

## Safeguarding Policy

### 1. General Statement

**Safeguarding** means protecting children, young people and vulnerable adults at risk from harm, abuse and neglect.

Healthwatch Bedford Borough is committed to safeguarding and promoting the dignity, wellbeing and safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults, engaged in the breadth of its activities.

Healthwatch Bedford Borough understands that all children, young people and adults have the right to be safe from harm and should be able to live free from violence and the fear of abuse, maltreatment, neglect and exploitation.

Healthwatch Bedford Borough is also committed to:

- ensuring that abuse is taken seriously and acted upon on the basis of a zero tolerance approach
- raising public awareness of safeguarding and promoting work on the prevention of abuse
- ensuring that directors, staff and volunteers understand their roles and responsibilities, and are provided with appropriate information and training, in respect of safeguarding
- contributing to and applying learning from serious case reviews

### 2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline the duty and responsibility of directors, staff, and volunteers in relation to the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults from abuse, maltreatment and neglect.

The key objectives of this policy are to:

- provide an overview of safeguarding issues
- identify the responsibilities of directors, staff and volunteers in respect of the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults
- ensure that recruitment and selection practices, including pre appointment checking requirements are of the highest standard
- enable directors, staff and volunteers who receive disclosures of, or who observe abuse, to make informed and confident responses to specific protection issues

- ensure that prompt action is taken to minimise the risk of harm occurring from any further abuse, maltreatment or neglect
- provide a clear procedure for reporting and responding to suspicions, concerns or incidents of abuse, maltreatment or neglect

### 3. Scope

This policy relates to all children, young people and vulnerable adults who are Healthwatch Bedford Borough service users and who may be at risk of abuse (including exploitation, neglect, physical and mental abuse).

Some people, including those with physical, sensory and mental impairments and learning disabilities, are less able to protect themselves than others, and some have difficulty making their wishes and feelings known. This may make them vulnerable to abuse.

For the purpose of this policy a *child/young person* is defined as a person under the age of 18. An *adult* is defined as a person aged 18 years or over.

Abuse is defined as a violation of an individual's human and civil rights by any other person or persons.

### 4. Responsibilities

#### Board of Directors

The Healthwatch Bedford Borough Board of Directors has a duty to promote the welfare and safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults. It will manage the policy, taking into account legal requirements, and ensure that it is properly implemented and adequately resourced. The Board of Directors have designated lead responsibility for safeguarding to the Manager and Company Secretary.

#### Staff and Volunteers

All staff and volunteers working with Healthwatch Bedford Borough have a duty to promote the welfare and safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults. It is everybody's responsibility to recognise the signs of, and to report, abuse wherever it is seen, suspected or disclosed. Staff and volunteers must also respond appropriately to any disclosure and take any immediate action necessary to protect any vulnerable person from identified risk of abuse.

### 5. Types of Abuse

Abuse, maltreatment and neglect can be passive or active; it can consist of a single act or repeated acts. It may be physical, verbal or psychological, or it may occur when a vulnerable person is persuaded to enter into a relationship to which he or she has not consented, or cannot consent.

Abuse can vary from treating someone with disrespect in a way that significantly affects the person's quality of life, to causing actual physical suffering or by failing

to prevent harm. It is behaviour towards a person that can be either deliberate or an act of neglect or an omission to act, perhaps as a result of ignorance, or lack of training, knowledge or understanding.

Individuals may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting, by those known to them or, more rarely, by a stranger. Anyone can be a perpetrator of abuse; it could be a paid carer, volunteer or a health or social care worker; a relative, friend, neighbour or an occasional visitor; another resident or service user, or someone who is providing a service.

Children may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children.

The *Working Together to Safeguard Children* guidance published by the Government defines four categories of abuse as follows:

### **Physical Abuse**

This may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces illness in a child.

### **Emotional Abuse**

This is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to a child that they are worthless, unloved or inadequate. It may involve bullying, causing children to feel frightened or in danger.

### **Sexual Abuse**

This type of abuse involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, including prostitution whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. Examples of physical contact include penetrative acts (rape, buggery or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts (kissing, fondling, and masturbation). It may include non-contact activities involving children in looking at or be involved in sexual online images and or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

### **Neglect**

This is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment to the child's health and development. It can include failing to provide adequate food, clothing and shelter, adequate supervision or failing to provide medical help when needed.

Adult abuse can occur in any relationship and it may result in significant harm to, or exploitation of, the person subjected to it.

The Department of Health in its *No Secrets* report suggests the following as the main types of abuse:

### **Physical Abuse**

Including hitting, slapping, pushing, kicking, pushing, rough handling, force feeding, misuse of medication, restraint, or inappropriate sanctions (e.g. deprivation of food, clothing, warmth and healthcare).

### **Sexual Abuse**

Including rape and sexual assault or sexual acts to which the vulnerable adult has not consented, or could not consent or was pressured into consenting.

### **Psychological and Emotional Abuse**

Including emotional abuse, threats of harm or abandonment, deprivation of contact, humiliation, blaming, controlling, intimidation, coercion, harassment, verbal abuse, enforced social isolation or withdrawal from services or supportive networks.

### **Financial or Material Abuse**

Including theft, fraud, exploitation, pressure in connection with wills, property or inheritance or financial transactions, or the misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions or benefits.

### **Neglect and Acts of Omission**

Including ignoring medical or physical care needs, failure to provide access to appropriate health, social care or educational services, the withholding of the necessities of life, such as medication, clothing, adequate nutrition and heating. Failure to give privacy and dignity.

### **Discriminatory Abuse**

Including racist or sexist abuse and abuse based on a person's disability, age or sexuality and other forms of harassment, slurs or similar treatment. Other types of abuse include domestic abuse, honour based violence (perpetrated against someone who is perceived to have brought shame or dishonour on a family or even a community), forced marriages and hate crime incidents.

## **6. Raising Awareness**

Healthwatch Bedford Borough will raise awareness of safeguarding issues by:

- ensuring service users and carers/support workers have access to information about how to raise concerns if they suspect or experience abuse or neglect
- providing individuals with knowledge and understanding so that they will be aware of what is appropriate or inappropriate behaviour towards them, of what constitutes abuse and why
- providing the support that may be necessary to ensure adequate levels of understanding and skills so that rights and responsibilities are recognised and asserted
- ensuring that directors, staff and volunteers are able to recognise poor practice, or abuse and respond appropriately
- raising awareness of how staff and volunteers can use their routine processes (e.g. risk assessments or 'enter and view' visits) to enable people

to acknowledge that they are at risk of abuse, and signpost them to effective support

- promoting relevant advocacy and advisory services to individuals;

## **7 Expectations**

Directors, staff and volunteers are expected to develop trusting and supportive relationships with service users in a professional manner and NOT to misuse the trust that exists between them, in particular with children, young people and vulnerable adults.

Directors, staff and volunteers who meet with children, young people and vulnerable adults on a one to one basis should do so in meeting rooms and confidential space in a neutral, public venue (e.g. another organisation's office, public library, café etc.). Meetings should NOT take place at a service user's home without the explicit permission of the Manager and Company Secretary. This will be in circumstances where meeting in a public venue is not possible (e.g. where the person has a disability, is unable to travel or there are no suitable facilities).

If, when meeting an individual at their home, staff and volunteers are concerned for the wellbeing of a vulnerable person they should report their concerns to the Manager and Company Secretary.

## **8 Procedure in the Event of a Disclosure**

It is important that children, young people and vulnerable adults are protected from abuse. All complaints, allegations or suspicions must be taken seriously, including those received anonymously. This procedure must be followed whenever an allegation of abuse is made or when there is a suspicion of abuse.

**Step 1 - Make sure the individual is safe** - If the person is in immediate danger, the police or ambulance must be called straight away on 999. Ensure prompt action is taken to minimise the risk of harm from any further abuse, maltreatment or neglect; this is particularly important if:

- the person remains in or is about to return to the place where the alleged abuse occurred
- the alleged abuser is likely to have access to the person or others who might be at risk

**Step 2 - Ascertain and establish the basic facts** - based on evidence of what is seen or heard and to make careful notes, clearly distinguishing fact from opinion.

**Step 3 - Report the disclosure** to the Manager and Company Secretary immediately or as soon as possible within one working day. In the first instance this may need to be done verbally.

**Step 4 - Make a full record** of the disclosure, allegation or incident, using the relevant Safeguarding Alert Form as soon as possible, within one working day.

**Step 5 - Provide ongoing support** to the individual, particularly if the person has felt able to confide in you. Your role will be to continue to offer help and support without directly asking questions or seeking opinions from the person. You may also be asked to attend a case conference to report on what the person disclosed.

Advice for Healthwatch Bedford Borough representative:

Please remain calm - do not show shock or disbelief.

- make sure the individual is safe
- assess whether emergency services are required and if needed call them
- listen carefully to what is being said and record it in detail
- questions should be kept to the minimum necessary to understand what is being alleged
- take all necessary precautions to preserve and protect forensic evidence
- offer sympathetic support and reassurance by acknowledging regret and concern for what has happened; that it was not their fault and they were right to tell you
- confirm that the information will be treated seriously
- explain that you must inform your Manager and that the Safeguarding Team at Bedford Borough Council
- give the person contact details so that they can report any further issues or ask any questions that may arise
- remember the need for ongoing support; signpost the individual who is being abused to appropriate sources of advice and support
- do not ignore or disbelieve the allegation or dismiss what you see or have been told

Do not:

- be judgmental or voice your own opinion
- investigate or interview beyond that which is necessary to establish the basic facts
- press the person for more details
- stop someone who is freely recalling significant events, as they may not tell anyone again
- ask leading questions (e.g. suggesting names of who may have perpetrated abuse if the person does not disclose it)
- assume information
- disturb or destroy possible forensic evidence (e.g. clean a person or area involved)
- interview or consult others not directly involved with the situation
- promise to keep secrets; but do explain that the information will only be passed to those who need to know
- make promises that you cannot keep (such as "this will not happen to you again")
- confront or contact the alleged abuser, or anyone who might be in touch with them
- elaborate in your notes

## 8. Recording Concerns and Disclosures

It is important to ascertain and establish the basic facts, based on evidence of what is seen/heard and to make careful notes, clearly distinguishing fact from opinion.

A full record of the disclosure, allegation or incident must be recorded as soon as possible and always on the same day, using the relevant Safeguarding Alert Form, where possible

Write in black ink so that documents can be photocopied if necessary. If you make a mistake, put a line through it - do not use correction fluid. Sign the report, date and time it. Be aware that the report may be required later as part of legal action or disciplinary procedure and that you may need to appear at a hearing or court.

In the record that you make please write down:

- the name of the person making the disclosure and, where different, the name of the child, young person or vulnerable adult who has allegedly been abused
- where and when disclosure was made, including date, time and the names of others present
- when the alleged abuse took place, including date(s) and time(s).
- the place where the alleged abuse happened
- whether anybody else was present when the alleged abuse took place or was involved in the abuse, including any issues about the mental capacity of those involved in the disclosure at the time of the incident
- the account that has been given of the allegation, including known events leading up to the alleged abuse, the nature of the abuse and the impacts of that abuse
- exactly what the person said (e.g. if an individual says "he touched me down there" write this down accurately
- a description of any injuries observed and use the body maps on the Safeguarding Alert Form to record shape, colour and location of bruises or injuries
- details about the alleged perpetrator; this should include their name and address (where known), the relationship to the alleged victim, their role and the organisation for whom they work, and whether they pose a risk of further abuse to other vulnerable people or children.
- what immediate actions were taken to protect the victim, the perpetrator if a vulnerable person and any other vulnerable people

Records of concerns and disclosures of abuse held by Healthwatch Bedford Borough should remain strictly confidential. It may be appropriate to store electronically, suitably protected by password access.

## 9. Confidentiality and Information Sharing

Where a disclosure has been made and suitably recorded, the person making the disclosure should be informed that formal contact will be made with the designated Safeguarding Team at Bedford Borough Council.



The Safeguarding Team will consider the wishes of the person making the disclosure. In particular, whether they consent to the matter being progressed further. There will be circumstances where an investigation may have to progress even if consent is not given.

If the person making the disclosure or any other person requests that a concern is not investigated, it must be made clear that referral to the Safeguarding Team will always be made to enable them to undertake a risk assessment and to verify whether there is a legal duty to act. The individual should be told that they will be fully consulted about further action at the point of the initial safeguarding visit. Their wishes will be respected unless there are other considerations that override those wishes.

### 10. Reporting an Allegation to the Local Authority

Any suspicion, allegation or incident of abuse must be reported to the designated Safeguarding Team at Bedford Borough Council as soon as practicable.

Where there is uncertainty on whether to report or not or there is any doubt, for example, the vulnerability of the person is uncertain, please contact the designated Safeguarding Team at Bedford Borough Council for their early advice.

**If someone is at immediate risk of harm - telephone 999 for the Police**

Bedford Borough Council	Adult Safeguarding Team	Children/Young People Safeguarding Team
Telephone	01234 276222	01234 718700
Out of office hours	0300 300 8123	0300 300 8123
email	adult.protection@bedford.gov.uk	multiagency@bedford.gov.uk
Address	Bedford Borough Council Borough Hall Cauldwell Street Bedford MK 42 9AP	Bedford Borough Council Borough Hall Cauldwell Street Bedford MK 42 9AP

In the case of reporting an allegation concerning a child or young person an appropriate Multi Agency Support Hub (MASH) form is available from [MASH \(Multi Agency Support Hub\) using the Enquiry Form](#)

**Please remember:**

**Safeguarding is the responsibility of everyone and they should know who to contact and how to contact them if they are concerned.**

**It is not your responsibility to decide whether or not abuse is occurring - BUT it is your responsibility to act on your concerns and report it accordingly.**

***“A strong voice for local people”***