

SAFEGUARDING VULNERABLE ADULTS POLICY

1. Introduction

‘Safeguarding means protecting an adult’s right to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect. It is about people and organisations working together to prevent and stop both the risks and experience of abuse or neglect, while at the same time making sure that the adult’s wellbeing is promoted including, where appropriate, having regard to their views, wishes, feelings and beliefs in deciding on any action. This must recognise that adults sometimes have complex interpersonal relationships and may be ambivalent, unclear or unrealistic about their personal circumstances.’

Care and Support Statutory Guidance, Department of Health, updated February 2017

This policy is about safeguarding vulnerable adults. For safeguarding children please refer to the separate Welcare policy on Safeguarding and Child Protection.

This policy should also be read in conjunction with the Mental Capacity Policy.

The safety and welfare of vulnerable adults is of the utmost importance. It is the duty of all staff and volunteers to protect vulnerable adults from abuse and to be alert to the possibility of abuse. Staff and volunteers should familiarise themselves with the relevant Local Authority’s procedures on safeguarding vulnerable adults, in particular, the document “A Guide for Frontline Staff and Volunteers”.

Some service users who may be additionally vulnerable are those who may have been in the looked after system and are now a care leaver and people who as a child have experienced child sexual exploitation.

2. Principles and Definitions

The Care Act 2014 provides the legislative framework for this policy. The Act is designed to provide a clear framework for how organisations working with vulnerable people should protect adults at risk of abuse or neglect.

The six principles of the Act are:

- Empowerment
- Protection
- Prevention
- Proportionality
- Partnership
- Accountability

Vulnerable adults are people over 18, who are in need of care and unable to protect themselves because of:

- a mental or learning disability
- a physical disability
- age or illness

Some service users who may be additionally vulnerable include:

- those who may have been in the looked after system and are now a care leaver and have returned to live with family
- people who, as a child, experienced child sexual exploitation

People who abuse:

- are often well known to their victims but can be strangers
- might be a relative, partner, son or daughter, friend or neighbour, a paid or voluntary worker, or a health or social care worker
- could be another vulnerable adult or service user
- may not realise they are abusing and can sometimes act out of character and abuse because of the stress of caring

Abuse can take place in a wide range of settings such as:

- the vulnerable adult's own home
- a Welcare centre
- a day centre
- a children's centre
- a hospital
- the workplace
- educational institutions
- in the community

3. Recognition

The most common types of abuse are:

Physical abuse: this is usually the use of force to cause pain and injury. Signs might include burns, bruising, scratches or accidents that cannot be explained. Also included is the misuse of medication or forcing someone, for example, to stay in a care home against their wishes.

Neglect: this is when a vulnerable adult does not have their basic needs met, such as adequate food or warmth or help with personal hygiene. Signs might include deteriorating health, appearance or mood.

Financial abuse: this is when a vulnerable adult is exploited for financial gain. Often valuables will go missing or there may be a change in financial circumstances that cannot be explained.

Sexual abuse: this includes rape and sexual assault or sexual acts to which the vulnerable adult has not or could not consent or was pressurised or manipulated. Signs can include changes in behaviour or physical discomfort. This is particularly relevant for adults who have recently turned 18 and were previously considered to be at risk or were being sexually exploited.

Psychological abuse: this might be emotional abuse such as threats of harm or abandonment, enforced isolation, blaming or controlling behaviour or verbal and racial insults. Signs may be fear, confusion or disturbed sleep.

Discriminatory abuse: this includes any sort of abuse based on a vulnerable adult's race, gender or impairment such as their mental or physical health.

Institutional abuse: this is poor professional practice, including neglect, and can take the form of isolated incidents right through to ill treatment or gross misconduct.

4. Action to be taken

It is the responsibility of all staff to report abuse.

- If the vulnerable adult is in immediate danger, first ensure they are safe and if immediate help is needed, call the emergency services on 999
- If abuse is discovered or suspected, the abuse must in all cases be reported at the earliest opportunity to Adult Social Care.

Then follow the detailed reporting procedure set out below. Action will then be taken to ensure the vulnerable adult is protected in the future. Staff who abuse will be dealt with through Welcare's disciplinary procedures. Where appropriate the police will be informed.

Procedure

- Only ask the person sufficient questions to establish what has happened e.g., accident or possible abuse.
- Inform your Line Manager or other senior member of staff at the earliest opportunity
- If danger exists, ensure the person and any other vulnerable adults are protected.
- If the person is seriously injured seek immediate medical treatment. Immediately report the incident to your line manager and adhere to existing policies e.g., Health and Safety and to the relevant Local Authority's Adult Protection Procedures.
- Be careful not to destroy or contaminate evidence.
- As soon as possible detailed notes should be made including when and to whom in the Local Authority's Adult Social Care Department the abuse has been reported.
- Documentation is vital as evidence might be required for criminal proceedings at a later date.

If the suspected abuser is a member of staff, the matter will be dealt with through Welcare's disciplinary procedure. The police could be involved and the member of staff could be suspended pending an investigation.

In making a decision whether to refer or not, the designated safeguarding lead should take into account:

- (1) the adult's wishes and preferred outcome
- (2) whether the adult has mental capacity to make an informed decision about their own and others' safety the safety or wellbeing of children or other adults with care and support needs
- (3) whether there is a person in a position of trust involved
- (4) whether a crime has been committed

This should inform the decision whether to notify the concern to the following people:

- the police if a crime has been committed and/or
- the relevant person in the local authority (part of adult social services) for a possible safeguarding enquiry
- relevant regulatory bodies such as Care Quality Commission, Ofsted, Charities commission
- service commissioning teams
- family/relatives as appropriate (seek advice from adult social services)

The designated safeguarding lead should keep a record of the reasons for referring the concern or reasons for not referring.

Incidents of abuse may be one-off or multiple and may affect one person or more. Staff and volunteers should look beyond single incidents to identify patterns of harm. Accurate recording of information will also assist in recognising any patterns.

As soon as Adult Social Services becomes involved, a 4-stage safeguarding adults process is followed.

5. Section 42: Reporting procedures for cases of alleged/suspected abuse

Section 42 of the Care Act 2014 governs the reporting and investigation of concerns about abuse or neglect of vulnerable adults by relevant agencies and professionals. In effect Section 42 investigations are the equivalent of Section 47 investigations in respect of children and young people.

The main objective of Section 42 is to improve the independence and well-being of adults by:

- Establishing the facts of any particular case
- Taking into account the views of wishes of adults regarding potential outcomes
- Assessing the adults needs and the support /redress they may need to protect themselves of other persons from a risk of harm.

Key personnel in the Local Authority

1. Safeguarding Adults Manager
2. Safeguarding Enquiry Practitioners who carry out investigations

6. Confidentiality

People have the right to expect that all staff and volunteers will deal sensitively and sympathetically with their situation. It is important that information remains confidential and that information should only be shared on a “need to know” basis.

7. Safe Recruitment Procedures

Welcare’s recruitment policy stipulates that all paid staff will have to complete an application form detailing past work history and references. Individuals are interviewed and references requested. Only on receipt of satisfactory references will a formal offer of employment be made.

All staff and volunteers working directly and having regular, sustained contact with vulnerable adults are required to have an enhanced check through the Disclosure and Barring Service before commencement of work or activity. If necessary, additional risk assessments will be conducted.

8. Board Level Responsibility

In line with policy and good practice, the Chair of the Services Committee shall provide the lead at Board level on all safeguarding matters. This responsibility shall include ensuring that the safeguarding policies are fully implemented, understood, adhered to and monitored throughout the organisation. In providing this overview, the Chair shall be prepared to challenge and hold to account staff on any aspect of this policy.