

STOKE ST PARISH COUNCIL
SAFEGUARDING POLIICY
ADOPTED 21ST MARCH, 2024

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1. GENERAL

- 1.1 This policy enables Stoke St Mary Parish Council (PC) to demonstrate its commitment to keeping safe children, young people and adults who we come into contact with, through the services we provide.
- 1.2 This policy applies, and is made available to, all councillors, staff (including, casual, work experience placements and trainees), volunteers and relevant contractors. The purpose of the policy is to ensure everyone understands what is required in relation to the protection of children, young people, and vulnerable adults, and knows what to do should a concern arise.
- 1.3 Line managers will encourage good practice and identify any training needs required through the PC's appraisal system. Two references are taken up for all new employees, who also undergo a probationary period. Councillors working with children, young people, and vulnerable adults will be provided with appropriate training on safeguarding.
- 1.4 This policy has been written to follow guidance from resources including the Somerset Safeguarding Children partnership, NHS, NSPCC, to protect children and vulnerable adults from abuse, as well as to protect councillors, staff, and volunteers from situations where false allegations might occur.
- 1.5 The PC seeks to implement its safeguarding policy by:
 - Ensuring that all staff and councillors who have regular, direct, and unsupervised contact with children, young people and vulnerable adults are carefully selected, are DBS checked, trained and accredited where necessary.
 - Ensuring that any contractors of the council who have regular, direct, and unsupervised contact with children, young people and vulnerable adults have effective policies and procedures in place.
 - Giving all the parties involved, i.e., parents, guardians, carers, information about what they can expect from the council in relation to protecting and safeguarding children, young people, and vulnerable adults.
 - Ensuring that there is a clear complaints procedure in place that can be used if there are any concerns.
 - Sharing information about concerns with appropriate agencies and involving parents and/or carers as appropriate.

2. Policy Statement & Delegations

- 2.1 The PC recognises that living a life that is free from harm and abuse is a fundamental human right and an essential requirement for health and wellbeing. The PC is committed to safeguarding children, young people, and vulnerable adults when they are engaged in services organised and provided by, or on behalf of, the council. The policy will enable the PC to:
 - help to provide and maintain a safe and positive environment for children, young people, and vulnerable adults,
 - Promote good practice and work in a way that can prevent or reduce the risk harm and abuse occurring,
 - Ensure that any allegations of abuse or suspicions are dealt with appropriately.
- 2.2 The PC has delegated Sarah Fisher, Clerk, as Safeguarding Officer. The Safeguarding Officer will ensure that necessary reports on safeguarding issues are reported to Somerset Council and must ensure that the PC's arrangements for safeguarding the welfare of children, young people, and vulnerable adults are implemented.

3. Definitions

Child & young people: For the purposes of this policy, the definition shall be “Anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday,” as per the Children Act 1989.

Vulnerable Adults: “someone who has needs for care and support, who is experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect and as a result of their care needs - is unable to protect themselves.” Care Act 2014, s.42

Abuse: when someone harms a child, young person, or vulnerable adult. It can be physical, sexual, or emotional, or involve neglect, as per the NSPCC definition.

4. Scope of Policy

- 4.1 Somerset Council is responsible for discharging duties as provider of Children’s Social Care and is the lead agency for the protection of vulnerable adults.
- 4.2 The PC has a duty under the Children Act 2004 to co-operate with Somerset Council as that authority determines appropriate.
- 4.3 It is not the role of the PC to investigate allegations of abuse.
- 4.4 This policy aims to help those staff, councillors, and others to recognise the signs of abuse and improper behaviour and what appropriate course of action should be taken in the circumstances, and to understand the potential risk to themselves and ensure that good practice is adhered to at all times.
- 4.5 This policy should be used in conjunction with the council’s Risk Management Policy, Code of Conduct, Standing Orders, and any other policy deemed appropriate.
- 4.6 This policy applies to all children, young people, and vulnerable adults irrespective of their age, gender, race or ethnicity, religion, disability or sexual preference.

5. Act to report abuse and use of this policy

- 5.1 If any person working for or with the council is worried about a child, young person or vulnerable adult who could be in danger of harm, they should contact Somerset Council’s Children or Adults services on 0300 123 2224, by email at childrens@somerset.gov.uk or adults@somerset.gov.uk.
- 5.4 The police can be directly contacted by dialling 101 and they will discuss with the Social Care teams what action should be taken. **In an emergency always contact the police by dialling 999.**
- 5.5 The PC will not tolerate the harassment of any councillor, employee, volunteer, contracted service provider, or child/vulnerable adult who raises, in good faith, concerns of abuse. The PC is committed to maintaining an open culture where councillors, employees, volunteers, children, vulnerable persons, parents, guardians, and carers feel able to express concerns both about safeguarding issues and of poor practice. In addition to the procedures outlined in this policy, the PC’s Complaints Procedure Policy is available for use by councillors, staff, volunteers, and the general public.
- 5.6 Malicious complaints about a councillor or an employee and/or serious and/or persistent abuse of this safeguarding policy and council procedures will not be tolerated and will be dealt with either through the council’s disciplinary process, through referral to the Monitoring Officer according to the members Code of Conduct, or, if appropriate, reported to the police.

6. Main Forms of Abuse

6.1 Recognising abuse is not always easy. The list below provides some types and indicators of abuse. However, the lists are not exhaustive and must not be used as confirmation of abuse:

a. Physical Abuse

This harm is not accidental and might involve actions such as hitting, shaking, and burning as well as the use of inappropriate restraint. Physical abuse, as well as being a deliberate act, can be caused by an omission or failure to act to protect. It can include the giving of alcohol, inappropriate drugs, or poison.

b. Emotional Abuse

This is sometimes called psychological abuse. Emotional abuse is ongoing emotional maltreatment and includes deliberate actions to scare or humiliate. It includes threats of harm or abandonment, deprivation of contact, humiliation, blaming, controlling, intimidation, coercion, harassment, verbal abuse, cyber bullying, isolation or unreasonable and unjustified withdrawal of services or supportive networks.

c. Sexual Abuse

Involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. It may also involve non-contact activities such as showing pornographic material, sexual innuendo or encouraging someone to behave in a sexually inappropriate way. Adult sexual abuse is any contact or non-contact sexual activity that happens without consent or understanding, or with forced consent.

d. Neglect

The persistent failure to meet a child's or vulnerable adult's basic physical and/or psychological needs. These needs include adequate food and warm clothing and also medical care, social care and educational services. Neglect may include simply being left alone or excluded.

6.2 Possible indicators of abuse (non-exhaustive):

- 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 the explanation seems inconsistent, or which has not been treated adequately
- Sudden changes in behaviour, including becoming withdrawn or becoming aggressive, severe temper outbursts
- Neglected or changes in appearance - sudden loss of hair, dirtiness, weight loss, etc.
- Constant hunger
- Inappropriate dress for the conditions
- Fear of someone speaking with parents or carers about injuries or behaviours
- Flinching when approached or touched
- Neurotic behaviour e.g., hair twisting, rocking
- Fear of making mistakes
- Self-harming
- Fear of being left with a specific person or group of people
- Sexual knowledge which is beyond their age or development age
- Sexual drawings or language
- Saying they have secrets they cannot tell anyone about

7. Responding to allegations

7.1 If a person discloses abuse by someone else, you should:

1. Stay calm, take the allegation seriously
2. Allow the person to speak without interruption
3. If there is a risk of immediate danger, report the matter without delay to the police (see section 5 of this policy)
4. If possible, make a contemporaneous note of what is said, include dates, times, facts, observations, and verbatim speech
5. Be accepting of what is said, but DO NOT offer opinion or investigate
6. Only ask questions for clarification of your notes, do not ask leading questions
7. Alleviate feelings of guilt and isolation, while passing no judgement on any party; reassure them that they did the right thing by talking to you
8. Tell them that you MUST pass the information on
9. DO NOT OFFER or agree to keep the matter a secret.
10. Refer the allegation immediately and directly to the appropriate body and:
 - If an employee or volunteer is implicated, refer the matter to the town clerk.
 - If the town clerk is implicated, refer the matter to the council chairman.
 - All allegations must be referred, no matter how insignificant they seem to be, or when they occur.

7.2 As soon as possible after the disclosure has occurred:

1. Use your notes to ensure the correct details are available: the name of the person making the report, the name of the young person/ vulnerable adult (if different), and the name and address of their parent or guardian
2. Immediately contact the social services department at Somerset Council (see s.5 of this policy). Ask for a duty officer and state that you wish to discuss a matter of child / vulnerable person's 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.
3. If an elected member has been implicated in the allegation, inform the Somerset Council Monitoring Officer and prepare a confidential file. Record all notes, conversations, and advice from social services.
4. It is of utmost importance for all concerned that every effort is made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained.
5. Store information in a secure place with limited access to designated people, in line with data protection requirements.
6. Follow the advice from social services; take no other action unless advised to do so by social services. If in doubt about the advice you have received at any stage refer to social services for guidance.

7.3 If a concern is disclosed to you about a child or vulnerable person's welfare where there has been no specific disclosure or allegation, you should report the concerns to the parish clerk as soon as possible. The parish clerk will speak with social services and, if appropriate, will liaise with either the chairman of the council or the monitoring officer.

8. Good Practice Guidelines

8.1 Councillors and staff must:

- Be identifiable i.e., wearing council branded clothing or name badges
- Treat all children and people with dignity and respect
- Provide an example for good conduct that others can follow
- Challenge unacceptable behaviour i.e., bullying and report allegations/suspicions of abuse

- Ensure that, when possible, there is more than one adult present during activities with children and vulnerable people, or at least be within sight or hearing of others
- Respect others' right to personal privacy and encourage children and vulnerable people to feel comfortable enough to point out attitudes or behaviours they are uncomfortable with
- Remember that someone else might misinterpret certain actions, no matter how well intentioned
- Be aware that any physical contact with a child or vulnerable adult might be misinterpreted
- Recognise that special caution is required when discussing sensitive issues with children or vulnerable people
- Always operate within the principles and procedures of the council's code of conduct

8.2 Councillors and Staff must not:

- Have inappropriate or unwarranted physical or verbal contact with children or vulnerable people
- Be drawn into inappropriate attention-seeking behaviour or make suggestive or derogatory remarks or gestures in front of children or vulnerable adults
- Jump to conclusions about others without checking facts
- Either exaggerate or trivialise any abuse issues
- Show favouritism to any individual
- Rely on your position, good name or that of the council to protect you

9. Use of video and photography

9.1 The use of photographs and images of children and young people will be controlled to prevent possible misuse. In general, agreement will be sought from parents or guardians that images can be used as appropriate for each event/activity.

10. Procedure in relation to specific services

10.1 Work Experience

The PC might offer work experience placements through various local schemes. The PC will ensure that employees working with children or vulnerable adults are aware of this safeguarding policy. Line managers are responsible for the health, safety, and welfare of work experience students whilst they undertake placements with the council.

10.2 Facility hire

Independent groups and private individuals who use the facilities operated by the PC should have in place appropriate policies and practices for protection of children and vulnerable adults commensurate with the level of contact they have and activities they carry out.

10.3 Use of Contractors

The PC will take reasonable care that contractors undertaking work on behalf of the council are appropriately monitored. Any contractor or sub-contractor engaged by the PC in areas where workers are likely to come into regular contact with children, young people, or vulnerable adults, should have its own equivalent child protection and vulnerable adult policies, or failing this, must comply with the terms of this policy. This requirement will be written into relevant contracts.

10.4 First aid

Under ordinary circumstances, the administration of first aid to children, young people, and vulnerable adults can only occur if their parent or guardian expressly permits this course of action. When administering first aid, the provider should wherever possible ensure that another adult is present or is aware of the action being taken. A record must be kept of all first aid administered and parents/carers must always be informed. In exceptional circumstances, first aid might be required to alleviate significant distress or injury, and, in such cases, parents / carers must be notified as soon as possible.

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