2. What assumptions might I be making about capacity, vulnerability or credibility?
3. Do I know how to preserve evidence, report concerns and escalate risk?
4. Who else needs this information now to manage transferable risk?
5. How do we keep safety, dignity and recovery central while investigations continue?
6. What supervision or support do staff need after complex or distressing disclosures?

Briefing close: belief, curiosity and timely multi-agency action are protective factors.

Please note the SAR and agreed learning was undertaken by the West of Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Board tri borough partnership agreements which superseded the Wokingham Borough Safer Communities Partnership arrangements