

Safeguarding Policy

1. Purpose:

This policy provides details of our Safeguarding practices for the protection of all children and vulnerable adults who come into contact with staff, councillors, contractors and volunteers carrying out council duties.

2. Scope:

All volunteers, permanent and temporary employees and all associated persons such as contractors, consultants and others employed under a contract for services. In addition this policy will apply to any persons involved with work for or on behalf of the council in any setting including students and agency workers.

Note: The above will be referred to as Council representatives throughout this document.

3. Policy Statement:

We are committed to ensuring that:

- The welfare of the child and vulnerable adult is paramount.
- All children and vulnerable adults, regardless of age, disability, gender, racial heritage, religious or other belief and sexual orientation or identity have the right to protection from all types of harm and abuse.
- Working in partnership with children, their parents, guardians, carers and other agencies is key in promoting young people's welfare.
- All suspicions and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately. Sharing concerns with agencies who need to know, and involving parents and children appropriately.
- Staff, councillors and volunteers are aware of safeguarding practices.

The Council has an increasing number of activities that may involve children and / or vulnerable adults. These include but are not limited to litter picking, community gardening and award schemes.

The Council welcomes and encourages children and vulnerable adults to participate in our activities and schemes and is fully committed to their safety and wellbeing. Children and vulnerable adults are involved in the Councils activities at many levels and the council therefore has a duty of care for those who take part or receive services from the council.

Children and vulnerable adults have a right to be safe and feel secure in the activities and schemes that they and their parents, guardians or carers, choose to take part in.

The council believes that it is always unacceptable for a child and / or vulnerable adult (and indeed anyone) to experience abuse of any kind and recognises its responsibility to safeguard the welfare of all children and vulnerable adults by commitment to a practice which protects them from harm.

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4. What is Safeguarding?

a. Legislation

The legal duty to safeguard children and vulnerable adults is set out in the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 (England and Wales). The general obligation to safeguard children (and the same principles would extend to vulnerable adults) is set out in the Joint Chief Inspectors Report on Arrangements to Safeguarding Children (2002). This defines safeguarding as:

“Agencies and organisations working with children and young people (should) take all reasonable measures to ensure that the risks of harm to the individuals welfare are minimised; and where there are concerns about children and young peoples welfare all agencies (and organisations) take all appropriate actions to address those concerns, working to agreed local policies and procedures, working in partnership with other local agencies”

A child is defined as a person under the age of 18 years (The Children Act 1989).

A vulnerable adult is someone over the age of 18 who is “in need of community care services by reasons of mental health or other disability, age or illness” and “is or may be unable to take care of him or herself, or is unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation”. It should be noted that disability or age alone does not signify that an adult is vulnerable.

Other Legislation:

- The Children Act 1989
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Sexual Offences Act 2003
- The Children Act 2004
- Protection of Freedoms Act 2012
- United Convention of the Rights of the Child 1991
- Relevant Government guidance on safeguarding children

b. Definitions of Abuse

Abuse is a phrase that describes ways in which children / vulnerable adults are harmed in a physical or psychological manner. Abuse can be broadly separated into five categories:

Term	Definition
Physical abuse/injury	Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning, drowning or suffocating. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer feigns the symptoms of or deliberately causes ill health to a child / vulnerable adult they are looking after. Physical abuse, as well as being the result of a deliberate act, can also be caused through omission or the failure to act to protect
Neglect	The persistent failure to meet a child/ vulnerable adult’s basic physical and psychological needs, which is likely to result in serious impairment to health and development. It may involve a

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	carer failing to protect a child/ vulnerable adult from exposure to any kind of danger, including cold or starvation, or extreme failure to carry out important aspects of care, resulting in a significant impairment of the child/ vulnerable adult's health or development
Sexual abuse	Forcing or enticing a child / vulnerable adult to take part in sexual activities, whether or not they are aware of what is happening. This includes rape, incest and all forms of sexual activity involving children, including pornography and prostitution
Emotional abuse	Persistent emotional ill treatment, which is likely to cause serious harm to the child / vulnerable adult's emotional development. This may involve conveying to children / vulnerable adults that they are worthless, unloved and inadequate and cause children / vulnerable adults to feel frightened, in danger, be exploited or corrupted
Bullying & Discrimination	Usually occurs over time rather than being a single aggressive act. It involves an imbalance of power, the powerful attack the weak. It can be psychological, verbal or physical in nature. It is often difficult to decide what is "teasing" and what constitutes bullying

Another type of abuse related to vulnerable adults only can include financial or material abuse which includes theft, fraud, exploitation, pressure in connection with wills, property or inheritance or financial transactions, or the misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions or benefits.

It should be recognised that some children may be particularly vulnerable, for instance children with disabilities may be at increased risk of abuse through various factors such as stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, isolation and a powerlessness to protect themselves or adequately communicate that abuse has occurred.

5. Recognition of Abuse

It is not always easy to recognise a situation where abuse may occur or has already taken place. It must be recognised that the following is not exhaustive and that the presence of one or more indicators is not necessarily proof that abuse is taking place; there may be other reasons for changes in behaviour.

- Unexplained / inconsistent or suspicious injuries such as bruising, cuts or burns, particularly if situated on a part of the body not normally prone to such injuries, for example cheeks
- The child / vulnerable adult describes what appears to be an abusive act involving them
- Another child or adult expresses concern about the welfare of a child / vulnerable adult
- Unexplained changes in a child / vulnerable adult's behaviour, e.g. becoming very upset, quiet, withdrawn or displaying a sudden outburst of temper
- Inappropriate sexual awareness
- Engaging in sexually explicit behaviour
- Distrust of adults, particularly those with whom a close relationship would normally be expected
- Difficulty in making friends
- Being prevented from socialising with others

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- Displaying variations in eating patterns including overeating or loss of appetite
- Losing weight for no apparent reason
- Becoming increasingly dirty or unkempt
- Unexplained drop off in performance
- Physical signs such as stomach-aches, headaches, damaged clothes, bingeing
- Shortage of money or frequent loss of possessions

If you are worried, it is NOT your responsibility to decide if it is abuse or to decide if an investigation is warranted BUT it is your responsibility to take action and your duty to act on your concerns immediately and do something about it.

It should be recognised that abuse does not just take place within the family home. It can occur within other settings. It is therefore possible that allegations of abuse may be made against members of staff and/or volunteers working around you.

6. Good Practice Guidelines:

All Council representatives should conduct themselves in such a way that promotes best practice. There will be occasions during the course of normal duties when Council representatives will have to, for example, administer first aid or protect a casualty. Council representatives should follow these guidelines when doing so:

- Always working in an open environment (e.g. avoiding private or unobserved situations and encouraging open communication with no secrets)
- Treating all children and vulnerable adults equally, and with respect and dignity
- Always putting the welfare of the child or vulnerable adult first
- Maintaining an appropriate relationship with children and vulnerable adults: Physical contact may be appropriate as part of your normal duties i.e. administering first aid or protecting a casualty but should be avoided in any other situation. This also applies in a social or communication context where council representatives should acknowledge and maintain professional boundaries at all times
- Building balanced relationships based on mutual trust which empowers children and vulnerable adults to share in the decision making process
- Ensuring if any form of manual/physical support is required, it should be provided openly and according to guidelines. Children / vulnerable adults and their parents, guardians, carers should always be consulted and their agreement gained
- Being an excellent role model – this includes not smoking or drinking in the company of children
- Requesting written parental, guardian, carer consent if council representatives are required to transport children / vulnerable adults in their cars

Further information can be found in the Government Office document 'Guidance for Safer Working Practice for Adults who work with Children and Young People'.

With regards to communication online, communication between children and adults, by whatever method, should take place within clear and explicit professional boundaries.

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Government guidance states: “Adults should not share any personal information with a child or young person. They should not request, or respond to, any personal information from the child/young person. Adults should ensure that all communications are transparent and open to scrutiny”

Source: Guidance for Safer Working Practice for Adults working with Children and Young People – January 2009

The following practices should be **avoided** except in emergencies. If cases where these situations are unavoidable it should be with the full knowledge and consent of the Clerk of the Council or their Deputy, a Councillor, the Lead Volunteer or a parent, guardian or carer.

- Avoid spending time alone with children / vulnerable adults away from others
- Avoid taking children / vulnerable adults alone in the car

The following should **never** be sanctioned. You should never:

- Engage in rough, physical or sexually provocative games
- Allow or engage in any form of inappropriate touching
- Make sexually suggestive comments to a child / vulnerable adult, even in fun
- Allow allegations made by a child / vulnerable adult to go unrecorded or not acted upon
- Take children / vulnerable adults to your home where they will be alone with you

If any of the following occur you should report this immediately to the Clerk of the Council or their Deputy, a Councillor, the Lead Volunteer and record the incident. You should also ensure the parents, guardians or carers are informed:

- If you accidentally hurt a child / vulnerable adult
- If a child / vulnerable adult seems distressed in any manner
- If a child / vulnerable adult appears to be sexually aroused by your actions
- If a child / vulnerable adult misunderstand or misinterprets something you have done

Further information and guidance can be found by clicking on the following links:

<http://www.childrenengland.org.uk/upload/Guidance%20.pdf>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service>

Reviewed and readopted

13th May 2024 Minute Ref: 24/59j)

Signed: J Stanford (Chair)