Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnership

Transitional Safeguarding Audit Findings

1. Purpose of the Audit

This audit was carried out jointly by WFSCP and the Cumbria Safeguarding Adults Board (CSAB) in response to Recommendation 3 of SAR Kate, seeking assurance that transition processes for vulnerable young people—particularly those at risk of exploitation—are functioning effectively.

Four young people aged 18–19 with significant Child Exploitation (CE) histories were audited to examine the quality of transition planning, the timeliness of referrals to Adult Services, multi-agency communication, and the support provided beyond age 18.

The young people presented high and complex risks, including missing episodes, links to organised criminal groups, NRM decisions and complex family backgrounds. The audit enabled partners to reflect on practice, share learning and identify improvements to strengthen transitional safeguarding pathways.

2. Key Strengths – Timely Referrals

There was consistent evidence of:

- all four young people being referred to Adult Services *before* their 18th birthday;
- referrals being judged appropriate based on each young person's circumstances;
- Adult Services being invited to planning discussions, even when consent was limited;
- improved early involvement linked to learning from SAR Kate;
- a clearer expectation that transitions require proactive multi-agency preparation.

3. Key Strengths – Multi Agency Working and Person Centred Practice

Strengths included:

- effective collaboration across Children's Services, Adult Services, Youth Justice, Probation, Health, PAs and CE workers;
- Adult Services showing commitment by attending meetings even without a young person's consent;
- trusted relationships being used well, especially with CE workers and PAs who maintained continuity beyond age 18;
- young people's voices and lived experiences being understood and factored into planning;
- practitioners showing persistence and creativity in keeping engagement going.

4. Areas for Development – Referral Delays and Confusion Around Processes

The audit highlighted several process-related issues:

- Some delay occurred due to referrals being directed to the MACH rather than to the single point of access (SPA), meaning they were not immediately picked up by Adult Services.
- Telephone-only referral route limiting the ability to share written context or documents.
- Confusion between assessment types, including:
  - Transition Assessments
  - Care Act Assessments
  - Section 42 enquiries
  - Non-statutory safeguarding enquiries
- Inconsistent terminology leading to uncertainty about what had been completed and why.
- In some cases, unclear whether a Care Act Assessment had taken place, despite decisions being made about eligibility.

5. Areas for Development – Missing Professionals and Health Gaps

Key gaps included:

- Relevant professionals not always being invited to key transition or safeguarding meetings (e.g., CE workers, Children's Services colleagues, health professionals).
- Health engagement being inconsistent, partly due to the absence of a commissioned CE health role for Cumbria.
- Difficulties tracing health records for young people who had moved frequently.
- Some health needs, including mental health referrals, not being followed up.
- Missed opportunities for education input, including limited involvement from the Virtual School, despite young people expressing interest in returning to education.

6. Areas for Development – Young Adults Not Meeting Criteria, Justice Transitions & Consent Challenges

The audit identified ongoing practice challenges:

- A cohort of highly vulnerable young adults who do not meet Care Act criteria but still require coordinated safeguarding oversight.
- Risks being missed during transitions into adult justice settings, where young people were sometimes viewed primarily as offenders rather than exploited individuals.
- Consent being misunderstood—young people were often disengaged rather than refusing support.
- Capacity assessments not always considering executive functioning.
- Reliance on PAs or CE workers to help gather the young person's views when direct contact was not possible.

7. Suggested Improvements & Next Steps

The audit recommends clearer terminology and guidance within the Transitional Safeguarding Policy, including defined assessment terms, and the creation of a Vulnerable Young Adults Panel for those who do not meet adult service thresholds but remain at risk. It calls for stronger multi-agency attendance at meetings, with written updates provided when partners cannot attend, and more consistent health involvement, including exploring a commissioned CE health role. Justice transitions should continue to recognise exploitation risk after 18, while consent and capacity practice should make better use of trusted professionals and clearer recording. Finally, partners should strengthen information sharing by routinely uploading pathway plans, safeguarding minutes and assessment outcomes.

