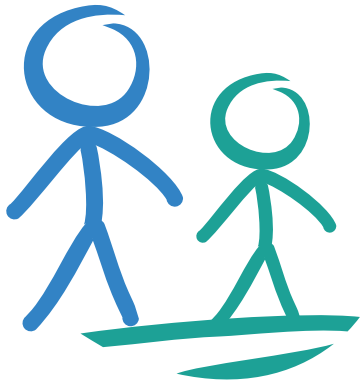




**Westmorland and Furness
Safeguarding Children
Partnership**

Annual Report

1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026



Contents

Executive Foreword	4
1. Introduction & Local Context	5
1.1 Purpose of the report	5
1.2 Our Vision and Values ¹	5
1.3 Overview of local safeguarding arrangements:	6
1.4 Local context, demographics and need:	7
2. About WFSCP: Partnership	8
Arrangements & Governance	8
2.1 Governance and Accountability	8
2.2 Safeguarding partners and relevant agencies:	8
2.3 Working Together in Practice with Shared Accountability	10
2.4 Meeting Structures	11
2.5 Our Partnership Priorities	12
2.6 Partnership Sub-Groups	13
2.7 Reporting to ensure connectivity and impact	13
3. A Year in Review; Evidence of Impact & Effectiveness	14
4. Sub-Group Achievements	15
5. Independent Scrutiny	19
5.1 Purpose of Independent Scrutiny	19
5.2 Our Scrutiny Model	19
5.3 Independent Scrutineer Evaluation of the Effectiveness and Impact of the Partnership	20
6. Learning from Reviews:	23
Driving Practice Improvement	23
6.1 Learning from Review Activity	23
6.2 Sharing the Learning – our Training offer	25
7. Business Priority	29
7.1 Improving responses for Neglect	29
7.2 Business Priority – Contextual Safeguarding	30
7.3 Business Priority – Domestic Abuse	32
8. Risk, Challenges and Accountability	34
8.1 Risk Register	34
8.2 Challenge Log	34

9. Funding & Resources	35
10. Single-Agency Inspections of Lead Agencies	36
10.1 Westmorland and Furness Children's Services Focused Visit	36
10.2 Cumbria Constabulary's HMICFRS Child Protection Inspection	36
11. National Reforms & Strategic Developments	37
11.1 Families First Partnership Programme	37
11.2 North West Regional Improvement Programme	37
11.3 The Association of Safeguarding Partners	38
12. Future Priorities & Forward Plan	39
12.1 Reflection and Development	39
12.2 Forward Plan	39
13. Accessibility & Publication	40
14. Appendix A – WFSCP Wider Safeguarding Accountability Board Membership	41
14.1 'Delegated Safeguarding Partners' Safeguarding Accountability Board Meeting	41
14.2 'Wider Partners' Safeguarding Accountability Board Meeting	41

Executive Foreword

Welcome to the 2025/26 Annual Report for Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnership. This Annual Report marks the first year of the Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnership (WFSCP), following the transition from the former Cumbria-wide arrangements on 1 April 2025. It represents a significant step in establishing a more local, place-based approach to safeguarding children and young people.

Over the past year, partners have worked collectively to establish strong foundations for the new Partnership, including establishing a new business unit, governance structures and reporting arrangements, all intended to support progress against a set of shared priorities. Through this transition, safeguarding has remained a clear and shared priority across all agencies. Partners have demonstrated strong commitment, collaboration and resilience, ensuring that children and families continue to receive effective support and protection.

This report reflects the hard work undertaken to establish the new partnership and our collective endeavours to address key safeguarding challenges in order to improve outcomes for children, young people and families in Westmorland and Furness. It also sets out our continued ambition to strengthen multi-agency working, enhance accountability and make a lasting difference to children's lives.

We would like to thank all partners and frontline practitioners for their ongoing dedication and contribution. The move to a place-based partnership provides a strong foundation to further develop our work, strengthen accountability and make a lasting difference to children's lives.



Miranda Cannon
Chief Executive
Westmorland and Furness
Council



Darren Martland
Chief Constable
Cumbria Constabulary



Aaron Cummins
Chief Executive
Lancashire and South Cumbria
Integrated Care Board



Sam Allen
Chief Executive
North East and North
Cumbria Integrated
Care Board

1. Introduction & Local Context

1.1 Purpose of the report

The purpose of this report is to reflect on the work undertaken by the Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnership (WFSCP) from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. It provides a clear, evidence-based account of how well local safeguarding arrangements are working and the difference these are making to children, young people and families across Westmorland and Furness.

This report sets out how partners have worked together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people, highlighting key priorities, achievements and challenges over the reporting period. It demonstrates how learning from practice, reviews and scrutiny has informed continuous improvement, and how the voices and experiences of children, young people and families have shaped our work. The report also outlines the Partnership's priorities for the year ahead, ensuring a continued focus on strengthening safeguarding arrangements and improving outcomes for all children in Westmorland and Furness.

Throughout this report, the Partnership seeks not only to describe the activity undertaken during 2025/26, but also to demonstrate the impact of that activity on safeguarding practice, multi-agency working and outcomes for children, young people and families. Evidence from audit, scrutiny, performance information, practitioner feedback and learning activity has been used to assess both the effectiveness of local safeguarding arrangements and the difference these are making across Westmorland and Furness.

1.2 Our Vision and Values¹

The Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnership (WFSCP) works together to create the conditions for all children and young people in Westmorland and Furness to grow up safe, supported and protected. Central to this is a strong, supportive and accountable multi-agency partnership that places children, young people and families — particularly those most at risk of harm — at the heart of everything we do. Our work is guided by shared values that shape how we operate as a partnership and deliver improved outcomes for children. We take a child-centred and early intervention approach, using evidence and intelligence to identify risk and target support where it is most needed.

We work collaboratively, building strong, transparent and respectful relationships across agencies, and fostering a culture of high support and high challenge. This enables partners to hold each other to account, drive improvement and ensure the impact and effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements. Our approach promotes professional curiosity, evidence-informed decision-making and equitable access to support. We operate with clear shared accountability, supported by effective information sharing, to ensure all partners work together to safeguard children and continuously improve outcomes.

¹ [WFSCP Vision and Values Poster.pdf](#)

1.3 Overview of local safeguarding arrangements:

The Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnership (WFSCP) is the statutory multi-agency partnership responsible for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children across the Westmorland and Furness area.

Established on 1 April 2025, WFSCP replaced the former Cumbria-wide safeguarding arrangements, reflecting a shift towards more localised, place-based partnerships. This enables a stronger focus on the needs, risks and experiences of children and families within our communities, while also allowing the Partnership to better understand, evaluate and demonstrate the impact of safeguarding activity and outcomes at a local level.

The Partnership operates in line with the statutory guidance [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026²](#), which requires three safeguarding partners to work jointly to lead and coordinate local arrangements. In Westmorland and Furness, these partners are:

- Westmorland and Furness Council
- Cumbria Police
- Integrated Care Boards:
 - North East and North Cumbria ICB
 - Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB

² [Working Together to Safeguard Children guidance was updated on 18 March 2026 \(WT2026\) – prior to this date the statutory guidance was Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023.](#)



1.4 Local context, demographics and need:

Children and Young People in Westmorland and Furness

Our Area

Third largest local authority area in England and Wales by land area but is sparsely populated.

Covers former districts of **Barrow in Furness, Eden and South Lakeland**

Includes the towns of Barrow, Kendal and Penrith, as well as extensive rural and coastal areas and parts of the Lake District National Park.

Our Front Door

April 2025 to March 2026:

7,590 Contacts

4,613 MACH Assessments

1,054 (23%) of MACH Assessments transferred to Children's Social Care

Top MACH referral sources:

1. Police 33%
2. Health 21%
3. Education 17%

Top MACH referral reasons

1. Domestic Abuse
2. Neglect
3. Concerning behaviour

Our Education System

2 nursery schools

122 primary schools

20 secondary schools

1 pupil referral unit

3 special schools

4.9% of the 0-25 population has an EHCP (**2,688**, January 2026)



Our Population

230,446 people live in W&F

41,965 are aged 0-19 years (**18%**)

Deprivation

6.3% (9 of 142) of Westmorland and Furness's LSOAs sit within the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England, down from 8.3% in 2019. These communities are all located within **Barrow**.

Our Children

As of 31 March 2026:

168 Child Protection Plans

350 Child in Need Plans

241 Cared for Children

167 cared for children placed in Westmorland and Furness by other LAs

During March 2026, there were **25** missing episodes.

In 2025/26, there were **120** children identified as being at risk of Child Exploitation.

2. About WFSCP: Partnership Arrangements & Governance

2.1 Governance and Accountability

This Annual Report fulfils the statutory requirement set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 for safeguarding partners to publish a yearly account of the effectiveness of local safeguarding arrangements. It reflects the collective responsibility of Westmorland and Furness safeguarding partners to lead, oversee and continuously improve the multi-agency system.

This report is jointly owned and approved by the safeguarding partners and provides a transparent account of how partners have worked together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children over the reporting period. It demonstrates how partners have exercised leadership, been held to account for their contribution, and responded to scrutiny, challenge and learning to strengthen practice and improve outcomes.

Governance and accountability are exercised through the Partnership's Safeguarding Accountability arrangements, with Lead Safeguarding Partners retaining collective responsibility for the effectiveness of local safeguarding arrangements. Through the Delegated Safeguarding Partner Accountability Meetings, Wider Safeguarding Accountability Board, partnership sub-groups, audit activity, performance reporting and independent scrutiny, partners are held accountable for their contribution to safeguarding children and improving outcomes. These arrangements also provide oversight and accountability for the multi-agency implementation of the Families First Partnership Programme and wider children's social care reforms, ensuring that changes are effectively embedded and deliver improved support for children, young people and families.

Published annually and made publicly accessible, the report forms a key part of the Partnership's accountability to children, families, practitioners and national government. It sets out how effectively local arrangements are working in practice, the difference they are making, and how learning and evidence are being used to drive continuous improvement.

2.2 Safeguarding partners and relevant agencies:

Under Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026, safeguarding children is a shared responsibility, requiring strong, coordinated multi-agency working across all organisations that come into contact with children and families. The statutory guidance sets out clear expectations for how safeguarding partners and relevant agencies must work together to protect children and promote their welfare.

Lead Safeguarding Partners

In Westmorland and Furness, safeguarding arrangements are led by the three statutory safeguarding partners:

- Local Authority – Westmorland and Furness Council
- Police – Cumbria Constabulary
- Health – Integrated Care Boards (ICBs):
 - North East and North Cumbria ICB
 - Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB

These partners have equal and joint responsibility for the leadership, coordination and effectiveness of local safeguarding arrangements. The Lead Safeguarding Partner agencies are responsible for:

- Setting the strategic vision and priorities for safeguarding
- Ensuring a robust multi-agency framework is in place
- Monitoring the effectiveness of practice and outcomes
- Providing leadership, challenge and shared accountability across the system

This collective leadership ensures that safeguarding is not the responsibility of any single-agency, but a coordinated system response to risk, need and harm.

Relevant Agencies

In addition to the Lead Safeguarding Partners, a wide range of relevant agencies play a critical role in safeguarding children. These include organisations whose work brings them into regular contact with children, young people and families, such as:

- Schools, colleges and early years providers
- Health services, including hospitals, GPs and community health provider services
- Probation and youth justice
- Housing and community safety services
- Voluntary, community and faith sector organisations
- Adult social care and wider public services

Relevant agencies have a responsibility to cooperate with lead safeguarding partners, contribute to local arrangements and take appropriate action to safeguard children.

The Role of Education in Safeguarding

Education settings are a key partner in safeguarding arrangements due to their daily contact with children and their ability to identify concerns at an early stage. Schools, colleges and early years providers are often best placed to notice changes in behaviour, wellbeing or attendance that may indicate risk.

They play a vital role in early identification, information sharing and contributing to multi-agency planning, ensuring a coordinated and timely response to children's needs. Education settings also support prevention by promoting safe environments and building trusted relationships with children.

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 reinforces the importance of education as a core part of safeguarding arrangements, with a clear expectation that education providers are fully involved at both strategic and operational levels of multi-agency working.

To strengthen this approach locally, Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnership has ensured strategic education representation within its Delegated Safeguarding Partner 'Safeguarding Accountability meetings', reinforcing education's role in leadership, decision-making and accountability across the safeguarding system.

Effective collaboration with education strengthens communication across agencies, supports a more complete understanding of risk, and enables better outcomes for children.

2.3 Working Together in Practice with Shared Accountability

Effective safeguarding depends on strong collaboration across all partners and agencies. This includes:

- Sharing information appropriately and in a timely way to identify and address risk
- Coordinating assessments and interventions to provide effective support
- Providing constructive challenge to strengthen practice and decision-making
- Learning from reviews, audits and lived experience to improve the safeguarding system

The Partnership provides the leadership and governance arrangements that enable this approach, ensuring agencies understand their responsibilities and are supported and challenged to fulfil them.

Safeguarding partners and relevant agencies operate within a framework of shared accountability. They contribute to partnership priorities, participate in scrutiny and learning activity, and demonstrate the impact of their work on children's lives.

Evidence from multi-agency audit and scrutiny activity undertaken during the year demonstrates the value of this collaborative approach in practice. Audit activity found that safeguarding concerns were generally identified and responded to promptly, with all audited MACH assessments applying the appropriate threshold for intervention and decision-making taking place within expected timescales. Joint audit work has also evidenced stronger collaboration between children's and adults' services to support young people experiencing exploitation as they transition into adulthood, helping to reduce the risk of vulnerable young people falling through service gaps. This activity has not only provided assurance regarding what is working well, but has also enabled partners to identify areas requiring improvement, including strengthening the voice of the child, information sharing and safety planning, ensuring that learning is translated into practical improvements for children and families.

Through these arrangements, WFSCP promotes an effective safeguarding system that identifies risk early, responds to need and improves outcomes for children and young people across Westmorland and Furness

2.4 Meeting Structures

The Partnership's Safeguarding Accountability Meeting structure fulfils its responsibilities under Working Together by maintaining oversight of safeguarding practice across the system. These meetings monitor progress against partnership priorities, direct scrutiny activity, and support effective multi-agency working to improve outcomes for children and families.

The Partnership's core accountability arrangements comprise four quarterly meetings of the Delegated Safeguarding Partner (DSP) Accountability Meeting and three meetings of the Wider Safeguarding Accountability Board each year. These arrangements are chaired by the Director of Children's Services and supported by the WFSCP Business Unit and Independent Scrutineer.

The DSP Accountability Meeting brings together the Delegated Safeguarding Partners from the local authority, police, the ICB and education. The meeting provides strategic leadership and oversight of safeguarding arrangements, monitors delivery of the Partnership Business Plan, reviews safeguarding risks, receives assurance regarding the effectiveness of partnership activity and provides accountability for the implementation of the Families First Partnership Programme and wider children's social care reforms.

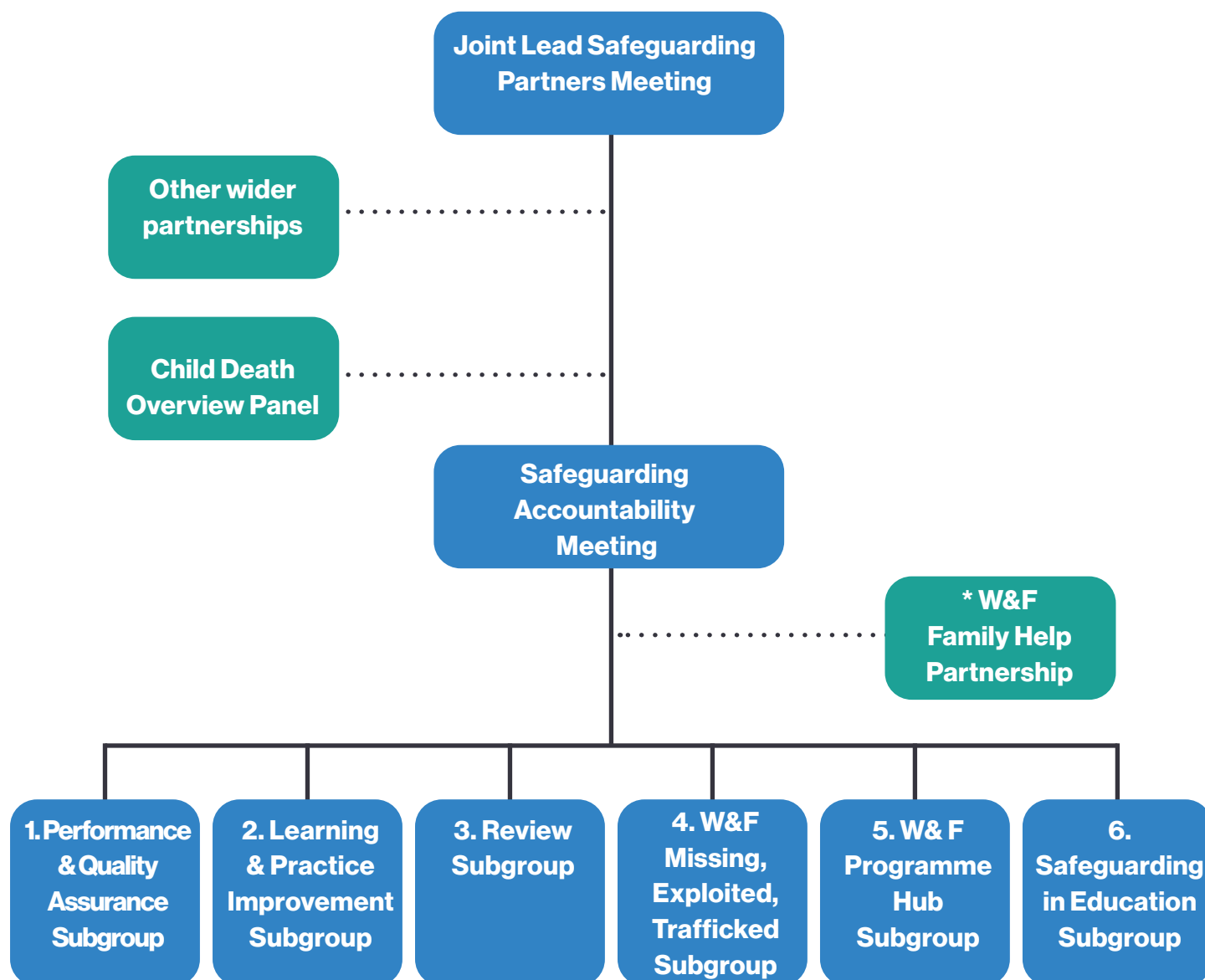
The Wider Safeguarding Accountability Board brings together senior representatives from relevant agencies, alongside WFSCP sub-group Chairs. The Wider Safeguarding Accountability Board receives updates on progress against partnership priorities, considers findings from audit, scrutiny and review activity and provides wider system assurance regarding the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements and the delivery of agreed improvement activity.

In addition, Lead Safeguarding Partners (LSPs) meet separately to fulfil their statutory responsibilities and maintain oversight of partnership activity. During the Partnership's first year, arrangements have continued to evolve as part of the transition to place-based safeguarding arrangements. A review of governance arrangements is planned during 2026/27 to ensure structures remain effective, proportionate and aligned with local and national developments, including the implementation of children's social care reforms.

Together, these arrangements provide robust governance, accountability and oversight of safeguarding activity across Westmorland and Furness, supporting continuous improvement and better outcomes for children and young people.



The Partnership sub-group structure is referenced in the image below and explained further in section 2.6.



2.5 Our Partnership Priorities

As part of our first year as a new place-based partnership, we agreed to three key practice priorities, alongside a set of development priorities to support the establishment and strengthening of our arrangements.

Our three safeguarding priorities are:

1. **Neglect** – improving outcomes for children and young people experiencing, or at risk of, neglect
2. **Contextual Safeguarding** – strengthening the identification of, and multi-agency response to, extra-familial harm and risks outside the home
3. **Domestic Abuse** – improving the identification of and response to children affected by domestic abuse

These priorities are informed by local evidence, learning and intelligence about need and risk. Delivery is supported through a clear partnership structure, with each sub-group and working group operating under defined terms of reference and work plans aligned to these priorities. This ensures a coordinated, focused and outcome-driven approach to safeguarding across Westmorland and Furness.

2.6 Partnership Sub-Groups

As set out in the diagram above, the WFSCP is organised into six multi-agency sub-groups. These groups are chaired by a Senior Manager from one of the three Lead Safeguarding Partners. Sub-groups are supported by working groups and time-limited task and finish groups that lead targeted activity and support the progression of key workstreams.

- Performance and Quality Assurance sub-group
- Learning and Practice Improvement sub-group
- Reviews sub-group
- Missing, Exploited and Trafficked sub-group
- Hub Programme Board sub-group
- Safeguarding in Education sub-group

2.7 Reporting to ensure connectivity and impact

In addition to a formal governance and meeting structure, WFSCP has established clear reporting arrangements to ensure effective information flow between safeguarding partners and strong connectivity across sub-groups.

The Partnership Manager provides regular written updates to Lead Safeguarding Partner meetings, alongside a more detailed quarterly report to the Delegated Safeguarding Partners Safeguarding Accountability Board. These reports summarise national and local developments, sub-group activity, progress against priorities, and highlight any risks or issues requiring escalation.

The Partnership Business Unit produces a structured “3A” report subsequent to each sub-group meeting. These focus on **Assurance** (what is working well), **Analysis** (emerging risks and learning), and **Action** (next steps and areas for improvement), with a clear emphasis on single and multi-agency impact and effectiveness. These are shared quarterly with Delegated Safeguarding Partners to support strategic oversight.

Regular meetings of sub-group chairs further support alignment and ensure that key themes and learning are shared across the partnership.

Delegated Safeguarding Partners also provide quarterly written reports to highlight single-agency activity, highlighting areas of good practice, barriers, further areas for development and opportunity to consider anything that the partnership could do to help. This helps to ensure single-agency connectivity at a strategic level from the statutory safeguarding partners into WFSCP.

3. A Year in Review; Evidence of Impact & Effectiveness

A number of key areas of work were prioritised during the Partnership's first year, all of which have been integral to establishing a strong, effective and sustainable partnership. These have included:

- Agreement and publication of the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements providing greater clarity regarding roles, responsibilities and accountability across the safeguarding system.
- Forming and sustaining effective working relationships with key partners from across the new partnership area strengthening collaboration and shared ownership of safeguarding priorities.
- Development of a robust, multi-agency meeting structure, including establishing Terms of Reference, setting up meeting membership lists and work plans for each sub-group (and associated working groups) supporting effective oversight, challenge and accountability.
- Establishment of a WFSCP website, including a review of all content improving access to safeguarding information, guidance and learning resources.
- Set up mailing lists and developed monthly newsletters and focused campaigns to share preventative and proactive safeguarding messages increasing practitioner awareness of local safeguarding priorities and emerging risks.
- Promotion of the new partnership and ensuring agencies know where to find the relevant information regarding WFSCP.
- Development of a risk matrix, register and challenge log strengthening the Partnership's ability to identify, monitor and respond to emerging safeguarding risks.
- Development of a report framework to ensure consistent communication across the partnership infrastructure.
- Programme of multi-agency training, which includes feedback from practitioners to demonstrate impact upon practice and changes made to improve safeguarding with 73% of practitioners reporting increased confidence following training and 99% stating they would recommend training to colleagues.
- Multi-agency audit, scrutiny and performance activity has provided evidence of timely safeguarding responses, strong partnership working and improving practitioner confidence, whilst identifying key areas for ongoing improvement.

WFSCP has also undertaken a range of sub-group specific activities during 2025/26, detail of which are provided later within the report. The formation of strong foundations for the new partnership and the progress made on distinct pieces of work via the sub-groups has contributed to ensuring that children, young people and families are protected and effectively safeguarded from harm.

4. Sub-Group Achievements

4.1 Performance and Quality Assurance Sub-group

Throughout the year, the Performance and Quality Assurance Sub-group has provided oversight and assurance of safeguarding practice across the partnership through a strengthened focus on performance, scrutiny and quality assurance activity. Key achievements included the development of a Quality Assurance Framework and Scrutiny Model, alongside oversight of multi-agency audit and inspection preparedness activity. This included completion of the multi-agency Front Door audit and Domestic Abuse audit as well as plans to follow up on the findings of domestic abuse audit work. A refreshed partnership performance scorecard has been introduced, with data now presented in a more meaningful and accessible format to support shared multi-agency understanding, constructive challenge and performance discussions. The sub-group has also established quality assurance processes for private providers and considered a range of single-agency assurance activity, including learning from a recent CQC inspection and Children's Services learning circles assurance. Audit and performance activity has provided assurance that safeguarding arrangements are working effectively in many key areas. Multi-agency audit work found evidence of timely responses to safeguarding concerns, appropriate threshold decision making and strong partnership working, whilst performance data indicates improved attendance at child protection conferences, low re-referral rates and increased use of early help and family help interventions to support children at the right level of need. The sub-group's scrutiny activity has also helped identify opportunities for further improvement enabling targeted action to further strengthen safeguarding practice and outcomes for children. The sub group has benefited from strong multi-agency attendance, reflective discussion and positive partner engagement in audit and assurance activity. Looking ahead, the group will oversee further multi-agency audit activity, including child sexual abuse audits, continue to monitor the impact of social care reforms, strengthen scrutiny of strategy meeting attendance, further develop Section 11 and Section 175 assurance processes, and continue to improve access to multi-agency data to support analysis and partnership learning.



4.2 Learning and Practice Improvement Sub-group

The Learning and Practice Improvement Sub-group has focused on strengthening the partnership's learning offer, workforce development and reviewing existing procedures in preparation for the launch of our own safeguarding procedures manual. Throughout the establishment of the new partnership, the multi-agency training offer was maintained through a blend of virtual, online and face-to-face delivery, supported by an in-person training pool development day. During the year, the training strategy and multi-agency safeguarding training competence framework were reviewed. With partner support, a new Level 3: Working Together to Safeguard Children training package was developed, quality assured and launched, alongside new training on Trauma Informed Practice and the impact of Domestic Abuse on children. Evaluation feedback indicates that the Partnership's learning offer is having a positive impact on practice, with 73% of practitioners reporting increased confidence following training and 81% rating training as extremely or very useful. Practitioners particularly valued opportunities for multi-agency learning, increased understanding of safeguarding issues and improved awareness of local pathways and procedures. Practitioner forums, thematic learning events and seven-minute briefings have been used to disseminate learning, share key messages and raise awareness of local and national safeguarding themes, supporting improvements in frontline practice across the partnership. The existing Cumbrian Safeguarding Children Procedures were reviewed and a new safeguarding procedures manual launched in February 2026, with a clear update schedule in place for future revisions. Learning from scrutiny, audit and workforce development activity has identified a need to strengthen consistency of practice in relation to neglect, parental substance use and understanding children's lived experiences. In response, the sub-group has agreed to further develop the learning offer in these areas and support the rollout of the Together in Practice framework, which provides a consistent approach to working with children, young people and families across partner agencies and supports the delivery of more effective and relationship-based practice. Challenges remain around capturing and embedding the voice of children and young people, measuring the long-term impact of training, and recruiting sufficient members to the training pool to sustain a high-quality multi-agency learning offer.

4.3 Review Sub-group

The Review Sub-group has worked collectively to ensure that local, regional and national safeguarding learning informs practice improvement across Westmorland and Furness and leads to measurable improvements in safeguarding practice. Learning from reviews has directly informed training, policy development and workforce development activity, helping practitioners develop a stronger focus on children's lived experience, professional curiosity, information sharing and whole-family approaches to safeguarding. During the year, a local learning review was completed, and learning was shared across the partnership with resulting actions progressed. Learning from review activity has resulted in improvements to multi-agency training, information-sharing arrangements and local review processes, helping practitioners place greater emphasis on children's lived experiences, professional curiosity and whole-family approaches to safeguarding. The local review process and paperwork were reviewed, revised and relaunched with partners. The sub-group has sought to work closely with neighbouring safeguarding partnerships to support thematic learning from review activity and consistency of approach to support our partners that cover multiple safeguarding children partnerships in the locality. Future activity will focus on embedding learning from regional and national reviews, strengthening links with the North West region and continuing to test and refine review processes.

4.4 Missing, Exploited and Trafficked (MET) Sub-group

The Missing, Exploited and Trafficked Sub-group has focused on improving partnership responses to contextual safeguarding risks. Significant achievements during the year included the Partnership's support to the Police in implementing the new missing person process, including facilitating multi-agency Missing briefings and subsequent amendments to the Partnership Missing Procedure. The Partnership also supported the successful rollout of the Pol-Ed programme, with 89% of secondary schools and 64% of primary schools signed up by year end, reaching almost 12,000 pupils with preventative education on exploitation, online harms and healthy relationships. This preventative work has been identified as a contributing factor to a 13% reduction in youth crime across Westmorland and Furness. The group has considered the Police's CSAE Problem Profile and provided a partnership forum for consideration of the themes emerging from the data. The group are sighted on the Baroness Casey report with regular updates from Police regarding single-agency assurance. Partnership collaboration has been a notable strength, particularly via the MET Operational working group which has developed a process for ensuring relevant health information is shared and sought for young people at risk of exploitation. The group undertook a multi-agency Transitional Safeguarding Audit in response to learning from a previous Safeguarding Adult Review, which provided assurance of stronger joint working between children's and adults' services and more consistent support for young people at risk of exploitation as they move into adulthood.

4.5 Hub Programme Board Sub-group

The Hub Programme Board Sub-group has continued to oversee the effectiveness of the Multi-Agency Child Hub (MACH) and Front Door arrangements. Key achievements included a comprehensive multi-agency Front Door audit and development of an associated action plan. The sub-group also facilitated the MACH Development Day with partners and worked with Children's Services partnership analysts to develop a MACH dashboard which supports performance monitoring and multi-agency discussion. Audit and scrutiny activity has also strengthened the collation and use of health information, particularly from GP practices, resulting in improved information sharing and supporting more informed safeguarding decision-making at the front door. Evidence from health audit activity indicates increased use of early help assessments, particularly by GP practices, supporting earlier identification of need and more informed safeguarding decision-making at the front door. The Hub Programme Board provided challenge in respect of ensuring ongoing Health input into the MACH during a period of business continuity. Strong multi-agency attendance and valuable partner contributions have supported increasingly reflective conversations about performance and service delivery. The sub-group has maintained oversight of social care reforms and ensured partners remain informed about developments. Looking ahead, priorities include monitoring progress against the Front Door action plan, reviewing the Threshold Guidance and continuing to provide strategic oversight for the implementation of social care reforms.

4.6 Safeguarding in Education Sub-group

The Safeguarding in Education Sub-group has strengthened engagement with schools and education settings across the partnership throughout the year. A significant achievement was the first in-person Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL) Conference in October 2025, attended by more than 130 education professionals. Feedback demonstrated increased awareness of local safeguarding pathways, support services and emerging safeguarding risks, with participants particularly valuing opportunities for multi-agency learning, networking and shared problem-solving. The conference also helped strengthen links between DSLs and partner agencies, supporting greater confidence in accessing advice, challenge and support to inform safeguarding decision-making. Key areas of work included supporting the roll-out of Pol-Ed, promoting learning from the Sara Sharif Review in relation to elective home education, and improving understanding and responses to Operation Encompass notifications. The sub-group has benefited from strong multi-agency involvement and a shared commitment to strengthening safeguarding within education settings. Future priorities include improving the use of children's social care referral data to identify safeguarding trends, enhance referral quality, and better understand outcomes for children. The sub-group will also continue to promote consistent application of threshold guidance, strengthen school representation and engagement, align PSHE developments with wider partnership priorities, and build on the learning and actions from the DSL Conference. Challenges remain in increasing participation from schools and DSLs, clarifying roles and responsibilities across the system, and ensuring sufficient capacity and resources to deliver the sub-group's ambitions.



5. Independent Scrutiny

5.1 Purpose of Independent Scrutiny

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2026) sets out that independent scrutiny should evaluate multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and contribute to both published arrangements and the annual report as part of wider accountability processes.

Independent scrutiny plays a vital role in providing objective assurance and constructive challenge across the safeguarding system. It should:

- Provide independent, rigorous and effective challenge to partners across all areas of safeguarding practice
- Support understanding of the impact of multi-agency arrangements for children and young people
- Drive continuous improvement, including embedding learning to strengthen practice

WFSCP benefits from an Independent Scrutineer who offers objective assessment and constructive challenge, strengthening accountability and supporting ongoing improvement across the partnership.

5.2 Our Scrutiny Model

The image above illustrates our approach to scrutiny across the WFSCP structure, with the role of Independent Scrutineer offering objective assurance and scrutiny. Our Quality Assurance and Scrutiny framework exists to help us deliver continuous improvement in the quality of services delivered by partners for children and young people.

The framework helps us to know ourselves and exists to:

- Ensure partners meet statutory requirements
- Ensure consistency of safeguarding practice
- Identify and share good practice
- Challenge appropriately and effectively hold each other to account
- Ensure outcomes are improved for Children and Young People



Our agreed approach to scrutiny has four key elements and requires evidence to be gathered against each of these to inform scrutiny and challenge. We use a number of mechanisms to engage with staff and understand the importance of listening to stakeholders, including the value of gaining input directly from children, young people and their families. We use a range of quantitative information to build our intelligence base and ensure that our activities and priorities are data driven. Quality assurance activity completes this approach and is well embedded in our partnership via multi-agency audit activity. All of this information helps to build a picture of shared intelligence and support an effective scrutiny learning process which exists to ultimately improve outcomes.



5.3 Independent Scrutineer Evaluation of the Effectiveness and Impact of the Partnership

I have remained as the Independent Scrutineer for the new Children's Safeguarding Partnership arrangements in Westmorland and Furness to ensure continuity, focus and scrutiny during the transition to the new safeguarding arrangements. Significant work during this first year of the new partnership has focused on ensuring the necessary mechanisms are in place to support and ensure effective multi-agency practice and drive work against the agreed business priorities. It has inevitably taken time to recruit to posts in the partnership business team, update and develop multi-agency policies and procedures, set up new websites, sub-groups, reporting mechanisms and performance reporting to name but a few. However, the importance of developing a strong bedrock that facilitates robust and effective safeguarding and facilitates a culture of "high support and high challenge" cannot be underestimated.

It is clear that the effective working relationships that were a key strength in the Pan-Cumbria multi-agency safeguarding arrangements have been maintained in the transition to the new partnership. I see open and trusting relationships but also evidence of appropriate and necessary challenge at all levels, across the partnership. Children and young people remain in focus at all times and there is emerging evidence of impact on practice as outlined in this Annual Report.

There is good evidence that the new partnership has the necessary conditions in place for strong, accountable and effective practice. The Children's Services Practice Week model that focuses on quarterly detailed testing of the effectiveness of key areas of practice, is particularly strong, due to children's and parents' feedback, audits, practice observations, and practitioners' input. It also results in clear improvement plans and re-testing and has helped drive improvements in practice quality.

The depth of single and multi-agency quality assurance and scrutiny undertaken in this first year, especially the commitment to multi-agency audits and re-audits, evidences the commitment to understand the strengths in practice and areas for improvement. Evidence of the outcomes of these audits in helping the partnership “know themselves” are highlighted in this report. Planned focus on important emerging issues are also tackled pro-actively for example a Partnership Practice Fortnight focussed on Child Sexual Abuse is planned for June 2026.

There is good evidence of shared and effective leadership across the partnership in tackling key safeguarding challenges. The work led by Cumbria Police to improve the response to missing children is showing real impact for individual young people, including those placed in the area by other local authorities. This is evidenced through reductions in missing episodes and significant reductions in risk for young people at risk of exploitation and other contextual harms.

The development of the Partnership's 3A reporting template across all sub-groups and business groups ensures a focus on “assurance, analysis and actions” and includes a section on “impact and effectiveness” that collates single and multi-agency evidence, including data and qualitative examples. It provides good assurance about progress of work to address key priorities and ensures an evolving focus on impact. In the latter stages of this reporting period, I have commenced scrutiny of the effectiveness and impact of the sub-groups. This scrutiny will also inform the partnership's review of its first year, which will include reflections on assurance and impact. This evaluation will feed into the Safeguarding Partnership's planned Development Session in early summer 2026.

From my perspective there has been a strong commitment to strengthen the engagement and input of education in the new partnership. The appointment of a school Headteacher as a Delegated Safeguarding Partner, who acts as a leader in chairing both the Keeping Safe in Education subgroup and reaching into existing education structures, is a real strength. There is evidence of emerging impact through the identification of areas for strengthening and improvement, such as schools' understanding of thresholds and challenges about the adequacy of understanding routes to Early Help. Work to improve the quality and consistency of safeguarding policies in education settings and the now active and regular engagement with DSLs appears to be leading to improved practice, for example good quality referrals to the Multi-Agency Children's Hub were seen during scrutiny.

The Lead Partners and wider partnership agencies have also openly reflected on areas that require strengthening over the next year. This includes strengthened governance, more robust performance reporting on key priorities and evidence of impact against the key business priorities, and a strengthening of the voice and input of young people in all aspects of the partnership work. There is a commitment to build on the outstanding work undertaken in the old Pan-Cumbria arrangements where young scrutineers worked alongside me and led on key pieces of scrutiny.

Overall, I have fulfilled my scrutiny role through seeking robust assurance and evidence of effective and impactful practice. I achieve this through detailed scrutiny, observation and analysis and by questioning and challenge. I provide my independent opinion on whether specific circumstances meet the criteria for Serious Incident Notifications and Rapid Reviews or Learning Reviews. This year only one consideration was necessary and was discussed by the Delegated Safeguarding Partners and it was rightly identified that it did not meet the criteria.

I have also engaged with the North West Regional Improvement Plan Pilot, a Department for Education funded reform initiative focussed on sharing best practice in partnership working across the twenty-four local authorities involved. The benchmarking, especially in relation to data, was helpful and I was able to share some of the good practice locally, including the partnership's Quality Assurance and Scrutiny Framework and how I was providing effective scrutiny across my partnership areas.

As well as wider scrutiny across all aspects of the partnership, I have undertaken a detailed evaluation of the "Effectiveness of Partnership Working in Identifying Initial Need and Risk at the Front Door." This was to support a strong multi-agency evaluation of the Multi-Agency Children's Hub (MACH) using the JTAI Framework. It involved multi and single-agency audits, professionals' feedback, a multi-agency improvement session, self-evaluations and interviews. It found that the multi-agency response is broadly effective at identifying and responding to initial need and risk, with evidence through audits of timely contacts/referrals and constructive collaboration between agencies. This provides some assurance alongside inspection findings that children and young people are being appropriately safeguarded. It promoted an increased awareness of issues requiring development or improvement and acknowledgment that greater consistency is required across the MACH. Moreover, those partners were open, reflective and committed to improvement. My report has been shared widely including with LSPs, DSPs and across the partnership. A detailed action plan has been drawn up to address improvements, and I am already seeing evidence of improved engagement and information sharing by and with GPs.

Future Scrutiny

I have engaged in open and reflective discussions with LSPs and DSPs, about the need to retest progress against key business priorities and understand whether the desired outcomes and impact for children and their families is evidenced. It has therefore been agreed to evaluate multi-agency practice on two of the three key business priorities:

- Neglect
- Contextual Safeguarding

The further scrutiny evaluation of neglect will take place beginning in summer 2026. This will be followed by an evaluation of the impact of the new exploitation multi-agency practice model, due to be launched in late 2026. The outcomes will be published in next year's Annual Report.

Ongoing scrutiny and oversight of the Families First implementation and testing of the new ways of working and their impact for children, young people and their families will also need to be a key focus in the forthcoming year.

Lesley Walker
Independent Scrutineer

6. Learning from Reviews: Driving Practice Improvement

6.1 Learning from Review Activity

This section provides assurance that the partnership has responded to learning identified through local and national reviews, outlining the actions taken to share, embed and promote learning across the safeguarding system.

Local Learning Review Activity

Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnership did not submit any Serious Incident Notifications or Rapid Reviews during 2025/26. One non-statutory local learning review was undertaken during the period, the key learning points from this review are detailed below.

A multi-agency action plan was formulated to progress the identified recommendations, with oversight provided by the Reviews Sub-group. Learning from the review has informed multi-agency training, practitioner forums and policy development across the partnership. Subsequent Practice Week feedback, health audit activity and wider assurance processes have enabled the Partnership to test the extent to which learning is being embedded, highlighting positive examples of multi-agency working, information sharing and consideration of children's lived experiences, alongside areas where further improvement remains required.

Importance of professional curiosity to help agencies holistically understand what life was like for the children

Importance of exploring the impact of trauma to help support the family. Including the cumulative impact of trauma on resilience

Think Family - The need to consider wider family dynamics and issues which could impact parenting capacity

**Intersectionality of Domestic Abuse and Neglect.
Reminder to agencies that Children who experience DA should be considered as victims in their own right**

Importance of active multi-agency participation in MARAC processes

Learning regarding the importance of accurate and timely communication across Health Providers; helping to build a full picture of presenting risk and need

Value of multi-agency involvement in Strategy and Statutory Safeguarding meetings to help ensure decision-making and safety planning is informed

Importance of agencies maintaining healthy scepticism, in circumstances of co-parenting, particularly where there may be concerns regarding Domestic Abuse

Learning from National Reviews

As a partnership we understand the importance of responding to national learning. This year work began via the partnership to respond to the recommendations made within the National Panel report – [**“I wanted them all to notice”: Protecting children and responding to child sexual abuse within the family environment.\(Published November 2024\)**](#). A Child Sexual Abuse Working Group was set up and work commenced to benchmark our collective response to Child Sexual Abuse, identify areas requiring improvement and respond to improve the identification, assessment and response to children affected by Child Sexual Abuse.

The Missing, Exploited and Trafficked sub-group also considered the learning from the [**National Audit on Group-based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. \(Published June 2025\)**](#). Baroness Casey’s audit on group-based child sexual exploitation and abuse (‘grooming gangs’) made a number of single and multi-agency recommendations.

WFSCP is committed to ensuring that learning from reviews undertaken in other areas of the country is considered and responded to, where it is relevant to the Partnership. One such example being Surrey’s Safeguarding Children Partnership’s [**Child Safeguarding Practice Review for Sara Sharif \(published November 2025\)**](#), which the Review sub-group and Safeguarding in Education sub-group have considered and used to inform future planned workstreams and activity.

The Review sub-group will be undertaking work in 2026/27 to benchmark the Partnership against the learning from other National Panel reports, including:-

- [**“It’s Silent”: Race, racism and Safeguarding children \(published March 2025\)**](#)
- [**Protecting all vulnerable babies better \(published February 2026\)**](#)

The Review sub-group – improving process and practice

The Review sub-group considered the learning from the Serious Child Safeguarding Incidents report (July 2025) and used this to inform a review of the paperwork associated with the statutory and non-statutory review processes. This provided an opportunity to confirm consistent understanding of the reviews process across partners and puts us in a strong position to respond quickly and effectively to any potential future reviews that occur in Westmorland and Furness.

Also considered was learning from the National Panel, Learning Support and Capability Project (May 2025), which highlighted the need for continuous learning, recurring learning themes and the importance of considering the impact of structural and organisational culture.

6.2 Sharing the Learning – our Training offer

Multi-Agency Training and Workforce Development

The Partnership continued to deliver a free multi-agency safeguarding training programme throughout 2025/26, supporting practitioners to develop safeguarding knowledge, strengthen multi-agency working and improve outcomes for children and families. The training offer was regularly reviewed and enhanced in response to practitioner feedback, emerging themes and identified workforce needs. During the year, the Partnership also invested in workforce development through a Training Pool Development Day and by supporting volunteer trainers to access external development opportunities, helping to maintain a high-quality and sustainable training offer.

Training Activity 2025/26

- 25 multi-agency training sessions delivered
- 622 practitioners attended training
- 129 organisations represented

Training topics included:

- Working Together to Safeguard Children (Level 3)
- Child Exploitation Level 2 and CE Networks
- Trauma Informed Practice
- Learning from Reviews
- Non-Fatal Strangulation
- Missing Policy Review
- Tom's Story
- Practitioner Forums

Training was attended by practitioners from Children's Social Care, Education, Early Years, Health Services, Police, the Voluntary and Community Sector and other safeguarding partners, creating valuable opportunities for shared learning and a greater understanding of safeguarding roles and responsibilities across agencies. Early evaluation suggests the programme is strengthening safeguarding practice, with 73% of practitioners reporting increased confidence and participants highlighting improved understanding of safeguarding issues, local pathways and multi-agency working.



Review and Re-Launch of Level 3 Training

During the year, the Partnership undertook a comprehensive review of its Level 3: Working Together to Safeguard Children training package. The programme was refreshed with input from multi-agency partners, trainers and learners to ensure it reflected current safeguarding priorities, local learning and national developments.

Case studies were updated to reflect local and national learning, content was reviewed to align with wider safeguarding themes, and the structure was redesigned to improve flow, interaction and discussion. The revised programme places a particular focus on the Partnership's priorities of neglect, domestic abuse and contextual safeguarding, alongside key themes including online safety and child sexual abuse. To support deeper learning and richer discussion, the session length was extended to four hours.

The package was independently quality assured by the Local Authority Organisational Development and Workforce Training Team, who supported the launch and attended the first delivery to provide constructive challenge around learning styles and facilitation.

Feedback from trainers, learners and quality assurance partners was overwhelmingly positive:

- *“Overall, a really well put together session, created with clear sections and continual changes in format with appropriate resources to keep engagement.”*
- *“Facilitated expertly by people who are obviously experienced and passionate about the subject and learning.”*
- *“Credit to the designer and facilitators for your ability to create a session with this amount of content and still be interactive and engaging.”*
- *“Opportunities to discuss case studies, hear experiences of others, clarify terms and update knowledge.”*
- *“As a veteran of these safeguarding training sessions, this was an excellent refresh.”*



Thematic Learning Event

Whilst there were no active Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews during the year, the Partnership completed a long-standing action to deliver a multi-agency Thematic Learning session. This responded to a recommendation from previous Pan-Cumbria scrutiny activity which evaluated the effectiveness of partnership working in embedding learning to improve practice. Developed collaboratively with partners, the training drew upon learning from national reviews, previous Cumbria reviews, local audit activity and emerging partnership themes.

The session explored a range of safeguarding topics including:

- Domestic abuse and parental risk factors
- Neglect and cumulative harm
- Complex needs and mental health challenges
- Voice of the child
- Professional curiosity
- Information sharing
- Transitions
- Cultural competence

The training also provided an opportunity to share learning from recent multi-agency audit activity and local review processes, highlighting themes relating to Family Help, information sharing, domestic abuse, parental vulnerabilities, parenting capacity and the importance of understanding the lived experience of children and young people.

Practitioner Forums

Practitioner Forums continued to provide an important mechanism for sharing learning and emerging safeguarding themes with practitioners across the partnership. Sessions delivered during the year focused on:

- Child Exploitation
- Domestic Abuse
- Operation Encompass
- Cyber Prevent

These forums enabled practitioners from a range of agencies to hear from subject matter experts, share experiences and reflect on how learning could be embedded within frontline practice. The forums have supported professional discussion, strengthened multi-agency understanding and helped disseminate local and national safeguarding learning across the workforce. Emerging evidence from audit activity demonstrates stronger multi-agency collaboration, improved information sharing between agencies and more consistent consideration of children's lived experiences, providing assurance that key learning themes are influencing practice.

Sharing Learning Across the Workforce

A key focus during the year has been ensuring that learning is effectively shared across the workforce. Through purposeful training, practitioner forums, 7-minute briefings and themed awareness campaigns linked to partnership priorities, local reviews, CDOP findings and national developments, the Partnership has supported practitioners to reflect on learning, increase their awareness of emerging safeguarding issues and embed improvements in day-to-day practice. Learning has been shared through a range of formats to maximise engagement and ensure key safeguarding messages reach practitioners across Westmorland and Furness.

Evaluation and Impact

A total of **380 evaluations** were completed during the year.

- 81% rated the training as very or extremely useful
- 73% reported increased confidence in their practice
- 99% would recommend the training to colleagues

Practitioners reported increased confidence in identifying and responding to safeguarding concerns, a stronger understanding of multi-agency working and improved awareness of local safeguarding procedures and referral pathways.

- *“This was genuinely some of the best training I have received.”*
- *“Thank you, the course was informative and engaging.”*
- *“Really interesting and well presented. Good information and references to reflect on.”*

Whilst evaluation data demonstrates positive participant feedback and increased confidence, the Partnership has also begun to consider the impact of learning on practice through audit, scrutiny and review activity. Emerging findings indicate that training priorities remain aligned to the themes identified through audits and reviews, including information sharing, children's lived experiences, contextual safeguarding and multi-agency working. The Partnership will continue to strengthen its approach to evaluating the longer-term impact of training on practice and outcomes for children and families.

Looking Ahead

During 2026/27, the Partnership will continue to develop and enhance its learning offer, using feedback, evaluation findings and emerging safeguarding themes to ensure training remains relevant, accessible and responsive to the needs of the workforce. Particular focus will be given to neglect, parental substance use and supporting the implementation of the Together in Practice framework alongside the Families First Partnership Programme and wider children's social care reforms. As the Partnership provides governance and oversight of these reforms, workforce development activity will play a key role in ensuring practitioners understand and can confidently implement new ways of working to improve outcomes for children, young people and families.

7. Business Priority

7.1 Improving responses to neglect

Neglect remains a key priority for WFSCP and has been a focus of partnership activity throughout 2025/26. A key driver for this work has been the findings of the Independent Scrutineer's review of neglect, which evaluated the effectiveness of multi-agency practice and the impact of the Cumbria Neglect Strategy, Day in My Life Toolkit and associated resources. The review identified a number of strengths, including evidence that the toolkit supports improved understanding of children's lived experiences, more child-centred planning and positive outcomes for children and families when used effectively. It also highlighted areas requiring further development, including the consistent use of neglect tools, improved analysis of assessment findings, strengthening professional confidence, improved information sharing and better use of data and quality assurance activity. WFSCP has used these findings to shape its neglect improvement programme and there are plans in place to hold a Neglect Development session early 2026/27.

The scrutiny findings demonstrated that where neglect tools are used effectively, children report tangible improvements in their lives, including cleaner home environments, improved routines, better school attendance and stronger relationships with trusted adults. Parents described positive changes linked to hearing and understanding their child's lived experience, while practitioners reported that the tools support professional curiosity, assessment quality and partnership working. These findings have reinforced the Partnership's commitment to embedding relationship-based practice and maintaining a focus on the lived experience of the child.

To support improvement and embed learning across the partnership, WFSCP has:

- Used the findings and recommendations from the Independent Scrutineer's Neglect Review to inform local improvement activity and partnership priorities.
- Rebranded and promoted the Day in My Life tools and shared flash card resources via the WFSCP website.
- Worked in collaboration with Children's Services to develop and promote the Home Conditions Assessment Tool to support a more consistent and structured approach to assessing home conditions where neglect is a concern.
- Contributed to the development of the North West Multi-Agency Neglect Dataset. This exploratory work will now be used locally to report on neglect data with a view to supporting a more consistent approach to understanding, analysing and benchmarking neglect across our partnership.
- Sought assurance from health partners with regards to Child Was Not Brought (CWNB) processes
- Continued to develop resources and guidance to support a consistent multi-agency response to neglect, which are available on the WFSCP website.
- Facilitated an opportunity via the Practitioner Forums, for the 0-19 health service to discuss their approach to assessing neglect across the partnership.
- Incorporated Neglect and the use of tools into the new Level 3: Working Together to Safeguard Children training package and the thematic learning event.

Whilst progress has been made, partners acknowledge that further work is required to ensure neglect tools are used consistently across all agencies, strengthen information sharing, improve professional confidence in evaluating neglect concerns, and further develop the partnership's use of multi-agency data to understand prevalence, performance and impact. These areas will remain a key focus for the Partnership during the coming year. The themes from the recently published Neglect Thematic report will be incorporated within future plans across the partnership and will be subject to ongoing scrutiny and assurance activity to monitor progress and evaluate their impact on practice and outcomes for children.

7.2 Business Priority – Contextual Safeguarding

Improving the identification of, and response to, contextual safeguarding concerns remained a priority for WFSCP throughout 2025/26. The Missing, Exploited and Trafficked (MET) Sub-group provided multi-agency oversight of children at risk of exploitation, missing episodes and extra-familial harm, bringing together partners from Children's Services, Police, Health, Education and Probation to monitor practice, data, emerging risks and safeguarding activity. The sub-group maintained strong links with MACE, the Child Centred Policing Team (CCPT), the Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) working group and regional networks, ensuring a coordinated response to contextual safeguarding issues. A MET operational group has also been established to support the strategic group in progressing the Child Exploitation action plan.

Throughout the year, the Partnership supported a range of workforce development and awareness-raising activity to strengthen practitioner knowledge and confidence. This included Child Exploitation Level 2 training, delivery of exploitation awareness through practitioner forums, the Child Exploitation Network with support from The Children's Society, Cyber Crime Unit and other relevant professionals, training and awareness-raising in relation to sexually coerced extortion, online harms and Safer Internet Day, and ongoing promotion of the Pol-Ed programme across schools. By February 2026, Pol-Ed engagement had reached 89% of secondary schools and 64% of primary schools across Westmorland and Furness, with almost 12,000 pupils receiving lessons during the reporting period.



A significant area of work during the year focused on improving responses to children who go missing. WFSCP supported Cumbria Constabulary's Missing Task and Finish Group, who reviewed local arrangements and identified key areas for improvement. This resulted in the development and implementation of an updated missing children procedure, revised police policies and jointly delivered multi-agency training facilitated by WFSCP. This training reached approximately 250-300 professionals across education, care, health and social care settings. The resulting changes have strengthened partnership responses to missing children, with more consistent safeguarding practice, improved information sharing and enhanced oversight through daily multi-agency discussions and coordinated review of missing episodes.

The Partnership also strengthened its understanding of exploitation through quality assurance and audit activity. This included completion of a Child Exploitation referrals audit, a transitions audit examining responses for young people approaching adulthood, and planning for further multi-agency audit activity relating to missing children. Findings from these reviews have informed service development and highlighted the need for stronger arrangements for vulnerable young people transitioning into adulthood. As a result, partners have begun exploring an all-age contextual safeguarding pathway and future arrangements to strengthen safeguarding responses beyond the age of 18.

Considerable progress was made in improving multi-agency information sharing. A new health information-gathering process was developed to ensure that relevant health information informs Child Exploitation Initial Meetings and decision-making. This has strengthened the ability of professionals to develop a more comprehensive understanding of a child's vulnerabilities, risks and needs. The Partnership also continued to improve oversight through regular monitoring of Child Exploitation pathway data, Return Home Interview completion, missing episodes and risk levels across children subject to exploitation pathways.

Partners have also worked together to strengthen disruption and prevention activity. Assurance was received that Operation Makesafe awareness-raising was delivered with businesses and locations identified as potential exploitation hotspots, while work continued to improve understanding of local child sexual abuse and exploitation risks through an awareness of the Police's problem profile. Findings from the profile have directly informed partnership training, awareness-raising, contextual safeguarding activity and the development of local responses to online exploitation, helping partners better identify, understand and respond to emerging risks.

Whilst progress has been made, the Partnership recognises that further work is required to strengthen responses to children at risk of exploitation and extra-familial harm. Priorities for the coming year include refreshing the Contextual Safeguarding Strategy, embedding the new practice model and supporting the development of the Multi-Agency Child Protection Team (MACPT) as part of the Families First Partnership Programme and wider social care reforms. These developments will strengthen risk assessment, safety planning, information sharing and multi-agency responses to children experiencing contextual harms. We will seek to further improve the use of data, audit and performance information to understand impact and outcomes for children and young people.

7.3 Business Priority – Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse remains a key safeguarding priority for WFSCP. During 2025/26, the Partnership established a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Working Group to support preparedness for the Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) framework on domestic abuse, strengthen partnership understanding of local practice, and coordinate improvement activity across agencies. The group brought together representatives from Children's Services, Police, Health, Probation and specialist domestic abuse services to undertake self-assessment activity, review local arrangements and oversee a comprehensive multi-agency audit.

The multi-agency audit reviewed six children's cases involving domestic abuse and identified both strengths and areas for improvement. Positive practice included timely referrals, effective use of MARAC processes and examples of strong multi-agency working. Areas for development have included ensuring children's lived experiences are more consistently captured, strengthening information sharing, promoting professional challenge, improving safety planning, recognising children as victims in their own right and reducing the use of victim-blaming language in professional records.

In partnership with the Westmorland and Furness Community Safety Partnership, WFSCP developed and promoted a series of learning resources to support practice improvement. This included the development of 7-minute briefings on [victim-blaming language](#) and effective [information sharing](#), helping practitioners to recognise and challenge language that places responsibility on victims, improve multi-agency communication, and strengthen child-centred responses to domestic abuse. The Partnership has also continued to develop and promote its dedicated domestic abuse team, providing practitioners with access to local guidance, learning resources, training opportunities and support pathways. The team provides a valuable source of consultation and specialist advice for practitioners, supporting risk assessment, safety planning and decision-making. Domestic Abuse audit findings also identified strengths in timely referrals and multi-agency working, providing assurance that children and families are benefiting from a more coordinated response.



To support improvement and embed learning across the partnership, WFSCP has:

- Undertaken a multi-agency domestic abuse audit and developed an associated improvement action plan.
- Established a Domestic Abuse Task and Finish Group to oversee progress against audit recommendations and support continued improvement.
- Produced a 7-minute briefing to disseminate learning from the domestic abuse audit across the children's workforce.
- With the support of Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB the partnership has delivered multi-agency Non-Fatal Strangulation training to improve professional awareness of this significant risk indicator and strengthen safeguarding responses.
- With the support of Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB the partnership has delivered Tom's Story training, using the child's voice and lived experience to strengthen understanding of the impact of domestic abuse on children and promote child-centred practice.
- Shared Cumbria Constabulary's "Through the Eyes of the Child" learning resource across the partnership to reinforce the importance of understanding domestic abuse from the child's perspective and capturing this within assessments, recording and decision-making.
- Strengthened awareness of professional challenge and escalation processes across partner agencies.
- Supported the use of tools such as "A Day in My Life" to better understand and capture children's lived experiences.
- Worked with education partners to strengthen Operation Encompass arrangements and improve support for children affected by domestic abuse.
- Re-established regular partnership meetings between Health and Children's Social Care to improve information sharing and joint safeguarding responses.
- Incorporated domestic abuse and that children are victims in their own right into the new Level 3: Working Together to Safeguard Children training package and the thematic learning event.

By the end of the reporting period, significant progress had been made against the domestic abuse action plan, with many actions embedded into routine safeguarding practice. A multi-agency re-audit has been arranged to evaluate the impact of this work and identify any remaining areas for development.

8. Risk, Challenges and Accountability

8.1 Risk Register

During 2025/26, WFSCP implemented a formal risk management framework to support the identification, assessment and monitoring of risks that may impact safeguarding arrangements or outcomes for children and young people. Risks are reviewed quarterly, assessed against an agreed framework and escalated where appropriate. This enables the Partnership to maintain oversight of emerging issues and ensure mitigating actions are in place.

During the year, key risks identified through the partnership risk register included workforce capacity and system pressures, the impact of children's social care reforms, consistency of multi-agency information sharing, health business continuity arrangements within the Front Door, and ensuring effective responses to exploitation, neglect and domestic abuse. Regular review and mitigation planning provided assurance that these risks were recognised and actively managed by partners.

8.2 Challenge Log

The Partnership maintains a challenge log to record occasions where professionals or agencies raise concerns, question decisions or seek assurance that safeguarding needs are being appropriately addressed. The challenge log promotes constructive professional challenge and supports a culture where practitioners feel confident to escalate concerns in the best interests of children and young people. The log provides an auditable record of concerns, actions and outcomes, enabling the Partnership to identify themes and trends relating to issues such as thresholds, information sharing, service delivery and multi-agency working. Learning from challenge activity informs quality assurance, workforce development and service improvement, helping to strengthen accountability and improve safeguarding practice across the partnership. The challenge log was introduced during 2025/26 as part of the Partnership's wider accountability framework. As the system becomes embedded, analysis of challenge themes and outcomes will be used to inform future quality assurance, learning and improvement activity.



9. Funding & Resources

The breakdown of partner contributions to the partnership costs for the annual year 2025/26 are below, based on the agreed split of: 50% Local Authority, 30% ICB, 20% Police.

Agency	Budget Contribution
Westmorland and Furness Council (50%)	£102,496.50
Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB (30%)	£61,489.90
Police (20%)	£40,998.60
Total	£204,993.00

Cost	Percentage
Staffing	85.2%
Independent Scrutiny	7.1%
Learning and Improvement activity	1.9%
Policies and procedures	5.3%
Memberships	0.5%

Of the total funding for the partnership for 2025/26, the majority of the cost was attributed to staffing. The Business Unit has three full-time members of staff who undertake the management and support function for the partnership. The team is hosted within Westmorland and Furness Council and includes a Partnership Manager, a Partnership Officer and a Partnership Assistant.

WFSCP budgetary contributions are reviewed on an annual basis. The agreed percentage contributions for 2026/27 have been amended (40% Local Authority, 40% ICB and 20% Police) to ensure an equitable and proportionate financial contribution to WFSCP.



10. Single-Agency Inspections of Lead Agencies

10.1 Westmorland and Furness Children's Services Focused Visit

Ofsted's Focused Visit of November 2025 found that Westmorland and Furness Council had made significant improvements to services for care-experienced young people since the 2024 ILACS inspection. Inspectors highlighted the strength of partnership working, noting that senior leaders, stakeholders and external partners have worked effectively together to strengthen corporate parenting arrangements and service quality. The development of the Cared For and Care Experienced Partnership was recognised as providing effective oversight and accountability, while co-production with young people has directly influenced service development, including the creation of the Care Leavers Hub. Ofsted also recognised effective partnership arrangements supporting health, well-being and community connections for care-experienced young people. Areas for continued partnership focus include improving pathway planning, support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and increasing opportunities for young people who are not in education, employment or training.

10.2 Cumbria Constabulary's HMICFRS Child Protection Inspection

HMICFRS's National Child Protection Inspection of Cumbria Constabulary, undertaken in October 2025 and published in June 2026, recognised the force's strong contribution to safeguarding children through effective partnership working and multi-agency collaboration. Inspectors found that Cumbria Constabulary works productively with statutory safeguarding partners and is an active member of the Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnership. Strong strategic relationships, effective information sharing and joint oversight arrangements were identified as key strengths. The inspection highlighted innovative partnership initiatives, including the Cumbria Child Centred Policing Team and Operation Veritas, which support early intervention, trauma-informed practice and improved outcomes for vulnerable children. While HMICFRS identified areas requiring further improvement, particularly in relation to child exploitation investigations and multi-agency oversight processes, the report provides positive assurance regarding the strength of safeguarding partnerships across Westmorland and Furness and their collective commitment to protecting children and improving outcomes.



11. National Reforms & Strategic Developments

11.1 Families First Partnership Programme

During 2025/26, the Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnership (WFSCP) provided governance and accountability for the local implementation of the Families First Partnership Programme and children's social care reforms. Through a dedicated multi-agency reform group, safeguarding partners maintained oversight of progress, ensuring that reforms were aligned with safeguarding priorities and strengthened existing partnership arrangements across children's social care, health, police and education. Lead Safeguarding Partners, Delegated Safeguarding Partners and relevant agencies received regular updates in respect of the implementation progress.

Significant progress was made in developing multi-agency approaches to Family Help and Child Protection. Partners undertook health mapping activity to strengthen information sharing between children's services and GP practices, improving confidence in safeguarding information and supporting more effective joint working. Cumbria Constabulary also seconded a Temporary Detective Inspector to support the scoping and development of reforms across the partnership, helping shape future multi-agency child protection arrangements and strengthen police involvement in planning and implementation. The Partnership has continued to provide strategic oversight of this work, supporting agencies to build on existing strengths and develop more integrated responses for children, young people and families.

11.2 North West Regional Improvement Programme

WFSCP has actively contributed to and benefited from the North West Safeguarding Partnership Improvement Programme, a regional collaboration involving all twenty-four safeguarding partnerships across the North West. The programme has supported the development of a more connected, evidence-informed safeguarding system through shared learning, co-production, workforce development and multi-agency collaboration. Through engagement with regional networks, WFSCP has contributed to a number of workstreams, including the Business Managers Network, performance and quality assurance forums, workforce development initiatives and regional discussions focused on strengthening safeguarding arrangements and promoting consistency across the region.

During 2025/26, the programme supported the development of a shared thresholds methodology, including participation from children and young people, promoted a stronger focus on equality through the Fairness and Belonging workstream, and amplified the voice of young people through Participation People engagement. Regional work also focused on developing consistent multi-agency datasets and reporting arrangements for key safeguarding themes, including neglect and contextual safeguarding, with WFSCP contributing quarterly safeguarding data returns and benefiting from sub-regional safeguarding effectiveness reporting. The programme delivered a range of practical resources to support local partnerships, including threshold guidance, multi-agency data and insights tools, Section 11 assurance resources, practice frameworks and a regional Section 11 toolkit designed to improve consistency of audit and assurance processes.

WFSCP also accessed the bespoke workforce development support offer, participated in reviews of local training provision, and engaged with regional partners to strengthen the role of education within safeguarding arrangements. This collaboration has enhanced local safeguarding practice, strengthened assurance activity and supported continuous improvement across the partnership.

11.3 The Association of Safeguarding Partners

WFSCP is an active member of the Association of Safeguarding Partners (TASP). TASP provides significant benefits to Safeguarding Children Partnerships by enabling access to a national network of safeguarding professionals, opportunities to share learning and best practice, and up-to-date information on policy, legislation and emerging safeguarding issues. TASP supports continuous improvement through webinars, resources, specialist working groups and peer learning opportunities, helping partnerships strengthen their multi-agency arrangements and respond effectively to local and national challenges. Membership also enabled WFSCP to be part of a collective voice in shaping the future development of safeguarding practice, promoting collaboration across the safeguarding sector.



12. Future Priorities & Forward Plan

12.1 Reflection and Development

WFSCP held a development session in July 2025. This development session brought together Delegated Safeguarding Partners, senior leaders and wider safeguarding partners to reflect on the effectiveness of the new safeguarding arrangements, strengthen shared understanding of roles and responsibilities, and agree the culture, governance, priorities and improvements required to deliver effective partnership working and better outcomes for children and young people.

A further development session will be held in July 2026, to revisit the progress made within our first year as a new partnership, receive an update from the sub-groups and discuss recent progress across the partnership in relation to the Social Care Reforms. This information will inform forward planning and help ensure that WFSCP continues to work collaboratively with partner agencies to make progress against our shared priorities.

12.2 Forward Plan

The Partnership will continue to review delivery of the Business Plan on a quarterly basis, providing regular assurance and progress updates to Delegated Safeguarding Partners on activity and impact across all WFSCP sub-groups.

As a newly established partnership, there remains important work to progress in relation to our agreed priorities of neglect, domestic abuse and contextual safeguarding. Alongside this, we are continuing to respond to and embed the implications of wider social care reforms. In this context, the Partnership has agreed to maintain its current priorities for a further year. This will enable sustained focus, deeper collaboration and a stronger collective impact in addressing these key safeguarding issues and improving outcomes for children and young people.

Over the coming year, success will include the launch of a refreshed Pan-Cumbria Contextual Safeguarding Strategy and supporting place-based action plan, the development and implementation of a Westmorland and Furness Neglect Strategy and Action Plan, and increased partnership focus on Child Sexual Abuse, including online child sexual abuse and exploitation. We also recognise that further work is required to strengthen our understanding and response to neglect and ensure this remains a key area of improvement.

The Partnership has identified several areas where further development is needed. These include strengthening how we capture and act upon the voices of children, young people and families through a dedicated engagement approach; completing re-audit activity in relation to domestic abuse to evaluate the impact of improvement work; undertaking further scrutiny of neglect to provide assurance regarding the effectiveness of multi-agency practice and identify any remaining areas for improvement; and benchmarking local practice against national learning, including making greater use of National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel resources to inform practice and partnership development.

In addition, we will continue to strengthen engagement with education, including designated safeguarding lead networks, ensure partnership readiness for future Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAs), further develop our understanding of multi-agency safeguarding data and insights to inform priorities, and review our workforce development offer to ensure training remains responsive to emerging safeguarding themes, risks and learning.



13. Accessibility & Publication

In line with national expectations, the Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report will be published to the Partnership's website.

This report has been designed to be accessible and easy to navigate, using clear language and visual summaries.

To contact WFSCP Business Unit, please email wfscp@cumbria.gov.uk

14. Appendix A – WFSCP Wider Safeguarding Accountability Board Membership

14.1 'Delegated Safeguarding Partners' Safeguarding Accountability Board Meeting

Role	Agency	Job Title
Independent Scrutineer	N/A	Independent Scrutineer
Local Authority DSP and WFSCP Chair	Westmorland and Furness Council	Executive Director of Children's Services
Police DSP	Cumbria Constabulary	Assistant Chief Constable
Education DSP	Holme Primary School	Headteacher
ICB DSP	Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB	Director of Safeguarding
Business Unit	Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnership	Children's Safeguarding Partnership Manager
		Partnership and Improvement Assistant

14.2 'Wider Partners' Safeguarding Accountability Board Meeting

The 'Wider Partners' Safeguarding Accountability Board meeting is attended by the Delegated Safeguarding Partners, Independent Scrutineer, WFSCP Business Unit and the following wider partner agencies. This meeting also includes the Chairs of the WFSCP sub-groups to ensure connectivity across the Partnership's meeting structures.

Role	Agency	Job Title
Justice	Probation	Head of Probation Delivery Unit – Cumbria
Police	Cumbria Constabulary	Detective Chief Inspector (sub-group Chair)
		Head of Crime PPU
Health Provider	CNTW Foundation Trust	Associate Nurse Director
	Harrogate District Foundation Trust	Safeguarding named nurse for 0-19
	Lancashire and South Cumbria Foundation Trust	Named Nurse for Safeguarding
	North Cumbria Integrated Care	Chief Nurse
	University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay Trust	Head of Safeguarding
NWAS	North West Ambulance Service	Named Nurse for Safeguarding

Role	Agency	Job Title
Health ICB (South)	Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB	Chief Nursing Officer
	Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB	Deputy Head of Safeguarding
	Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB	Designated Safeguarding Nurse (sub-group Chair)
Health ICB (North)	North East and North Cumbria ICB	Designated Nurse for Safeguarding
Voluntary Sector	Family Action	Voluntary Sector Representative
Local Authority; Community Safety	Westmorland and Furness Council	Assistant Community Safety Manager
Local Authority; Public Health	Westmorland and Furness Council	Consultant in Public Health
Local Authority; Adults Services	Westmorland and Furness Council	Service Manager
Local Authority; Children's Services	Westmorland and Furness Council	Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion
		Assistant Director - Quality Resources and Transformation
		Director of Children and Families (sub-group Chair)
		Senior Manager
		Data Analyst
Business Unit	Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnership	Children's Safeguarding Partnership Manager
		Partnership and Improvement Assistant
		Partnership and Improvement Officer



