

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
8 SEPTEMBER 2026**

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF INFORMATION NOTE: ANNUAL REVIEW OF SAFEGUARDING AND PROTECTING CHILDREN AND ADULTS 2025-26

INFORMATION NOTE OF THE: Director - Governance

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Executive Member - Governance

COUNCIL PRIORITY: Thriving Communities;

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Council has robust procedures in place that govern how staff and councillors deal with concerns about children and adults with care and support needs at risk of abuse to maintain our statutory duty to safeguard their welfare. An operational review has taken place, and work is ongoing to ensure that these procedures are understood and followed consistently throughout the organisation.
- 1.2 That the Committee consider the following questions:
- What progress has been made against the Council's fulfilment of the statutory duty to maintain an effective safeguarding function regarding children, adults with care and support needs, modern slavery, Prevent and domestic abuse?
 - Are there sufficient and robust processes in place at the Council for application and review of safeguarding processes?

2. STEPS TO DATE

- 2.1 The key responsibility for safeguarding in Hertfordshire lies with the County Council. The District Council's main statutory role is to refer concerns to the appropriate agency (Social Care, or other) for action. The District Council should be notified if a referral meets the threshold for further inquiry, though this may not always occur. Officers involved with victims might need to support further proceedings or provide more information. If concerns don't meet the investigation threshold, they are returned to the originating organisation. Officers must offer advice and contact information for relevant agencies. All concerns are logged centrally to monitor ongoing reports that may warrant future referrals.
- 2.2 The role of the Councillor, employee, volunteer or contracted service provider is to inform and report concerns, not to investigate or judge. A District Council is not responsible for investigating any safeguarding incidents or allegations, involving children, young people or adults at risk, but provides the local 'eyes and ears' to enable a route to report any concerns.
- 2.3 District Council representation is maintained at various Hertfordshire safeguarding and partnership boards (Adult Board, Children Partnership, District and Borough Councils Safeguarding Group, Domestic Abuse Partnership and Multi Agency Prevent Board).
- 2.4 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive an annual safeguarding report summarising the Council's activities and upcoming initiatives.

3. INFORMATION TO NOTE

3.1 As shown in figure 1 below, the Council has continued to record and report more concerns year on year since 2014 when centralised records began. There is no evidence to suggest that our rising referral rates have been reflective of an increase in abuse in our local communities, but due to positive developments at the Council such as the introduction of a central database of referrals, mandatory corporate safeguarding training and numerous awareness raising campaigns. These have resulted in both an increased awareness and confidence amongst staff as well as improved corporate oversight about the safeguarding actions undertaken across the organisation resulting in a steady increase in our recorded referral rates.

3.2 The Council's safeguarding referral rates:

Figure 1 – Number of total external referrals per reporting period.

Referral type	Number of referrals - 25/26	Number of referrals - 24/25
Adult Social Care	148	99
Adult Safeguarding	96	67
Child Services	47	57
SPA (Mental Health)	57	66
SADA (Domestic Abuse)	131	165
Prevent	0	0
Modern Slavery	0	0
Total referrals	479 432 – Adults 47 - Children	454 397 – Adults 57 - Children
Incidents / Concerns which do not meet threshold for referral (internal records)	67	91

Figure 2 – Type of referrals per reporting month 2025/26

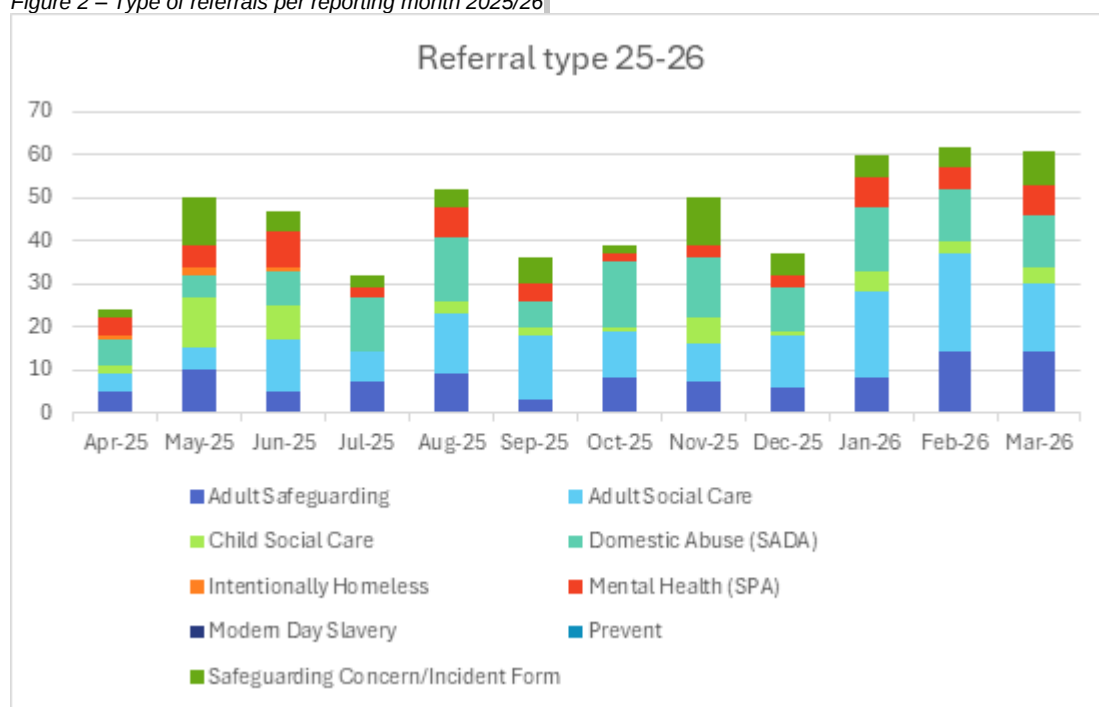
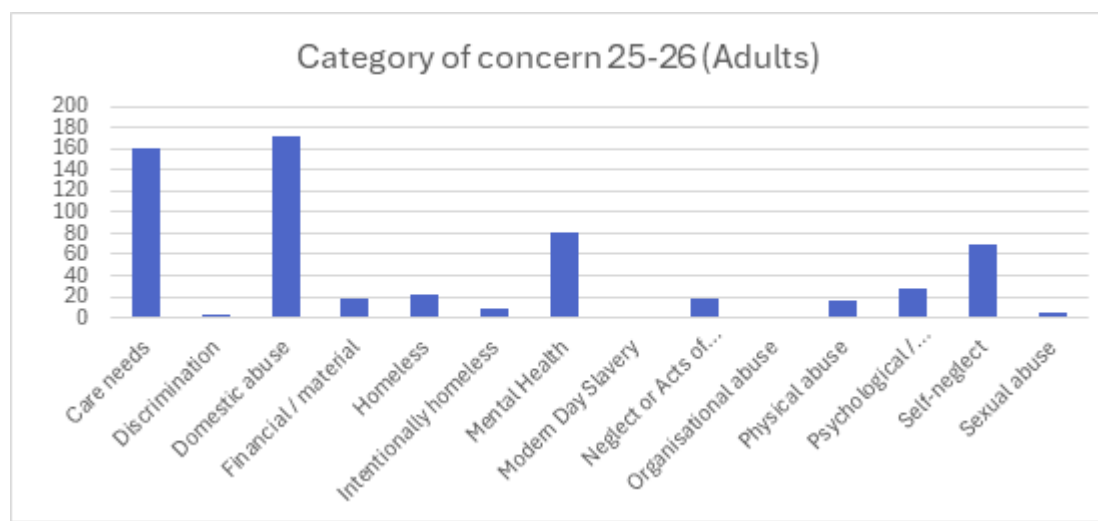
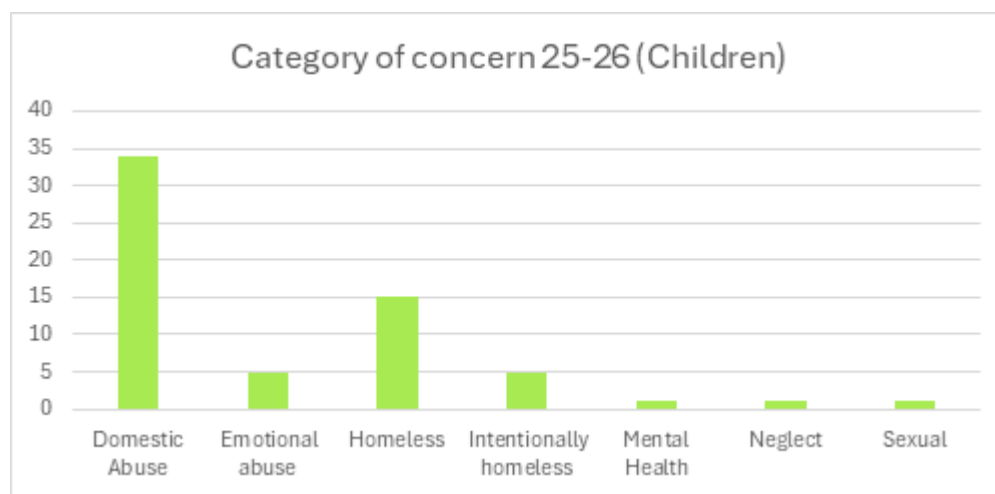


Figure 3 – Categories of concern (Adult referrals) 2025/26



- a. In 2025/26, referral rates have continued to rise, with a significant increase in referrals for adults with care & support needs at risk of significant harm, and adults with unmet care needs. The most frequent reasons for referral are domestic abuse, mental health and unmet care needs, with most of the latter coming via the Careline service. Figure 3 represents the categories of concern within the referrals. There are often multiple categories cited in referrals, so this explains the increased number of categories compared to referrals (604 categories in 432 referrals for adults)
- b. Referrals for specialist mental health support have remained consistent. Whilst the referrals to specific mental health services (SPA) appears to be less numerically than the previous year, in practice, referrals incorporating multiple needs, including mental health, are also passed to Adult services, who then determine the most appropriate service for that individual, based on the information and priority need. Therefore, some mental health referrals are captured within the Adult Safeguarding figure. It is worth noting that number of referrals does not equate to the number of individuals referred; this does not account for cases of repeated referrals for one individual. It is the request of mental health services to supply updated referrals as and when necessary so they can ensure they remain updated with current health information hence there could be multiple referrals for the same individual.
- c. The Council commission Survivors Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) to provide expert help for domestic abuse victims. Primarily, SADA are contacted in cases of domestic abuse, and it is agreed that it is their role to further refer adults and children for additional safeguarding or care services. However, where applicable, the Council make safeguarding referrals for adults and children affected by domestic abuse in North Herts, especially where consent is not obtained for referrals to SADA. Legislation requires public bodies to automatically refer children to safeguarding who are living in a household where domestic abuse is present. Adults can separately be referred for support with their consent.
- d. In 2025/26, domestic abuse was the primary reason for Child Safeguarding referrals by North Herts Council, followed by concerns around homelessness, both intentional and incidental. The data in figure 4 for domestic abuse does not contain additional referrals that may have been made by SADA following the initial referral from the Council.

Figure 4 – Categories of concern (Children's referrals) 2025/26



4.0 NEXT STEPS

4.1 April 2026 to March 2027:

- 4.2 During 2024-2025, the team had been under resourced, with vacancies at both Team Leader and Support Officer level. During this time, the focus was the core safeguarding functions (correct referral collation and responding to FOI and Data subject requests) with limited capacity for campaigns or departmental development. The roles within the team are currently filled.
- 4.3 During Q3-Q4, the safeguarding team conducted a full review and overhaul of the training provisions within the Council, with the aim to ensure the safeguarding learning and development was appropriate and relevant for staff and Councillors. This work has introduced a series of updates, namely the introduction of a safeguarding induction for new starters, revised mandatory online course material, and format and content changes to the in-person training for all. This work has also seen the introduction of a safeguarding handbook and quick reference guide to support individuals' responses to concerns.
- 4.4 Most significantly, 2025/26 has seen the implementation of two bespoke databases created for Safeguarding at North Herts Council. One is a case management system, providing audited, secure storage and analysis of case records and the other, a training system, designed to support the organisation and management of mandatory safeguarding training.
- 4.5 The work plan for 2026/27 will include the continuation of all ongoing day to day safeguarding functions: training for new staff and refresher training for existing staff; review and management of referrals, advice and guidance to colleagues, maintenance of the databases and information sharing requests; representation on relevant networks and partnership groups ;revision and coordination of Corporate Designated Safeguarding Champions, promoting local and national campaigns and data retention compliance.
- 4.6 The team will ensure effective compliance regarding the Authority's duties in relation to modern slavery and human trafficking and Domestic Homicide Reviews, providing input as and when requested.

- 4.7 Ensure staff and Designated Safeguarding Champions are equipped to support complex requests for help from individuals experiencing a mental health crisis, in terms of technical skills and knowledge but also aftercare for colleagues supporting individuals who are self-harming or threatening suicide.
- 4.8 The Team reviewed the audit actions that arose out of the HSAB Audit in 2025 and the s11 Audit in 2026. Recommendations from these audits have formed part of the Safeguarding operational plans for 26/27 and will be addressed in line with priority and resource capacity.
- 4.9 A dedicated Safeguarding team was originally appointed in December 2022 and there have been several personnel changes since this time, with the current Team Leader in place since December 2024 and Support Officer since August 2025. The periods during which no team was in place, were covered by ad-hoc administrative support and the Policy and Community Manager. The Team Leader role was initially a part time position, but this increased to full time in April 2026 to support the growing requirements of the team and role. The Support Officer is a part time position of 20 hours per week, and the current officer is due to start maternity leave in September 2026, with interim cover recruited.

5 APPENDICES

- 5.1 Appendix 1 - North Herts Safeguarding Data 2025/26
- 5.2 Appendix 2 - Comparative District Data 2025-2026.

6. CONTACT OFFICERS

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7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 None.