

Safeguarding Children Policy

1 Purpose

“Our organisation is committed to working with colleagues, customers and key stakeholders to make sure safeguarding is understood and good practice demonstrated throughout the organisation. We recognise the importance of safeguarding children who live in our communities and we are committed to championing their welfare by having policy and practice which reflects statutory responsibilities, government guidance and best practice”. **Geeta Nanda Chief Executive Officer**

The Children Act of 1989 and 2004 set out the duties of Local Authorities to protect children in their area and to undertake enquiries if they believe a child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm. These duties can only be discharged with the co-operation of other partners who work with, or come into contact with, children during the course of their work. **Working Together to Safeguard Children Guidance** sets out the ways in which Local Authorities and other agencies can be clear about what is required of them individually, and how they need to work in partnership to work effectively in a system which responds to the needs of children and families. As a provider of social housing and community services, we are part of that system.

2 Scope

This policy sets out our approach to safeguarding children and young people.

This policy and accompanying procedure applies to:

- All children and young people who live in accommodation owned or managed by us
- All children and young people where we deliver community-based services or that we may encounter in our work

The requirements and expectations set out in this policy apply, but are not limited to:

- All colleagues including agency, bank workers, students, peer mentors, volunteers, consultants, contractors, and suppliers as well as all stakeholders/ partners commissioned by us.

For any safeguarding concerns about adults at risk, please see our **Safeguarding Adults at Risk Policy and Procedure**.

Our Commitment

We will:

- Set clear priorities of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people
- Train all colleagues to identify and report safeguarding concerns
- Require all colleagues and stakeholders/partners to make sure all suspicions of abuse and allegations are taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately
- Implement recruitment and human resources management processes which are robust, including arrangements for appropriate checks on new starters, continuing colleagues and volunteers

3 Our Approach

3.1 Definitions

Safeguarding means protecting a person’s right to live in safety, free from abuse, harm, exploitation, or neglect. Working with other agencies, we safeguard children by aiming to prevent and stop the risks and experience of abuse, harm, exploitation, or neglect.

Child is defined in law (Children Act 1989) as under the age of 18. The term "child" refers to children and young people. The support to children under this act is extended to young people over the age of 18 until the age of 25 who are defined as vulnerable under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

Child abuse is a generic term encompassing all ill-treatment of children and young people. This includes: neglect, physical and sexual assaults, child sexual exploitation, cyber bullying and cases where the standard of care does not adequately support the child's emotional health or development. For example, where they are living with neglect, domestic abuse, and or adult mental health or substance abuse.

Children and young people may be abused or neglected through the infliction of harm, or through the failure to act to prevent harm. Abuse can occur anywhere be it in a family, sport, institutional, educational, community or faith setting. It can also occur, online via the internet, texting and via other social media activities.

Defining abuse is not always easy, and it is not the responsibility of our organisation to determine whether a child or young person has been abused or is at significant risk of harm. We do, however, recognise that we have a fundamental responsibility to act and pass on information and our concerns to the appropriate agencies if we have any concerns.

This policy has considered all the specific needs and requirements of each protected characteristic and provides assurance that we will act in the best interests of our customers. For the purpose of this policy, our customers are children and young people who live in accommodation owned or managed by us, or that we may encounter in our work or where we deliver community-based services.

Exploitation is the act of using someone unfairly to another's advantage. There is often an unequal exchange (for example, of money, sex, or work), in return for necessities, such as food, shelter or protection. This could involve coercion where an individual feels frightened of the consequences if they refuse.

There are different categories of child abuse:

Physical Abuse

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Hitting
- Kicking
- Shaking
- Burning
- Poisoning

Emotional Abuse

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Humiliating
- Shouting
- Threatening
- Social isolation
- Emotional detachment
- Ignoring
- Manipulation

Sexual Abuse

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Touching
- Rape/penetration
- Forcing to take part in sexual activity (including by webcam)

- Being made to watch pornography
- Forced to touch someone else sexually

Neglect

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- failure to provide adequate nutrition
- failure to attend to personal hygiene
- failure to obtain proper medical care
- lack of adequate shelter
- lack of appropriate clothing

Modern Slavery

The Modern Slavery Act 2015 identifies that a child can be a victim of modern slavery, this can include; slavery, servitude, forced and compulsory labour and human trafficking. The common factors are that a victim is, or is intended to be, used or exploited for someone else's (usually financial) gain, without respect for their human rights.

Domestic Abuse

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognises that a child who sees, hears, or experiences the effects of domestic abuse and is related to the person being abused or the abuser, is also regarded as a victim of domestic abuse in their own right.

Honour Based Abuse is a collection of practices, which are used to control behaviour within families or other social groups to protect perceived cultural and religious beliefs and/or honour. Such violence can occur when perpetrators perceive that a relative has shamed the family and / or community by breaking their honour code.

Honour based violence, where it affects children and young people, is a child protection issue. Children and young people who are subject to honour based abuse and violence are at risk of significant harm through physical, sexual, psychological, emotional harm and neglect. In some cases, they are also at risk of being killed.

Children and young people may find themselves in an abusive and dangerous situation against their will with no power to seek help. The usual avenues for seeking help – through parents or other family members may be unavailable.

Honour based abuse and violence manifests itself in a diverse range of ways with children and young people, it can lead to a deeply embedded form of coercive control, built on expectations about behaviour that are made clear at a young age. Often the control is established without obvious violence for instance through family members threatening to kill themselves because of the victim's behaviour. It can be distinguished from other forms of violence, as it is often committed with some degree of approval and/or collusion from family and/or community members. Women, men and younger members of the family can all be involved in the abuse.

Forced Marriage is where one or both people do not consent to the marriage as they are pressurised, or abuse is used, to force them to do so. It is recognised in the UK as a form of domestic or child abuse and a serious abuse of human rights. The Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Act 2022 raised the age of marriage and civil partnership to 18 in England and Wales on the 26 February 2023. The new law expands the criminal offence of forced marriage to automatically recognise children, on account of their age, as victims of forced marriage. Children will no longer be required to prove they were coerced or pressured to marry.

Forced marriages of children may involve non-consensual and/or underage sex, emotional and possibly physical abuse and should be regarded as a child protection issue and referred to Children's Social Care.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is child abuse and is illegal in the UK and is extremely dangerous. FGM causes physical, psychological and sexual harm which can be severely disabling. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland all forms of FGM are illegal under the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003.

FGM is the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia for non-medical reasons. It's also known as female circumcision or cutting. FGM is often performed by someone with no medical training who uses instruments such as a knife, scalpel, scissors, glass or razor blade. Children are rarely given anaesthetic or antiseptic treatment and are often forcibly restrained.

3.2 Contextual Safeguarding

Contextual safeguarding recognises that as young people grow and develop, they are influenced by a whole range of environments and people outside of their family which could lead to safeguarding concerns. For example, in school or college (peer group abuse), in the local community (gang violence or knife crime) or online (risk of child sexual exploitation). Children and young people may encounter risk in any of these environments.

On some occasions, different contexts are inter-related and can mean that children and young people may encounter multiple risks. Contextual Safeguarding looks at how we can best understand these risks, engage with children and young people, and help to keep them safe. It's an approach that's often been used to apply to adolescents, though the lessons can equally be applied to younger children.

3.3 Internal Safeguarding Structure

The Safeguarding, Care and Quality Panel has oversight and accountability on behalf of our Board for assurance of safeguarding, regulatory reporting compliance and internal performance standards across the organisation. Its membership is drawn from Board members, independent industry practitioners and senior colleagues. Its Terms of Reference are agreed by the Board and sets out our Safeguarding Agenda, agreed by the Executive Team. Following a Safeguarding, Care and Quality Panel meeting, the Chair will share any feedback with the Board.

The Executive Director of Customer Services is the named senior person in our organisation with accountability for assurance of safeguarding compliance, internal arrangements and oversight of serious safeguarding concerns and incidents. The Executive Director of Customer Services will chair the Safeguarding, Care and Quality Panel meetings.

The Head of Strategy & Support is the operational lead in our organisation with responsibility for safeguarding assurance and the management of serious safeguarding concerns and incidents. They provide specialised advice and oversight to the organisation for its practice and liaise with partner organisations.

The Safeguarding Support Manager acts as a source of support, advice, and expertise for all colleagues to enable them to mitigate risks to the customer and negotiate relationships with partners. They liaise with relevant Heads of Service or Managers to discuss and resolve ongoing issues with the support process or investigations. Provides briefings and training to colleagues to ensure safeguarding concerns are well managed, sharing learning from reviews and case studies.

The Operational Managers have the responsibility to ensure that any management, at service or team level, complete the required actions following a safeguarding alert.

The Assessment and Support Team process all safeguarding reports. They triage referrals in accordance with risk level, signpost to services, make referrals to local authorities and facilitate case conferences with relevant colleagues to agree actions and safety planning. They provide first-line assurance on the management of safeguarding cases in operational teams. Their role includes tracking safeguarding concerns to ensure all agreed actions have been completed.

The Caldicott Guardian is a senior person within our organisation who makes sure that the personal information about our customers is used legally, ethically and appropriately, and that confidentiality is maintained. They will provide support on complex matters involving confidentiality and information sharing.

4 Our Colleagues

4.1 Responsibilities for our Colleagues

All colleagues have an individual responsibility to:

- Understand what we expect in terms of their own behaviour and conduct, please refer to our **Code of Conduct**
- Be familiar with the safeguarding reporting procedure and with whom they should raise any concerns
- Access training and support to enhance their own understanding of safeguarding and request support when required
- Know how to escalate a concern in accordance with their role
- Exercise professional curiosity and judgement by asking the right questions and follow up with the appropriate actions

4.2 Safer Recruitment

Safer practice in recruitment means the safety and welfare of our customers is paramount at every stage of the process. It starts with detailed planning at recruitment and, where the post is advertised, ensures our commitment to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of customers and their children is clear. It also requires a consistent and thorough process. Key elements include:

- The job description for all relevant roles references the responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children/ adults at risk
- The person specification for all relevant roles includes specific reference to suitability to work with children/adults at risk
- Comprehensive scrutiny of information from applicants, challenge and resolution of any gaps, discrepancies or anomalies in employment histories
- Obtaining independent professional references that answer specific questions to help assess an applicant's suitability to work with children/adults at risk and follow up any concerns
- A face-to-face or virtual interview that explores the candidate's suitability to work with customers at risk as well as their suitability for the post
- Carry out an appropriate level of Disclosure and Barring (DBS) check for roles which involve working with adults and children at risk, or providing CQC regulated activity – level of DBS are defined in the DBS policy
- Where colleagues change roles there may be changes in their DBS requirements
- DBS checks will be renewed periodically through continuing employment, timeframes dependent upon the individual role and will be detailed in the **Disclosure and Barring (DBS) Policy**.

4.3 Colleague Allegations

Where there is suspected abuse by a colleague, the **Safeguarding Allegations Against a Colleague Procedure** must be followed. If an allegation is made about a colleague, we would consider a referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service where appropriate.

4.4 Whistleblowing

Whistleblowing is when someone raises a concern about a dangerous or illegal activity or any wrongdoing within their organisation or externally. It is a vital process for identifying risks to people's safety. Sharing information or talking through a concern can be the first step to helping an organisation identify problems and improve their practices. If a colleague feels unable to share information through usual routes, or otherwise wishes to whistle blow, they must refer to our **Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure**.

4.5 Use of photography/filming/social media

We publicise our work, activities and good practice. We will make certain that permission is obtained from the parent, guardian or carer of anyone under 18 before taking photographs or recordings or using images in any medium for promotion, articles or reports. Customers who are over 16 years old and live in supported accommodation will be able to give their own consent.

5 Working Together in Partnership

Our organisation is committed to working in partnership with the Police, Children Social Care Departments, Health and Local Safeguarding Children or Adult Boards (LSCB and SAB) or their equivalent Strategic Partnership Boards in accordance with their local procedures, thresholds and information-sharing protocols. This is essential to enable these organisations to carry out their statutory duties to investigate concerns and protect all children and young people.

PREVENT Duty

PREVENT is one of four elements in the government counter terrorism strategy (CONTEST). As a service partner, we recognise our role in local authorities and Safer Partnerships, as part of the government’s Prevent strategy to safeguard young people, against grooming or exploitation into radicalisation/ extremism. Prevent training is a required module in our safeguarding training programme.

6 Background Legislation

- The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018
- Children Act 1989
- Children Act 2004
- Children and Families Act 2014
- Modern Slavery Act 2015
- Counter-Terrorism Act 2008
- Employment Rights Act 1996 (as amended by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998)
- Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003
- Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007
- Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Act 2022
- Equality Act 2010

7 Our commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

In implementing this policy, MTVH will not discriminate against any colleague, customer, or stakeholder on the grounds of their race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, gender reassignment status, ethnic origin, age, religion/beliefs, disability, marital status, class, socioeconomic status, and pregnancy/maternity.

8 Key Policy Information

Policy Owner	Director of Operational Risk and Development
Author	Safeguarding Support Manager
Approved by	Customer Services SLT
Effective from	March 2024
Approach to review	This Policy & associated Procedures will be reviewed as required by the owner for changes in legislation, regulation, and operational need. Any amendments will be appropriately consulted on and signed off before being clearly communicated to customers and colleagues. Next expected review is 3 years from the ‘Effective date’ of this document.
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