

Corporate Safeguarding

Annual Report 2026



Our Commitment

Over the past year, our safeguarding commitment has focused on strengthening our governance reporting and analytical capability across the group. This has included a particular emphasis on safeguarding, positive behaviour support and restrictive practice, as well as clinical and invasive practice compliance.

We also committed to re-establishing our Health and Wellbeing Working Group, alongside expanding the MyVoice initiative to ensure the full inclusion of our workforce in shaping health and wellbeing—both individually and collectively—and, in turn, supporting our overall organisational performance.

As always, communication and participation have remained central, with this “golden thread” further reinforced through the continued development of our highly successful MyVoice initiative.

Ensuring we get it right

As always, our main safeguarding priority is to get it right for the people we support, working in partnership to enable all supported individuals to collaborate and influence our safeguarding journey.

During the last 12 months we have:

- Reviewed and refreshed our volunteering strategy to strengthen the contribution our volunteers make to the lives of the people we support
- Reviewed key policies across the group, to ensure and communicate a clear commitment to the wellbeing of the people we support and our employees.
- Prioritised the review of all internal processes that have the potential to impact on the safety and security of digital data, working closely with 3rd party stakeholders to maximise GDPR best practice and minimise safeguarding risk
- Further developed our digital reporting platform to maximise our ability to review, analysis and robustly embed improvement actions and any lessons learned that arise from safeguarding events
- Continued our vision of an inclusive partnership by expanding and further developing our MyVoice initiative, providing the platform and resources to encourage and inspire the people we support to contribute, drive and determine the future vision the Real Life Options Group
- Continued with our promise to ensure that safeguarding the people we support remains at the centre of all current and future business and commercial development plans
- Continued to prioritise and embed our restraint reduction strategy to reduce and remove blanket restrictions in line with the individual need of the people we support

Our Progress over the last 12 months on these has been:

Volunteer Strategy 2025 – 2028

We cannot under estimate the value our volunteers have with regards to promoting the independence, safety and wellbeing of the people we support and therefore it was essential the organisation refreshed its Volunteering Strategy to strengthen the contribution volunteers make to the lives, independence, and wellbeing of the people we support. The strategy builds on the progress made since the launch of the Real Life Volunteers programme in 2019, through which more than 200 individuals have supported services in a variety of roles.

Volunteers play an important role in promoting inclusion, connection, and independence. Many of the people we support benefit from additional social interaction, companionship, and opportunities to access activities within their communities. By increasing volunteer involvement, the organisation aims to enhance these opportunities while reducing social isolation and strengthening links with local communities.

The refreshed strategy focuses on expanding and diversifying volunteering roles, including befriending, community activity support, gardening, arts and crafts facilitation, volunteer driving, and fundraising support. These opportunities enable volunteers to contribute their skills in meaningful ways while supporting people to engage more fully in community life.

Safeguarding remains central to the volunteering programme. The strategy reinforces robust recruitment, onboarding, and support processes to ensure volunteers are safely recruited, appropriately trained, and well supported in their roles. Volunteers are expected to share the organisation's commitment to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the people we support.

Overall, the refreshed strategy aims to create a sustainable, inclusive volunteering programme that strengthens safeguarding practice, enhances quality of life for the people we support, and deepens community engagement across our services.

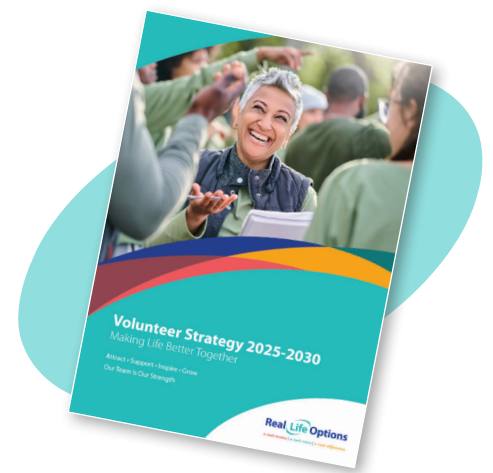
Policy Review

As an organisation it is essential we have confidence in the abilities of our policies and procedures to: protect the people we support, properly guide our staff, and meet our legal, statutory and best practice obligations.

At the start of 2026 we finalised our Transformation Policy Review Programme which supported Real Life Options Group to review, update and modernise our complete policy library, associated statements, forms and guidance. As a result, we now have a more streamlined and efficient suite of policies which are aligned to a robust review process for 2026-2027. This has been a pivotal piece of work which will support, drive forward and evidence an inclusive culture of safety, consistency, accountability, and trust for employees, the people we support and their families.

Digital Safeguarding

Throughout 2025-2026 we continued to stay focused on the implementation our IT strategy and modernisation programme. Systematically moving away from old and outdated technology, working with internal and external IT partners to both develop and adopt a suite of technology and digital safeguards to robustly manage and protect organisational data and the data of the people we support.



Digital Contingency Planning

One of our current corporate objectives is to achieve Cyber Essential Accreditation, and over the last 12 months we have continued with our commitment to further develop our information security and IT related disaster recovery planning processes across the organisation. This includes: the full implementation of our digital care platform project, which incorporates digital solutions that support dignity, privacy, and non-intrusive care and support for the people who use our services.

CPOMS – Digital platform for Accident/incident/safeguarding/complaints reporting

The ongoing development of our internal reporting processes has seen a marked increase in the number and quality, of improvement actions identified following any incident recorded on our CPOMS system, and this coupled with an enhanced use of stakeholder feedback and the centralised reporting of the progress toward resolution of any potential issues raised, has had a positive impact on learning outcomes identified and embedded as a result of any item recorded.

My Voice Initiative

Through providing and embedding a variety of mediums and resources to encourage and inspire the people we support to contribute, drive and determine the future vision of our organisation, we have begun the process of taking us from person-centred to a person-led organisation, which is an exciting journey that we are extremely proud of.



Future Business

To strengthen our tendering approach and responses from a safeguarding perspective, we have remained focused over the last year on ensuring our tender process is fully aligned with our internal Safeguarding / Adult Support & Protection policies and best practice guidance. This guarantees that any safeguarding learning outcome that has been identified within our safeguarding processes can be utilised to further develop quality service delivery from a procurement point of view. In addition, our tender responses mirror the principles of support and enablement, ensuring that the safeguarding needs of the people we support remain at the heart of co-produced support planning.

Restraint Reduction Strategy

Part of our restraint reduction strategy is focused on the design and development of internal awareness and practice tools, which will support our employees to both recognise and where relevant collaborate with the people we support, to both reduce and where possible remove the use of blanket restrictions. Our initial tranche of training at operational level has now been completed and our Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) Partners continue to support our People Development Team to develop additional resources to raise awareness with Business Support colleagues.

In addition, our PBS Partners continue to support operational teams with practical coaching, working closely with management, operational teams and the individuals we support to create individualised PBS plans, aligned to a programme of continual review, so that their effectiveness and be scoped and monitored at all times.

PBS Case Study

Michael* (early 30s) shares his home with Angus* (early 70s) in a supported living service. Over time, Angus's verbal and physical aggression towards Michael impacted Michael's quality of life, with several incidents recorded last year.

A Positive Behaviour Support Plan was developed for Angus following the completion of a Functional Assessment. Both the assessment and the Positive Behaviour plan was produced in collaboration with his staff team and his family. Once completed, the team attended a bespoke workshop to enhance their understanding of how the plan was developed and how best to implement it. As a direct result of this, and also the team working together to deploy the plan and the agreed strategies/scripted responses for Angus, this provided him with predictability, structure, routine and the consistent approach that he need.

In parallel, a Risk Management Plan was devised to support Michael and his staff, with the aim of creating a more supportive and controlled home environment, identifying and reducing restrictive practices, through enhancing communication and consistency.

By following both plans, the quality of life has improved for both gentlemen and a reduction in incidents has been recorded.

(*Please note: the individual's names have been changed to protect their anonymity)

Further achievements in the last year

The development of our workforce wellbeing strategy

As an organisation we fully recognise the critical link between workforce wellbeing and safe, compassionate and effective care. Working with a collective focus across the group to implement and embed an inclusive programme, that fully reinforces a strong culture of employee health and wellbeing, by ensuring employees feel supported, valued, and able to raise concerns or seek assistance when needed. This includes access to a suite of wellbeing resources, manager capability development initiatives, and improved signposting to support services such our Employee Assistance Programme.

During 2025-2026, the organisation has established a Health and Wellbeing Group to strengthen our focus on the health, wellbeing, and the resilience of our workforce. The group brings together representatives from human resource and operational teams to review wellbeing trends, identify areas where additional support may be required, and promote initiatives that contribute to a positive and supportive working environment.

The group seeks to ensure that employees have access to appropriate wellbeing resources, that managers are equipped to support staff effectively, and that concerns relating to stress, workload, or wellbeing can be identified and addressed at an early stage.

In 2026-2027 we will continue to review wellbeing themes and workforce indicators, reporting key insights through organisational governance processes to ensure that employee wellbeing remains a priority and that any emerging risks or safeguarding implications are managed appropriately.

Clinical Governance – Protecting the people we support and our workforce

Our corporate initiative which focused on developing our internal resources relating to Clinical Governance, has gone from strength to strength, and has been fundamental to the ongoing development of our safeguarding processes and some of our achievements to date in this area are identified below:

- The full review and update of our Medication Policy and associated guidance ensuring safe practice is delivered by a competent, and knowledge work force
- The implementation of High-Risk Alerts, added to support plan documentation to provide prominent reminders to staff regarding any identified key/high risk health issue
- The development and implementation of Soft Signs of Illness and Sepsis Awareness documentation/training tools, which support staff to recognise early changes in the health and wellbeing of the people we support, so that appropriate and timely action and/or reporting to appropriate Healthcare Professionals can take place
- The full implementation of a Dysphagia, Choking and Aspiration 'at risk register' to monitor changes in need and support best practice care delivery
- The development and implementation of training awareness sessions/training competency tools and knowledge checkers regarding Dysphagia Awareness for all operational staff.
- Review, update and implementation of associated health forms related to:
 - choking incident reporting
 - medication auditing
 - medication error reporting
 - health monitoring records

Health & Safety – Protecting People, Preventing Harm

From a Health and Safety point of view maintaining safe working and living environments is an essential element of safeguarding our workforce and the people we support, and the following are some of our key H&S work streams in the past year:

- The introduction of a dedicated H&S sub committee and forum, which will support the further development of current systems and innovative work practice while maintaining robust oversight
- Implementation of enhanced H&S auditing programme by our qualified H&S team, which will compliment current compliance auditing processes
- Implementation of robust internal legionella training and testing programmes to compliment external maintenance requirements
- Implementation of a suite of regular H&S/environmental toolbox talks, which are an invaluable asset in helping our workforce to keep themselves and the people we support safe

Our Safeguarding Years in Numbers

Point of note: It should be noted when viewing these figures that some safeguarding events will span multiple categories.

As can be demonstrated in the table below there has been a 14-point decrease in the total number of safeguarding events in the 2025 – 2026 financial year and this equates to 2%. The increase or decrease in each category is highlighted below:

Category	2024 -2025 Total	2025 -2026 Total	Percentage increase or decrease
Total Safeguarding	708	694	2% ▼
Medical Errors	325	298	11% ▼
Physical Abuse	82	65	33% ▼
Cause for Concern	205	221	8% ▲
Other	163	154	12% ▲

Trends analysis

As you can see “Medication Error” category was the largest single category accounting for 41.6% of all safeguarding issues and to fully understand the rationale behind these types of increases Real Life Options Group had previously undertaken a review of their recording and reporting processes for medication errors. As a direct result of the review findings changes were made to internal recording processes to include enhanced detail on the potential causes, types and drivers of each recorded error.

Following the implementation of these changes the additional data we can now extract, has given us a far greater depth of understanding to the possible underlying factors involved in a medication error. For example:

The clear trend in the statistics for medication errors in 2025-2026 reporting year, show that the highest risk scenario for a medication error to occur is as follows:

- Missed medication (followed closely by wrong documentation)
- Caused by human error
- On a weekday (Monday – Friday)
- During morning medication
- Using original packaging

Although it is always pertinent to understand that there can be multiple facets to any medication error it is essential for both our internal learning and the development of improved work practice that we continue to work behind the scenes to gain a better understanding of when, where, why and how medication errors happen.

Our organisational commitment to this workstream remains unwavering and as a result we are beginning to see some small, sustained and meaningful reduction in medication errors over the last few months, indicating that targeted interventions are starting to have the desired systemic impact.



My Voice Initiative

During 2025–2026 the MyVoice programme conducted multiple surveys covering a wide variety of subjects including:

- **Using the Internet** – this including understanding and support to stay safe online. This survey was for the people we support, employees (namely support staff) and family / guardians.
- **Service Communication** – this looked at the services ability to communicate with the people they support, family and / or guardians.
- **What does good look like?** – This survey which ran in conjunction with the MyVoice Conference was looking at the qualities the people we support look for in their support team members.
- **MyVoice Employee Survey** – This was the first time we had completed a survey of this type under the MyVoice banner and with 451 employees participating, there appeared to be good cross-section of the organisation.
- **Internal Communication** – This was directed toward employees to understand their thoughts on the communication within the organisations.
- **Annual Care at Home Surveys**



Working Together in Collaboration

MyVoice Conference 2025 – This was held at the Yorkshire Wildlife Park with the theme of “What does good look like?” This was our largest conference to date with over 100 people participating on the day.



MyVoice Case Study

Brad* is an autistic gentleman who has always had difficulty in expressing himself and finds opening up to people very difficult – In his own words this is generally due to the fear of being misunderstood or saying something he feels may be “wrong”.

As part of his continued development with his team, he was invited to the MyVoice Conference in Newcastle. The event was running on a theme of employment, and it was the power of the speakers (other supported individuals) and their willingness to share their story that inspire Brad to want to do the same.

As a result he contacted his service manager and requested that he take part in training his staff team on what he calls his “super-power” (this is how Brad views his autism). Working together with his service manager and the lead person on MyVoice, Brad pulled together a plan for him to co-produce and co-deliver this particular training. Brad gained so much confidence from this he wanted to share his story with the wider organisation, and went on to deliver the training he helped to plan and produce at the next MyVoice Conference the following year.

His story was not just about his increase in confidence, it’s a poignant record of his thoughts on where his support had failed him, left him vulnerable and had not met his needs. But in the end, this is a good news story, as the added confidence he felt following his training debut, allowed him to find his voice and also say what was not good enough, and just as importantly express how much better things had become since he ‘trained his staff. Safeguarding comes in many forms, and enabling people to have a voice is one.

(*Please note: the individual’s name has been changed to protect their anonymity)

Working together to make positive change happen

Delivering and embracing positive change can be difficult for any organisation, their employees and their stakeholders, and therefore the core consideration for our organisation when considering our new change management process, was to ensure that agreed changes would improve the overall quality of service delivery without causing confusion, risk, or disruption to our stakeholders, including the people we support.

As a result, one of our initiatives for 2026–2027 is to further develop and embed a more dynamic change management process, which will focus on an evidence based collaborative approach, building on shared ownership and informed decision making, using impact assessments to find better solutions that dovetail with a realistic planning route maps, that will ultimately strengthens our safeguarding commitment to the individuals who work in and use our services.

Future development plans for 2026–2027

- Finalise and embed our new medication management scoring system which will enhance our ability to ensure medication errors are managed, actioned and addressed in a manner that is appropriate to the level of risk.
- Develop our current processes and associated feedback tools to ensure the individuals we support can freely provide feedback on possible learning outcomes that may arise from any safeguarding issue. Through utilising productive debrief tools we can continue to support and embed a culture of being a truly person lead organisation

- Continue to embed the use of feedback logs within service improvement plans so that any feedback received from the people we support can be actively monitored, actioned and progressed, providing us with the opportunity to continue our improvement journey in a meaningful and productive way
- To further strengthen our inclusive Health and Wellbeing Strategy, through embedding a menopause informed approach across our workforce wellbeing initiatives to enhance manager capability and improve access to specialist wellbeing resources and support pathways.
- To continue to protect and safeguard the digital data of the people we support, our employees and other stakeholders by achieving Cyber Essentials certification
- Further develop our emergency preparedness processes in relation to Business continuity, winter planning and infectious diseases contingencies, ensuring safe living and working environments for the people we support and their staff teams
- To continue to strengthen our facilities management processes to support the implementation and maintenance of high-quality service provision
- To maintain our current focused approach, to working with or strategic partners and grant funders to identify and implement a range of innovative, projects driven by the people we support
- Fully embed our new inclusive change management process that is focused on protecting the individuals who use our services

“ Jean Trench, CEO

As we look ahead, we do so with confidence, clarity and a continued commitment to delivering safe, high-quality, person-led services.

Our priorities for the year ahead reflect what matters most—strengthening the quality and safety of our support, listening deeply to the voices of the people we support, and continuing to build an organisation where every individual feels valued and empowered. We will enhance our approaches to governance and clinical practice, while ensuring that feedback and learning remain at the heart of how we grow and improve.

We are equally committed to supporting our workforce. By investing in wellbeing, inclusion and leadership capability, we will create environments where colleagues can thrive and deliver their very best every day.

At the same time, we will strengthen our resilience—protecting data, improving preparedness, and working closely with partners to deliver innovative, forward-looking services that are shaped by the people who rely on them.

I would like to thank our colleagues, partners and the people we support for their ongoing dedication and trust. Together, we will continue to learn, improve and make a meaningful difference—now and into the future.



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