



Introduction

Okehampton Town Council has a responsibility to ensure that all children and vulnerable adults are protected and kept safe from harm whilst engaged in services organised and provided by the Council.

This policy applies to all situations within Okehampton Town Council's services, which could potentially involve children and vulnerable adults. This policy affects every Okehampton Town Council staff member, councillor, volunteer and anyone working on behalf of and/or representing the Council.

Definitions

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

A vulnerable adult is someone aged 18 or over who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness, and who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.

For example, a person who:

- is elderly and frail
- is suffering from mental illness or dementia
- has a learning disability
- is suffering from a debilitating physical illness
- has drug/alcohol problems (substance misuse)
- has sensory loss e.g. hearing/sight impairment

Policy Principles

Okehampton Town Council is committed to providing a safe environment for all.

The welfare of children and vulnerable adults is paramount. All children and vulnerable adults have an equal right to protection from abuse.

Everybody at Okehampton Town Council has a responsibility to support the care and protection of children and vulnerable adults.

Types of Abuse

'No Secrets' produced by the Department for Health in 2000 described abuse as 'a violation of an individual's human and civil rights by any other person or persons'.

Abuse is any form of physical, emotion or sexual mistreatment or lack of care that leads to injury or harm.

Physical Abuse

This may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm, as well as withholding food or drink, force feeding, wrongly administering medicine, unnecessary restraint, failing to provide physical care and aids to living. Physical abuse as well as being a result of a deliberate act, can also be caused through omission or the failure to act to protect.

Emotional or Psychological Abuse

Where there is persistent emotional ill treatment that causes severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's or vulnerable person's emotional status.

This may involve name calling, embarrassing or ignoring someone, persistent emotional ill treatment or rejection, including verbal abuse, shouting, swearing, threatening abandonment or harm, isolating, taking away privacy or other rights, bullying/intimidation, blaming, belittling, silencing, controlling or humiliating.

People with disabilities 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 powerless to report abusive treatment.

Sexual Abuse

Where children or vulnerable adults unknowingly take part in an activity that meets the sexual needs of the other person or persons involved. This includes inappropriate photography or filming.

This may involve sexual assault, rape, inappropriate touching/molesting, forcing or enticing someone into sexual acts they don't understand or feel powerless to refuse and grooming a child or young person in preparation for abuse. Sexual abuse may also include non-contact activities, such as being made to look at or watch something or being encouraged to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

Financial and Material

This may involve illegal or improper use of a person's property, money or other assets without their informed consent or where the consent is obtained by fraud. It can include exploiting someone's financial position e.g. abuse of the responsibility to look after someone else's money such as an unexplained withdrawal from a person's bank account, intentionally mismanaging finances, withholding money or possessions, borrowing money and not repaying, theft of money or property.

Neglect

Neglect is a failure to meet a person's basic physical and psychological needs. It may involve:

- the failure to provide adequate food, drink, shelter, heating, clothing
- failing to provide access to health, social and educational services
- ignoring physical care needs
- failure to get appropriate medical care or treatment

- exposing a person to unacceptable risk
- failing to ensure adequate supervision or the neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, the basic emotional needs of a child.

Discriminatory

This may involve abuse motivated by oppressive and discriminate attitudes and behaviour due to age, ethnicity, disability, marital status, race, religion, sexual orientation or gender.

Institutional

This is the mistreatment of people brought about by poor or inadequate care or support, or systematic poor practice that affects the whole care setting. It occurs when the individual's wishes and needs are sacrificed for the smooth running of a group, service or organisation.

Signs of abuse

There are many possible signs of abuse, none being conclusive on their own. Examples include:

- Unexplained injury/weight loss/cuts and bruises/dirtiness
- Changes in behaviour
- Depression/low self-esteem
- Lack of self-care/dehydration/abnormal eating pattern
- Harm to self
- Obsessive behaviour
- Bills not being paid
- An overly critical or disrespectful carer who may bully or undermine
- Isolation from usual network of friends, family or community

Responding to concerns and allegations

A safeguarding concern arises if abuse is suspected or disclosed. Abuse can happen anywhere – at home, in a residential or nursing home, a hospital, in the workplace, at a day centre or educational establishment or in the street.

Where a disclosure is made by a child or vulnerable adult it is important that you do not promise to keep the information secret but tell them that you will only disclose it to someone who can help them.

We all have a responsibility to report any safeguarding concerns over the welfare of children and vulnerable adults. This extends to the identification of signs of abuse; poor practice by staff, councillors and others acting for or on behalf of the Council, and allegations brought to our attention by a member of the public. Reporting safeguarding concerns can prevent serious abuse or harm from happening, or from escalating.

If a person discloses abuse to you:

- Allow the person to speak without interruption, accepting what is said, but DO NOT investigate.
- Alleviate feelings of guilt and isolation, while passing no judgement. Reassure them that they did the right thing by talking to you.
- Advise that you will try to offer support, but that you MUST pass the information on.
- Record the facts as you know them.

- Refer the allegation immediately to the Town Clerk. If the Town Clerk is implicated or unavailable, refer to the Assistant Clerk **and** Mayor. All allegations must be referred, no matter how insignificant they seem to be, or when they occur.
- Try to ensure them that no-one is placed in a position which could cause further compromise.

Action to be taken by the person receiving the referral as soon as possible, in any event within 24 hours:

- Write down notes, dates, times, facts, observations, verbatim speech, if possible, as soon as possible after the incident or disclosure has occurred.
- Ensure correct details are available: young person's/vulnerable adult's name and address, and the name and address of their parent or guardian.
- Immediately contact the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub. Ask for the name of the person you are speaking with. 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 from the Safeguarding Board. Every effort should be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned.
- Information should be stored in a secure place with limited access to designated people, in line with data protection legislation.
- Follow advice from the Safeguarding Board. Take no other action unless advised to do so by the Board.

Staff, councillors and volunteers must not attempt to investigate abuse themselves; neither must they confront anyone who is allegedly responsible for abuse nor tell them that allegations have been made about them. However, staff, elected members and volunteers do have a duty of care to the child or vulnerable adult to report any suspicions they may have.

The officer responsible for receipt of concerns and forwarding them on is the Town Clerk, or the Assistant Clerk **and** Mayor in the Town Clerks absence. If neither of these officers are available, do not wait for him/her to return to work.

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

All employees, volunteers and councillors are encouraged to share concerns with the Town Clerk. The Town Clerk will, if appropriate, make the necessary referral.

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

- (a) Unexplained or suspicious injuries, e.g. bites or bruising.
- (b) An injury for which the explanation seems inconsistent, or which has not been treated adequately.
- (c) Change in behaviour, including becoming withdrawn, or becoming aggressive.
- (d) Displaying inappropriate sexual awareness for their age.
- (e) Refusal to remove clothing for normal activities, e.g. swimming.

- (f) Looking neglected in appearance.
- (g) Losing or putting on weight for no apparent reason.
- (h) Lack of trust in adults.

Contact Details

The following should be contacted to report safeguarding allegations or concerns.

Town Clerk Assistant Town Clerk/ Mayor	Okehampton Town Council Town Hall Fore Street Okehampton EX20 1AA 01837 53179	townclerk@okehampton.gov.uk 07477 916922 admin@okehampton.gov.uk 07477 917377
Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)	If you are concerned about a child	Enquiry – 01392 388362 Referral - 0345 1551071
Care Direct	if you suspect a vulnerable adult is being abused	0845 1551007
Devon and Cornwall Police		Tel: 101 (in an emergency contact via 999/112)
Care Quality Commission	You should contact the social care department at the appropriate local authority if you are concerned about a child or a vulnerable adult. If you cannot get through to your council, you can call the CQC	03000 616161 enquiries@cqc.org.uk
NSPCC	Help for adults concerned about a child. Help for children and young people.	0808 800 5000 0800 1111

Safeguarding allegations or concerns should be reported at the earliest opportunity and at least within 24 hours.

Dial 999 if a child or vulnerable adult may be in imminent danger or a criminal offence may have been committed.

The Police or relevant agency will need as much factual information as possible. For example

- The child or vulnerable adult's name and address (and parent/carer's address if different)
- The reason for concern – a note of significant events or conversations should be made as promptly as possible to assist with any referral and subsequent investigation
- Any other known factors, which may be contributing to the problem.
- Additional information such as age (or date of birth), ethnicity, religion, language and disabilities/specific needs.

However, the safeguarding concern should still be reported whether or not the information is complete.

The Council is committed to maintaining an open culture where employees, councillors, volunteers, children, vulnerable persons, and all other persons feel able to express concerns both about safeguarding and issues of poor practice.

In addition to the procedures outlined in this policy, the Council's Whistleblowing Policy and Complaints Policy and Procedure are available to all staff, volunteers, councillors and the general public.

Confidentiality

Every effort should be made to ensure confidentiality is maintained for all concerned. Information should be handled and disseminated on a need-to-know basis only.

It is extremely important that allegations or concerns are not discussed, as any breach of confidentiality could be damaging to the child or vulnerable adult, their family and any child protection investigation that may follow.

Allegations against a councillor, member of staff or volunteer If someone witnesses behaviour by a councillor, member of staff, volunteer, contractor or partner, or an allegation is made about them that indicates that they have, or may have;

- harmed a child or vulnerable adult, or put them at risk,
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child or vulnerable adult or
- behaved in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children or a vulnerable adult,

they must report it as a safeguarding concern at the earliest possible opportunity.

A councillor or member of staff must report any allegation made against them to the Clerk or Mayor.

Safeguarding concerns and allegations relating to staff will be dealt with in accordance with the Council's Disciplinary Procedure. However, investigations by the responsible authorities will take precedence over internal council procedures relating to conduct. The Town Clerk will liaise with the responsible authorities to agree the appropriate course of action.

The Town Clerk will seek advice from the Police and/or Devon County Council Child and Adult Services prior to informing a member of staff of an allegation against them. The Clerk will offer appropriate welfare support to the member of staff and ensure that they are kept appropriately informed during any investigation process.

In accordance with the law, the Council will report to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), any Councillor, member of staff or volunteer

- who was dismissed because they harmed a child or vulnerable adult;
- who was dismissed or removed from working in a regulated activity because they might have harmed a child or vulnerable adult otherwise;
- who would have been dismissed for either of these reason, but they resigned first; or
- who works with children or vulnerable adults in regulated activity and has been cautioned or convicted for a relevant offence.

Safeguarding concerns and allegations relating to Councillors will be referred to the monitoring Officer and dealt with in accordance with the Code of Conduct of Members of the Council.

Recruitment and selection

Criminal records checks will be made where appropriate.

Roles that involve “regulated activities,” such as caring for, supervising or being in sole charge of children or vulnerable adults, require an Enhanced Disclosure and Barring service (DBS) check. This may include checking whether someone is included in the two DBS ‘barred lists’ of individuals who are unsuitable for working with children and adults. DBS checks must be obtained for staff and volunteers undertaking these roles and they will not be permitted to commence unaccompanied work until they have been received. It is against the law for employers to employ someone or allow them to volunteer for this kind of work if they know they are on one of the barred lists.

Codes of Practice and Behaviour

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

The guidelines apply to those working with vulnerable persons or children involved in activities organised by or on behalf of Okehampton Town Council or services provided by the Council.

You 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 you 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 young people to talk to others about any concerns they may have.
- Encourage young people and adults to feel comfortable and caring enough to point out attitudes or behaviours they do not like.
- Remember that someone else might misinterpret your actions, no matter how well intentioned.
- Recognise that special caution is required when you are 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/suspensions of abuse.

You 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 do things that are potentially dangerous, illegal or otherwise unreasonable.
- Exaggerate or trivialise abuse issues.
- Show favouritism to any individual.
- Rely on just your good name to protect you.
- 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.

Information and training

Appropriate information will be made available to staff and councillors in the form of this policy.

External organisations licenced by, or working with, for or on behalf of the Council

The Council works with and through a number of external organisations such as charities, contractors and other public sector bodies etc.

Where these external organisations are likely to have significant contact with children, or vulnerable adults as a direct result of their work for, on behalf of, or in partnership with the Council, they are required to have safeguarding procedures, such as safe recruitment and selection processes, in place.

Policy Monitoring and Revision

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

This policy will be reviewed every two years and will also be revised in the light of changing needs, changes in legislation and guidance, or in the light of experience.