

Corporate Safeguarding

Annual Report 2025



Our Commitment

Our safeguarding commitment last year was to continue to support people to achieve their goals in a safe and planned way. We wanted to further empower people to make their own decisions, heard by others through their own voices and in a way that worked for them. The highlights of our progress to date are as follows:

Getting it right – Progress to Date

Further Develop our Safeguarding Digital Reporting Platform

We have upskilled our teams across the Group to better understand and therefore better utilise the digital reporting platform and this has driven improvements in how we capture and analyse available data such as medication errors.

Fully Embed our Restraint Reduction Strategy

During 2024/2025 we launched our two year restraint reduction strategy supporting the lowering of levels of chemical and environmental interventions in services. This has enabled the group to agree and build organisational tolerance levels so we can begin to embed more robust reporting and a governance pathway, which will support operational teams further to reduce and or eliminate identified restrictions.

Refresh our Volunteering Strategy

Our refreshed volunteer strategy was launched to co-inside with national Volunteers week. It promotes new volunteering opportunities across the communities we deliver services in. In addition, we have improved access to volunteer training, ongoing development and advice and support for Volunteers, local service teams and the people we support.

Conclude our IT Strategy Development and Modernisation Programme

As part of our IT strategy review, we have completed a comprehensive review of our current systems, delivering on efficiencies and identifying solutions which are enhancing data collection and further support how we monitor various analysis initiatives across the Real Life Options Group. In addition, we are currently on track to achieve our Cyber Essentials accreditation by March 2026.

Policy Review

We continue to look at innovative ways to further develop our organisational policy and procedures working in tandem with subject matter experts, regulatory bodies and best practice initiatives to ensure these vigorously support the safety, health and wellbeing of the people we support and our staff teams.

Keeping Safeguarding at the Heart of any Service Development

Our Business Development Team remain dedicated to the continued engagement and co-production of our business growth and development plan with the people we support and look forward to this continued collaboration in the future.

New Corporate Strategy

And lastly, but no less important, since the beginning of 2025 we have worked collaboratively with colleagues from across the Real Life Options Group utilising information gathered from the My Voice initiative to write our new strategy that will truly reflect the people we support, our workforce and drive progress, growth and improvement over the next 3 years.

Refreshing our Values and Vision – Other initiatives that we have prioritised over the last 12 months

Restrictive Practice

In terms of restrictive practice, the organisation has recently conducted a survey across all services to get a clearer insight into the use of blanket restrictions and also where improvements can be made to enhance the quality of life for those we support.

This survey highlighted several key themes, strengthening our commitment to reducing restrictive practices and promoting the rights and freedoms of individuals supported. Some of the important dates in our Restrictive Practice reduction calendar for 2025/2026 are as follows:

January – December 2025

Restrictive Practice awareness campaign



Impact of Reducing Restrictive Practice

A key objective within the reducing restrictive practice strategy is the development and implementation of the Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) risk profile and once completed this information will be used to identify where supported individuals and staff teams may need some additional support. For example:

Case Study – Fred’s Story (please note: this is not the person’s real name)

Fred has a severe learning disability and is diagnosed autistic. He has a history of engaging in behaviours described as challenging. Real Life Options have supported Fred for over ten years with minimal episodes of Fred engaging in behaviours of concern.

In the Autumn of 2024, a recently completed PBS risk profile identified a gradual increase in behaviours of concern, the intensity of these behaviours and the use of as required (PRN) medication. Support staff worked closely with the PBS team to identify what Fred was trying to communicate through his behaviour. By completing detailed incident reports, daily notes, direct observations and regular communication / debrief sessions they were able to pinpoint that the pre cursor to the behaviours were predominantly when Fred was asked to participate in some of the new activities that had been introduced in August and September following his review.

The team then pulled together a phased plan to ensure there was a balance between engagement and time alone allowing sufficient time in-between activities for Fred to relax and unwind. In addition, now and next steps were implemented to help Fred understand and process the stages of the activity.

The changes to his routine resulted in a gradual decrease in the frequency and intensity of the behaviours of concern and subsequently a reduction in the use of PRN medication. The team now have a planned approach to ensure any changes in required in Fred’s routine, or to the environment are done slowly and subtly to support Fred to process the changes at a pace that suits him.

Our New Referral and Assessment Process

This has now been fully embedded across the organisation and within the first year of it going live the new policy and subsequent processes have been fundamental in supporting operational teams to ensure needs and risks are identified from the onset, to further support the development of robust support plan processes that meet supported people's health, wellbeing and quality of life expectations.

One of our Head of Operations had this to say about her experience of using the systems and processes within a residential care home in Scotland:

“ The new referral and assessment process proved invaluable when we received a referral for an individual with highly complex support needs, which extended beyond our agreed service model of care. The structured approach enabled us to thoroughly assess all associated risks, identify necessary staff training, and carefully consider the potential impact on existing people we support in the care home. This comprehensive process ensured we made an informed decision that prioritised the wellbeing of everyone involved and highlighted the strength of the new system in supporting safe, person-centred care planning. ”

Medication Review

We now have a dedicated medication review group, consisting of subject matter experts from across the group who meet on a regular basis to consider, action and progress any areas of concern in relation to medication. A particular focus has been looking at the various types of medication errors that occur and the reasons provided. Systematically using the collated data to strengthen our internal medication processes and also further develop our training provision for our workforce.

The medication review group, working directly with our analysis team have also been pivotal in the further enhancement of our current reporting processes refining the categories of medication errors that occur to maximise improved forward planning and enhanced reporting accuracy that will support a more structured and cohesive approach to the management of medication errors across the Group.

In addition, the continued completion and dissemination of monthly, quarterly and annual medication error trends analysis and statistical reporting to senior leadership and Board of trustees will continue to support further learning and improvement outcomes for the people we support and their staff teams.

Health and Wellbeing

For staff to flourish and work to their best levels, they need to feel fully supported. It is known that strong support from colleagues and managers is often noted as a key factor in strong workplace wellbeing. One of our key commitments over the next 24 months is to upskill the leaders across our organisation and equip them with the necessary tools and information to support colleagues and themselves to achieve a level of wellbeing that meets people's needs mentally, financially and physically.

We will refresh our Health and Wellbeing Working Group and review our Employee Benefits and Assistance Programme scheme to ensure that it reflects our workforces current needs and can really begin to make a difference to overall health and wellbeing.

One other element of ongoing support that will be reviewed is our current approach to supervisions and support sessions with the aim of fully aligning both to personal performance and feeling valued.

My Voice Programme

The My Voice team continues to advocate for the rights, choice and voice of the people supported by the organisation, working in partnership to encourage and ensure that supported individuals are actively involved in the continual development of our My Voice initiative.

Over the last twelve months the team have completed two surveys capturing feedback from people we support, their guardians and staff on service delivery and wellbeing. We also completed an additional survey alongside the people we support participating in key research highlighting the barriers faced by people seeking employment opportunities. Lastly, we facilitated two conferences, cross country for people to share their stories and air their views. Our conferences led on from one of the surveys completed, focussing on employment opportunities for the people we support.

The focussed study capturing the experiences of people we support into employment offered incredible insight into the thoughts, feelings and experiences, both positive and negative, for people with learning disabilities moving into the workplace. It gave insight into incredible examples of empowerment, positivity but also events of discrimination and exclusion from aspects of work.

Clinical Compliance

Over the last 12 months our dedicated Clinical Compliance Partner has worked closely with operational teams and our senior Leadership to:

- Further develop, review, implement and embed safe working practice with regards to invasive procedures
- Develop enhanced governance and corporate oversight in relation to clinical compliance
- Complete and implement a training needs analysis in relation to invasive practice/clinical compliance work streams

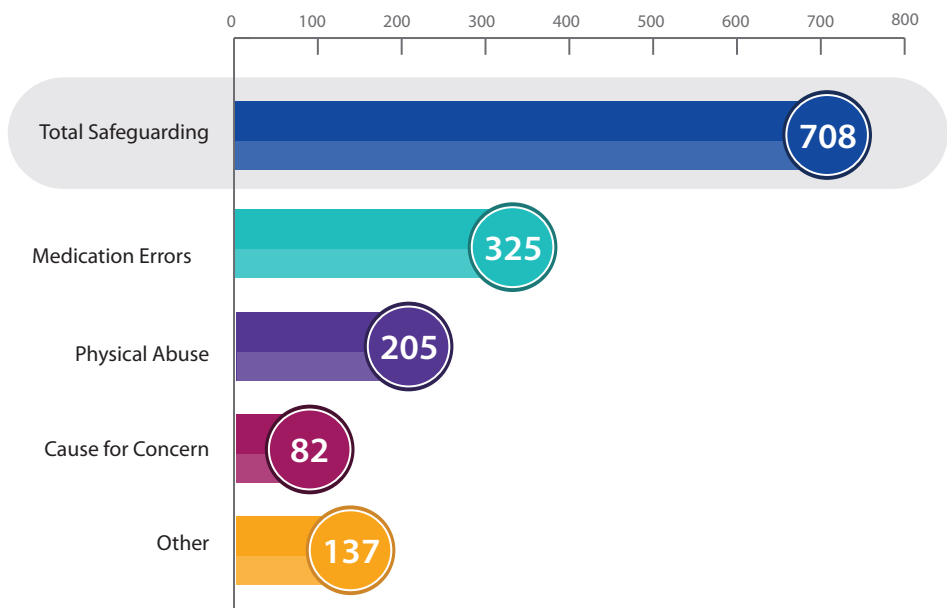
And some of the key areas of prioritised work to date include:

- Robust review and update of our Medication Policy
- The introduction of new guidance documents and support tools such as:
- High-Risk Alert procedures
- Soft signs of illness guidance
- Sepsis awareness documentation
- A formal Dysphagia register
- The introduction of mandatory dysphagia training, associated knowledge checker and related observational audit processes

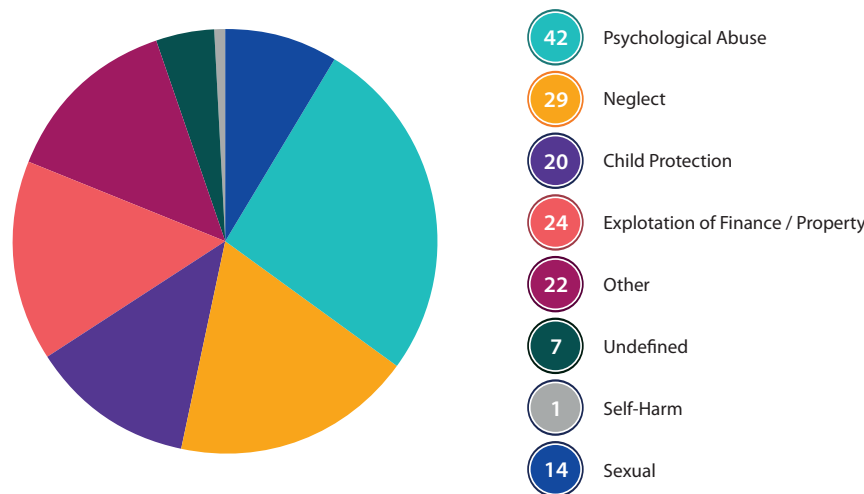
Our Safeguarding Years in Numbers

Below is an illustration of the total safeguarding issues raised in the organisation during the 2024-2025 financial year:

Safeguarding Totals for Financial Year 2024-2025



It is important to note that Safeguarding events described as “Other” encompasses a wide variety of types of events, the distribution of which is detailed below



Comparison

Please see below a comparison between the 2023–2024 and the 2024–2025 financial years:

Category	2023 -2024 Total	2024 -2025 Total	Percentage increase or decrease	▲ ▼
Total Safeguarding	604	708	17.22%	▲
Medical Errors	174	325	86.78%	▲
Physical Abuse	102	82	19.61%	▼
Cause for Concern	197	205	4.06%	▲
Other	163	137	15.95%	▼

As can be seen from the above table, the “Medical Error” category was the single largest increase over the year and is now the largest category accounting for 45.90% of all safeguarding issues.

There are however, several important factors involved in the increase in medication errors that always need to be considered and to better understand how those factors can impact on our statistics we made some crucial changes to how medication errors are recorded, reported and analysed across the organisation.

Prior to January 2025 all medication errors were logged on CPOMS under Safeguarding > medication mistake. The changes we made saw the removal of this subcategory and the formation of a far more bespoke categorised system that will enable more meaningful data collection, and we look forward to sharing our findings as a result of these changes in more detail next year.

Future Plans

- Continue to develop our governance reporting and analysis capacity across the group with a focus on safeguarding, positive behaviour support/restrictive practice, and clinical compliance/invasive practice
- Re-establish our Health and Wellbeing working group to maintain
- Expand the My Voice initiative to fully include our workforce's voice/s in the health and wellbeing of themselves, the group and therefore its overall performance.
- Promote and support the people who use our services into paid or unpaid employment or volunteering roles in a way that makes them feel safe, valued and understood.
- Creating an approach to Community Development and Social Value that begins to properly align people we support with their surroundings and local environments.

Welcoming new Senior Leaders who will continue to drive and embed our strong values driven safeguarding/adult support and protection ethos.

Kenzie Cartney – National Head Of Operations

“ In my role as National Head of Operations I truly believe in the requirement for each Employee to clearly understand what constitutes a safeguarding concern and just as important that they are equipped to identify, respond to, and report issues appropriately. Proactive risk mitigation, adherence to best practice, and learning from events are the key to strengthening systems and safeguarding the people we support.

Due to the nature of social care, eradication of all incidents is an unrealistic goal, but fostering a culture of awareness, accountability, and continuous improvement ensures safeguarding remains a shared, embedded responsibility across all levels and departments of the Real Life Options Group.

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Jordan Saunders – National Head Of Human Resources

“ Our internal Human Resource department, pay a vital part in maintaining the safety and wellbeing of our employees and the people we support, therefore as the new Group Head of this department my focus and priority over the next 12 months will be on the following:

- The further development of our comprehensive safeguarding policies, ensuring these are appropriately aligned with legislation and maximise abuse prevention
- Improving our Safer Recruitment practices, including enhanced DBS/PVG checks; thorough a programme of Safeguarding-related interview questions and employment history checks with gap explanations
- Complementing our current mandatory safeguarding induction for all new starters with the introduction of role specific refresher courses
- Promoting a zero-tolerance approach to abuse or neglect through fostering a speak-up culture where employees feel safe to raise concerns
- Encouraging reflective practice and learning from safeguarding incidents through 121 meetings, annual appraisals and performance management reviews
- Recognising that dealing with safeguarding issues can be emotionally challenging supporting a psychologically safe environment for employees to discuss concerns and share their thoughts

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Jean Trench – Chief Executive Officer

“ **Our Promise**
Real Life Options are committed to a person-centred approach with every decision we make: the support we deliver for people and our duty of care to every single person whether that be a person we support in their home or community or our colleagues who make up our valued workforce and teams.

With targeted focus in recent years to our ‘My Voice’ initiative we have empowered people we support to have their voices heard not just in a meaningful way but also as advocates for each other and their wider communities. My Voice will continue to develop in the coming year(s) with people’s voices being placed more and more at the heart of everything we do and communicated in a way that makes sense to all, empowering people to have the confidence to protect themselves and others.

Our teams are passionate in their roles and every day we work in partnership with people we support, stakeholders and guardians, to promote a safe and happy environment to live and work.

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