



Safeguarding Children & Young People Policy

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Southern Housing takes all concerns and allegations of abuse, neglect and harm seriously. Safeguarding¹ means protecting a person'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 ensuring the person's wellbeing is promoted.
- 1.2 We know abuse against people occurs in society, and individuals from all communities may be at risk of abuse. We recognise there are children and vulnerable young people who live in our properties and receive services from us who may be at risk of abuse.
- 1.3 Abuse can take many different forms. It may occur via neglect of an individual, by inflicting harm, or failing to act to prevent harm. It is behaviour that either deliberately or unknowingly causes harm, endangers life, or infringes on rights.
- 1.4 A key aspect of the statutory framework is 'making safeguarding personal'. This means we work with individuals to decide outcomes, actions and timescales, as the focus is on the person, not the process.
- 1.5 This Policy applies to:
 - Residents
 - Household members
 - People receiving a service from us who are not our residents
 - Southern Housing employees
 - Board members
 - Committee members
 - Those working with us and for us, for example, agency staff members, volunteers and apprentices.

¹ Definition of Safeguarding as outlined in the [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023](#) statutory guidance

2.0 Overview

- 2.1 In accordance with the [Children's Act 2004](#), [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023](#) and [Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006](#), we are committed to maintaining safeguarding policies and procedures, implemented by knowledgeable and trained staff.
- 2.2 Our primary role as 'alerters' is to report safeguarding concerns to the local authority and/or multi agency partners.
- 2.3 In meeting the standards our regulators, commissioners, residents and customers expect, this Policy is based on the NSPCC's first-check guide (2006) and conforms to both the:
- National Minimum Standards and the
 - Quality Assessment Framework (QAF).
- 2.4 In accordance with the above guidance, it's possible such children and young people may be:
- Residents in their own right
 - The children of residents
 - Visitors to any of our properties or premises
 - Directly receiving a care and support service from us.
- 2.5 The guidance also defines safeguarding children as:
- Protecting children from maltreatment
 - Preventing impairment of children's health or development
 - Ensuring children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care
 - Taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.
- 2.6 This Policy reminds all professionals who come into contact with children and young people of these two principles:
- **Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility:** for services to be effective each professional and organisation should play their full part
 - **A child-centred approach:** for services to be effective they should be based on a clear understanding of the needs and views of children.

3.0 Definitions

- 3.1 A government guidance document [Working Together to Safeguard Children \(2023\)](#) states *'a child is anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people'.*

3.2 Abuse

For this Policy, we define abuse as 'the violation of an individual's human

and civil rights by another person or persons’.

Abuse is behaviour that either deliberately or unknowingly causes harm or endangers life or infringes on rights. It may be:

- A single or repeated act
- Deliberate neglect or a lack of appropriate action
- Where the person is persuaded to do something they have not consented to or cannot consent to.

3.3 Abuse causes harm or distress to a person and is often a crime. It often occurs where there is an expectation of trust.

3.4 Abuse can happen to anyone, abuse cannot be excused for any cultural or religious reason and should always be reported.

3.5 **Children affected by domestic abuse**

The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) defines domestic abuse as occurring where the victim and perpetrator are over 16 years of age. Abusive behaviour directed at a person under 16 years of age would be dealt with as child abuse rather than domestic abuse.

However, the Act defines a child as a victim of domestic abuse if:

- They see, hear, or experience the effects of domestic abuse
- They are related to a person carrying out domestic abuse or the victim of domestic abuse.

The Act defines a child being related to a person if the:

- Person is a parent of, or has parental responsibility for, the child, or the
- Child and the person are relatives.

4.0 **Aims of Policy**

4.1 The aims of this Policy are to make sure we:

- Prevent harm and reduce the risk of abuse or neglect to children and young people
- Protect staff, volunteers, contractors, and agents who have a responsibility towards children and young people
- Raise awareness of the different types of abuse and signs to look out for
- Raise awareness of the action we'll take on suspecting, witnessing, or discovering abuse or inappropriate conduct
- Provide information and support in accessible ways to help people understand the different types of abuse, how to stay safe, and what to do to raise a concern about the safety or wellbeing of a child or young person
- Recognise and respect cultural and ethnic diversity
- Work in partnership with multi agency partners around safeguarding

- Work in line with our safeguarding partners' policies and procedures.

4.2 We will achieve our aims by:

- Protecting the rights of individuals at risk, and treating them with respect and dignity at all times
- Ensuring when in contact with people at risk, appropriately trained staff carry out all necessary health and safety risk assessments
- Ensuring our safeguarding lead provides clear lines of accountability for reporting abuse
- Working within, and keeping up to date with, government legislation, guidance, and regulation
- Having a safeguarding team in place to oversee strategic objectives for safeguarding.

5.0 Roles and responsibilities

- 5.1 While safeguarding responsibility sits with all staff, there are clear individual and team responsibilities too.
- 5.2 All staff, Board and Committee members, volunteers, agents, and contractors are responsible for understanding the different types of abuse and reporting concerns or suspected abuse.
- 5.3 All departmental managers are responsible for ensuring safeguarding matters are reported and safeguarding is effectively managed within their areas of responsibility.
- 5.4 We have a designated strategic lead on safeguarding, supported by a Safeguarding Team.
- 5.5 Our services provide a safe and secure environment for children. We will support children with:
- Engaging with services.
 - Having their voice heard; and
 - Resisting abuse and inappropriate behaviours

Our levels of involvement may be different depending on the services we are providing. Where these levels of support are not provided within our services, we will support children to access support from other agencies and make any appropriate referrals.

- 5.6 We are committed to identifying, recording, and responding to the needs of our customers wherever possible. We will do this by:
- Making referrals to, and working with, local authorities
 - Signposting and working with relevant support agencies
 - Facilitating or carrying out aids and adaptations where required
 - Keeping the person updated and involved
 - Monitoring and reviewing support action plans as necessary

- Working with families to promote an understanding of, and commitment to, the welfare of children
- Assisting them in building and maintaining satisfying relationships with peers and adults.

- 5.7 The Safeguarding Team, via the Executive Team, is responsible for making sure lessons learnt are communicated to all relevant staff. Where necessary, supporting policies, procedures, and guidance will be amended.
- 5.8 Safeguarding reports will be provided on a quarterly basis to senior managers across the organisation. As a minimum, six-monthly reports will be provided to the Executive Team, together with an annual report to the Board.

6.0 Reporting concerns – residents

- 6.1 We record all safeguarding reports and alerts relating to our residents and people receiving a service from us who are not our residents, on a central database.
- 6.2 We must report safeguarding concerns to the relevant local authority. Local authorities are the decision makers in relation to safeguarding children.
- 6.3 Our staff will always:
- Listen to children
 - Value and respect children as individuals, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, disability, or sexual identity
 - As appropriate, involve children in decision-making processes
 - Empower customers with the necessary information to make informed decisions.
- 6.4 We will raise awareness of how to report safeguarding concerns and the support we can offer to residents.
- 6.5 If a resident, or non-resident is concerned about a child or young person, they can contact us directly to inform us and for support and guidance.

7.0 Reporting a concern – non-residents

- 7.1 We take any concerns raised about our staff, Board and Committee members, volunteers, agents, or contractors very seriously.
- 7.2 If a member of staff suspects someone is being abused by another member of staff, they should report their concerns in line with our People policies.
- 7.3 We will address any allegations of or suspected abuse by our employees through formal statutory investigative procedures and our own internal disciplinary procedures.
- 7.4 If we become aware of staff who are alleged perpetrators of abuse from people living in the community, a third party or another statutory agency, we can take appropriate action in line with our People policies.

- 7.5 If a staff member is concerned for a non-resident using our services or a member of the public they should report the concerns to the relevant local authority.
- 7.6 Any allegation we receive relating to a contractor or person working on our behalf may result in their immediate suspension from our contract. The suspension will remain in place pending the outcome of any investigation. We reserve the right to permanently exclude the operative or agent from our contract following the outcome of the investigation.
- 7.7 We will protect the anonymity of people who report concerns of abuse. If the concern relates to significant harm or a criminal act we may need to share the details of the witness or person reporting their concerns with appropriate professionals. We will work sensitively with any person reporting concerns to support them throughout the investigation process.

8.0 Escalating concerns

- 8.1 If there is a case involving death or serious harm to a child or vulnerable young person living in our properties or receiving a service from us that could lead to reputational, financial or regulatory risk, the Safeguarding Team will immediately alert the Executive Team.

- 8.2 The Executive Team will report to Board where there have been:

- Incidents of significant abuse reported to statutory agencies that may lead to reputational, regulatory, or financial detriment
- Safeguarding allegations made against an employee.

All reports going to Board will be anonymised to hide the identities of those involved.

- 8.3 Concerns can also be escalated through safeguarding board local authority procedures.

9.0 Information sharing

- 9.1 When sharing information about people, we will comply with the [Data Protection Policy](#).

- 9.2 We are permitted to share information with an appropriate agency where there are overriding and serious concerns about the risk to an individual's health or personal safety. An amendment in 2005 to Section 115 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 also provides Registered Providers with the power to disclose information to, and request information from, relevant authorities where it will work towards reducing crime and anti-social behaviour.

- 9.3 Working in partnership with statutory and other relevant agencies is a key element of investigations into suspected abuse. It may not be applicable to gain consent from the children or young person, although in some cases the guardian will be informed.

9.4 However, where there is a concern the child or young person may be suffering or is at risk of abuse or neglect, their safety must be the over-riding priority. Information must be shared with statutory authorities where there is any indication of abuse. The following points must be considered as part of this process:

- We will explain openly and honestly to the guardian, or person if aged 16 and over:
 - what information we have to give statutory authorities and any other third parties
 - who we'll tell
 - how we'll tell them.
- We won't share information with other non-statutory third parties where it would increase the risk to the victim or undermine the prevention, detection, or prosecution of a crime
- Information shared must be accurate and up-to-date, necessary for the purpose for which it is being shared and shared only with those who need to know.

9.5 Our staff must respect confidentiality at all times and not share any information given in confidence unless justified by the assessed risk to the person or required by law.

10.0 Mental capacity – aged 16 and over

10.1 The [Mental Capacity Act \(2005\)](#) was created to enable people receiving support to make their own decisions, and to offer protection for those individuals charged with making decisions on the behalf of those lacking capacity.

The Act has five main principles:

- Every person has the right to make their own decisions unless it can be shown they are incapable of doing so
- People should be supported to make their own decisions where possible
- A person has the right to make decisions even if others regard the decisions made as being inappropriate. A decision deemed as inappropriate does not in itself mean the person should be deemed incapable.
- A person making decisions on the behalf of someone lacking capacity must do so in their best interests
- Decisions made by a third party on behalf of someone lacking capacity should always be the option which is least restrictive on their basic rights and freedoms.

10.2 Where staff have concerns about a resident or person receiving a service from us who is not our resident, or their ability to make an informed decision relating to an abuse allegation or concerns around abuse, we must:

- Request a mental capacity assessment takes place
- Ensure advocacy is provided where necessary.

Where the person at risk has an allocated social worker or care coordinator, they should be contacted in the first instance.

11.0 Safe recruitment and training

- 11.1 The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) helps prevent unsuitable people from working or volunteering with people at risk. The People Team will make any referrals to the DBS and ensure all staff and volunteers are employed according to DBS regulations.
- 11.2 All staff, volunteers, and Board members will complete mandatory safeguarding e-learning training as part of induction. This will be repeated at intervals appropriate for their role.
- 11.3 Frontline staff will attend mandatory training sessions, appropriate to their role. The frequency will be subject to contractual or statutory requirements.
- 11.4 We recognise the emotional impact on staff of working with vulnerabilities and having to recognise and deal with safeguarding concerns. Employees also have access to a specialist stress counsellor provided through our Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).

12.0 Contractors and people working on our behalf

- 12.1 Contractors and service providers for frontline services on our behalf need to make sure their staff:
 - Are suitable to provide frontline services
 - Comply with contractual requirements
 - Are aware of who to contact with any safeguarding concerns.

Contractors must also:

- Notify us of all safeguarding concerns
 - Fully co-operate with any investigation into received allegations
 - Have adequate systems in place to take appropriate disciplinary action.
- 12.2 The Safeguarding Team will support our main contractors by providing training and a range of resources.
- 12.3 Any breach of this Policy will be dealt with under the *Disciplinary Policy* or *Breach Procedure for Governance Members*.

13.0 Review

- 13.1 We will review this Policy to address legislative, regulatory, best practice or operational issues.

Policy controls

Effective from	16 December 2022
Approved by	Designate Executive Team
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Policy owner	Angela Prickett, Director of Housing
Policy author	Head of Care & Supported Housing Services (SHG)

Version history			
Version no.	Date	Summary of change	Author and approver
1.0	16.12.22	New policy	Naomi Keyte, Head of Care & Supported Housing Services (SHG) Designate Executive Team
1.1	04.06.24	Updated: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Footnote 1 to refer to relevant legislation for children and young people Statutory guidance date 	Brea Attrill, Corporate Lead – Safeguarding Angela Prickett, Director of Housing