

# LONGHORSLEY PARISH COUNCIL

## CHILD PROTECTION and VULNERABLE PERSONS SAFEGUARDING POLICY

### **Policy**

The purpose of this policy is to make clear to all members, staff, volunteers and contractors what is required in relation to the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults. Children, young people and vulnerable adults have the right to participate, have fun and be safe in the services provided for them and the activities they choose, or their parents / carers choose for them. This policy will help to maintain a safe and positive environment for children and vulnerable adults.

### **Policy Coverage**

This policy applies to all members, employees, volunteers and contractors working in partnership with Longhorsley Parish Council (LPC). It is not the role of LPC to investigate allegations of abuse. However, all members, employees, volunteers and contracted services providers 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.

The phrase 'children, young people and vulnerable adults' refers to:

- a) anyone under the age of 18 years,
- b) someone who is over the age of 18 who is, or may be 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 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.

### **Policy Principles**

LPC recognises that all children and vulnerable adults have an equal right to protection from abuse. It is committed to safeguarding children and vulnerable adults and protecting them from abuse when they are engaged in services organised and provided by, or on behalf of, LPC.

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

LPC will not tolerate the harassment of any member, employee, volunteer, contracted service provider or child/vulnerable adult who raises concerns of abuse.

## **Policy Statement**

LPC is committed to taking all reasonable precautions to safeguard the welfare of children and vulnerable persons that use its services and will promote a safeguarding culture and environment.

- it will endeavour to keep children and vulnerable adults safe from abuse
- suspicion of abuse will be responded to promptly and appropriately
- it will act in the best interests of the child or vulnerable adult at all times
- it will proactively seek to promote the welfare and protection of all children and vulnerable adults living in the local community
- it will endeavour to ensure that unsuitable people are prevented from working with children and vulnerable adults through, as appropriate, its recruitment and selection policy (using DBS where appropriate).
- it will take any concern made by a member, employee, volunteer or contracted service provider or child / vulnerable adult seriously, and treat it with sensitivity.

## **Procedures and Systems**

### **Definitions of Abuse:**

- Abuse covers any form of physical, emotional, mental and sexual abuse including bullying, including lack of care that leads to injury or harm. For vulnerable adults abuse may also be financial.
- Neglect is where people fail to meet a child's or vulnerable person's basic physical / psychological needs and is likely to result in the serious impairment of 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 is where physical pain or injury is caused, e.g., hitting, shaking, biting, etc.
- Sexual Abuse is 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 videoing.
- Emotional / Mental Abuse is where there is persistent emotional ill treatment that causes severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's or vulnerable

person's emotional status e.g., bullying (including cyber and text bullying), constant criticism and unrealistic pressure to perform.

- 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 powerless to report abusive treatment.

### **Use of Video and Photography**

The use of photographs and images of 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.

### **Responding to allegations**

If a person discloses abuse by someone else:

- Stay calm, take the allegation seriously
- 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 □ 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, do not offer to keep secrets.
- Record the facts as you know them.
- Refer the allegation immediately and directly to the appropriate person. If an employee or volunteer is implicated, refer to the Clerk.
- If the Clerk is implicated, refer to the Council Chairman. All allegations must be referred, no matter how insignificant they seem to be, or when they occur.
- Try to ensure that no-one is placed in a position which could cause further compromise.

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

- Write down notes, dates, times, facts, observations, and verbatim speech.
- Ensure the correct details are available, the young person's / vulnerable adult's
- name and address, and the name and address of their parent or guardian.
- Immediately contact the Social Services Department at Northumberland CC. 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.
- With the Clerk prepare a confidential file. Record all notes, conversations and advice from Social Services. Every effort should be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned.

- The Clerk will store this information in a secure place with limited access to designated people, in line with data protection legislation.
- Follow the advice from Social Services; take no other action unless advised to do so by Social Services.

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

All members, staff employees, volunteers and organisations contracted to provide services on behalf of LPC are encouraged to share concerns with the Clerk. The 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 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 in appearance, dirty or ‘smelly’
- constant hunger, sometimes stealing food from others
- fear of parents or carers being approached for an explanation
- neurotic behaviour e.g., hair twisting, rocking
- self-harm

**Confidentiality**

Members, staff, volunteers and contracted service providers 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 Clerk so that appropriate risk assessments may be undertaken.

**Codes of Practice and Behaviour**

These guidelines have been devised to protect children and vulnerable adults from abuse, as well as to protect members, staff and volunteers from situations where false allegations may occur. The guidelines apply to those working with children or vulnerable persons involved in activities organised by or on behalf of LPC. Members, staff 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 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 their actions, no matter how well-intentioned
- Challenge unacceptable behaviour and report all allegations/suspicions of abuse.
- Be identifiable and wear a name badge at all times.

### **Members, staff 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
- 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
- Show favouritism to any individual
- Rely on just their good name to protect them or 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.

LPC takes its responsibility very seriously. Employees 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 their parent organisation (as appropriate) will be informed. If a member does not adhere to the policy, there may be grounds for reporting their behaviour to the Standards Committee, who may require an investigation under the Member Code of Conduct. Where there is evidence of illegal activity, the member, employee or volunteer will be reported to the relevant authorities and may face a criminal investigation.

### **Procedure in Relation to Specific Services**

#### First Aid

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.

### 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 LPC 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 LPC 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.

### **Misuse of Procedure**

Malicious complaints about a member or an 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 LPC's disciplinary process.

### **Policy Monitoring and Review**

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