



Seaton Town Council Constitution

Chapter 30 Safeguarding Policy

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The purpose of this policy is to set out for the benefit of all members, officers, volunteers and contractors the safeguards required for the protection of children and vulnerable adults. Children and vulnerable adults have the right to participate, have fun and be safe whilst engaged in services provided or facilitated by Seaton Town Council ('the Council'). This policy will assist in maintaining a safe and positive environment for those individuals.

1.2 This policy applies to all members, officers, volunteers and contractors working for or engaged in partnership with the Council. Under the Children Act 2004, the Council has a duty to co-operate with other agencies and authorities to promote the well-being of children and young people. Devon County Council ('DCC') is the lead agency for the protection of vulnerable adults.

1.3 It is not the role of the Council to investigate allegations of abuse. However, all members, officers, volunteers and contractors have a responsibility to take action when they suspect or recognise that a child or vulnerable adult may be a victim of significant harm or abuse. This policy is to be considered in conjunction with the Council's Risk Management Strategy, Health and Safety Policies, Equality and Diversity Policy, Complaints Policy and Staff Handbook.

1.4 The phrase '**children and vulnerable adults**' refers to:

- anyone under the age of 18 years.
- someone who is over the age of 18 who is receiving, or may be in need of, community care services by reason of mental health or other disability or illness and is, or may be, unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.

When the term 'parents' is used, it is used in the broadest sense to include parents, carers and guardians.

2. POLICY PRINCIPLES

2.1 The Council recognises that all children and vulnerable adults have a right to protection from abuse. The Council is committed to safeguarding children and vulnerable adults and protecting them from abuse when the child or vulnerable adult is engaged in services provided or facilitated by, or on behalf of, the Council.

2.2 Referrals of suspicions of abuse cannot be anonymous and should be made in the knowledge that, during enquiries, the source of the referral will be made clear.

2.3 The Council will not tolerate the harassment of any member, officer, volunteer, contractor or child/vulnerable adult who raises concerns of abuse.

3. POLICY STATEMENT

- The Council is committed to taking all reasonable precautions to safeguard the welfare of children and vulnerable adults that use its services and promotes a

safe culture and environment.

- The Council will endeavour to keep children and vulnerable adults safe from abuse.
- Suspicion of abuse will be responded to promptly and appropriately.
- The Council will always act in the best interests of the child or vulnerable adult.
- The Council will endeavour to ensure that unsuitable people are prevented from working with children and vulnerable adults through, as appropriate, the Council's recruitment procedures and by reminding others of their safeguarding responsibilities.
- The Council will take any concern raised by a member, officer, volunteer or contractor or child / vulnerable adult seriously and treat it with sensitivity.

4. PROCEDURE AND SYSTEMS

4.1 Definitions of Abuse

- **Abuse** - any form of physical, emotional, mental or sexual abuse, including bullying or lack of care that leads to injury or harm. In the case of vulnerable adults, abuse may also be financial.
- **Neglect** - where people fail to meet the basic physical or psychological needs of a child or vulnerable adult, which could result in serious impairment to their health or development, e.g. failure to ensure that a child is protected from unnecessary risk of injury or exposing them to undue cold.
- **Physical Abuse** - where physical injury is caused, e.g. hitting, shaking, biting.
- **Sexual Abuse** - where children or vulnerable adults knowingly or unknowingly take part in an activity that meets the sexual needs of the other person or persons involved. This includes inappropriate photography or filming.
- **Emotional/Mental Abuse** - where there is persistent emotional ill treatment that causes severe and persistent adverse effects on the emotional status of a child or vulnerable adult e.g. bullying (including cyber and text bullying), constant criticism and unrealistic pressure to perform.

4.2 It is important to recognise that disabled children may be particularly vulnerable to abuse and may have added difficulties in communicating what is happening to them. Dependency on others for primary needs, e.g. feeding and clothing, may make a person feel unable to report abusive treatment.

4.3 This policy covers all children and vulnerable adults irrespective of age, gender, race or ethnicity, religion, disability or sexual orientation.

4.4 The use of photographs and images of young people will be controlled to prevent possible misuse. In general, consent will be sought from parents before an image is used.

5. RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS

5.1 If a person alleges abuse, then the following process will be invoked:

- Allow the person to speak without interruption, accepting what is said, but DO NOT investigate.
- Only ask questions for clarification, do not ask leading questions
- Pass no judgement but reassure them that they acted correctly in reporting the alleged abuse.
- Advise support will be offered, but that the allegation must be passed on to the appropriate authority.
- Record the facts as they have been reported.
- Refer the allegation immediately to the Town Clerk. If the Town Clerk is implicated, refer to the Chairman or Deputy Chairman of the Council. All allegations must be referred, no matter how insignificant they may appear, or when they occur.

5.2 As soon as possible after the incident or disclosure has occurred:

- Make a written record of the allegations, dates, times, facts, and, where possible, verbatim speech.
- Ensure the correct contact details are available, ie the child or vulnerable adult's name and address, and the name and address of their parent, in the case of children
- Immediately contact the Social Services Department at DCC. Ask for a duty officer and indicate that you wish to discuss a matter of child/vulnerable person protection. Ask for the name of the person with whom you are speaking. Do not filter out or withhold any information. Ask if there is anyone else who should be informed.
- Prepare a confidential file. Record all notes, conversations, and advice received from Social Services.
- Every effort should be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned.
- Store information in a secure place with limited access to designated people, in line with data protection legislation.
- Follow any advice received from Social Services; take no other action unless advised to do so by Social Services. Do not attempt to investigate matters – this is not the role of the Council.
- If in doubt about any advice received, at any stage, refer to Social Services for guidance.

5.3 Responding to concerns about a child's welfare where there has been no specific disclosure or allegation.

All members, officers, volunteers, and contractors are encouraged to share concerns with the Town Clerk. The Town Clerk will, if appropriate, make a referral to Social Services.

Recognising abuse is not always easy. The list below provides some indicators of abuse; however, the list is not exhaustive and contains only indicators - not confirmation - of abuse:

- unexplained bruising, marks or injuries on any part of the body e.g. cigarette burns, bite marks.
- bruises which reflect hand marks or fingertips (from slapping or pinching).
- an injury for which an explanation seems inconsistent, or which has not been treated adequately.
- sudden changes in behaviour, including becoming withdrawn or becoming aggressive, severe temper outbursts.
- reluctance to get changed e.g. for swimming.
- neglected in appearance, dirty clothing or lack of personal hygiene.
- constant hunger, sometimes stealing food from others.
- inappropriate dress for the conditions.
- fear of parents or carers being approached for an explanation.
- flinching when approached or touched.
- neurotic behaviour e.g., hair twisting, rocking.
- being unable to play.
- fear of making mistakes.
- self-harm.
- fear of being left with a specific person or group of people, lack of trust in adults.
- sexual knowledge beyond their age or development age.
- sexual drawings or language.
- saying they have secrets they cannot tell anyone about.
- not allowed to have friends.

5.4 Contact Details for Social Services, the Police and NSPCC:

Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) – Devon County Council:
Telephone: 0345 155 1071

Adult Safeguarding – Torbay and Devon Safeguarding Adults Partnership
Telephone: 0345 155 1007 (out of hours 0345 6000 388)

Devon & Cornwall Police:
Telephone: 101 or in an emergency 999

NSPCC Child Protection Helpline:
Telephone: 0808 800 5000

Childline:
Telephone: 0800 1111

5.5 Confidentiality

Members, officers, volunteers and contractors must not discuss allegations of abuse, substantiated or not, with anyone other than in connection with the formal investigation. Where it is necessary to put in procedures to prevent continuing abuse the matter should be shared with the Town Clerk, so that appropriate risk assessments may be undertaken.

6. PREVENTION

6.1 Recruitment

- Prospective employees will be interviewed and previous, relevant experience will be noted. Two appropriate references will be taken up for all employees.
- All employees will undergo a probationary period.

6.2 Training

The Council will make this Safeguarding Policy available to all members, officers, volunteers and contractors. The Town Clerk will encourage good practice and identify any training needs required through the Council's Appraisal System.

- All members and officers are expected to read this policy
- Members will be offered training on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, if required.

6.3 Reporting

The Council is committed to maintaining an open culture where members, officers, volunteers, children, vulnerable persons, parents, guardians and carers feel able to express concerns both about child protection and issues of poor practice.

In addition to the procedures outlined in this policy, the Council's Complaints Policy is available to all members, officers, volunteers and the general public.

7. CODES OF PRACTICE AND BEHAVIOUR

These guidelines have been devised to protect children and vulnerable adults from abuse, as well as to protect members, officers, volunteers and contractors from situations where false allegations may occur.

7.1 Members, officers and volunteers must:

- Treat everyone with respect, regardless of their age, ethnicity, social background, ability, sexual orientation, culture, or religious beliefs.
- Provide an example of good conduct they wish others to follow.
- Plan activities which involve more than one other person being present, or at least which are within sight or hearing of others.
- Respect a person's right to personal privacy.
- Provide access for children or vulnerable adults to talk to others about any concerns.

- Remember that someone else might misinterpret actions, no matter how well-intentioned.
- Recognise that special caution is required when discussing sensitive issues, such as bullying, bereavement, abuse, or personal development.
- Recognise that some children or vulnerable adults will be more vulnerable to abuse than others and may face extra barriers in getting help because of their race, gender, age, religion, disability, sexual orientation, social background, or culture.
- Challenge unacceptable behaviour and report all allegations or suspicion of abuse.

7.2 Members, officers and volunteers must not:

- Engage in physical horseplay, such as wrestling or tickling.
- Have any inappropriate verbal or physical contact with children or vulnerable people or make suggestive remarks or gestures.
- Permit abusive youth peer activities (e.g. initiation ceremonies, ridiculing, bullying etc.).
- Play physical contact games with children or vulnerable adults.
- Jump to conclusions about others without checking the facts.
- Ask children or vulnerable adults to participate in activities that are potentially dangerous, illegal or otherwise unreasonable.
- Exaggerate or trivialise abuse issues.
- Show favouritism to any individual.
- Rely on just their good name to protect them.
- Believe it could “never happen to me”.
- Take chances when common sense, policy or practice suggest a more prudent approach.
- Allow allegations made to go unchallenged, unrecorded, and not acted upon.

The Council takes its safeguarding responsibility seriously. Officers who breach these guidelines will face investigation and may face disciplinary action, which could lead to a dismissal.

Volunteers in breach of the above Code of Conduct will have their services terminated with immediate effect and, if appropriate, their parent organization will be informed.

If a member does not adhere to the policy, there may be grounds for reporting their behaviour to the Monitoring Officer, who may require an investigation under the Members’ Code of Conduct.

Where there is evidence of illegal activity, the member, officer, volunteer or contractor will be reported to the relevant authorities and may face a criminal investigation.

8. PROCEDURE IN RELATION TO SPECIFIC SERVICES

8.1 Employees aged under 18

The Council may employ workers aged under 18. The Council will ensure that all employees are aware of this Safeguarding Policy. Line managers are responsible for the health, safety and welfare of all employees.

8.2 Grants

All organisations who work with children or vulnerable adults, applying for a grant will be required to supply a copy of their safeguarding policy, if appropriate, in order for their application to be progressed.

8.3 Council Assets and Facilities

Independent groups and individuals who regularly use the assets and facilities owned and operated by the Council, and who have significant and regular unsupervised contact with children and vulnerable adults, should have appropriate child protection and vulnerable adult policies in place, commensurate with the level of contact they have, together with satisfactory DBS checks.

8.4 Internet and e-mail Policy

Please refer to the Council's Data Protection policy.

8.5 First Aid

The administration of first aid to children, young people and vulnerable adults can present risks. Under ordinary circumstances, a child or young person can be administered with first aid only if their parent or guardian expressly permits this course of action.

When administering first aid, wherever possible, employees should ensure that another adult is present, or is aware of the action being taken. Parents/carers should always be informed when first aid is administered.

Child welfare is of paramount importance. In certain circumstances members, employees, volunteers, and contracted service providers may undertake first aid as a last resort, notifying parents/carers as soon as possible, to minimise a child's or vulnerable adult's distress.

8.6 Special Events - Photography

It is an unfortunate fact that some people have used children and young people's events as opportunities to take inappropriate photographs or footage of children. Every attempt should be made to ensure that this does not happen. Members, employees, volunteers, and contracted service providers should be vigilant at all times. Anyone using cameras or film recorders for, or on behalf of the Council, should obtain consent from the parents of children being photographed or filmed before the activity commences.

When commissioning professional photographers or inviting the press to cover Council services, events and activities, the Council's expectations must be made clear in relation to child protection by checking the credentials of any photographers, ensuring identification is worn and by not allowing unsupervised access to children or one to one photographic session.

8.7 Misuse of Procedure

Malicious complaints about a member or employee(s) and/or serious and/or persistent abuse of these safeguarding policies and procedures will not be tolerated and will be dealt with through the Council's disciplinary procedures.

9 POLICY MONITORING AND REVIEW

All incidents and allegations of abuse and complaints will be recorded and monitored.