

Policies & Procedures

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Policy No. 120

**Draft policy on the protection of children visiting sheltered housing**

August 2009 Reviewed April 2010 April 2011

*Policies & Procedures are to be read and signed in the central policy file*

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### **1. Purpose**

Where used in this policy the term Council means Wiltshire Council, except where indicated.

The Council acknowledges it has a duty to protect children from any form of abuse. A policy is needed because abuse can potentially occur when children are visiting sheltered housing schemes.

### **2. Who is at Risk**

The Council treats the issue of protection from abuse as serious, and one which cannot be ignored, however rare or unlikely it is to occur. Children visit sheltered housing schemes, for example when visiting relatives, including social events organised for residents, doing paper rounds or on festive occasions such as Halloween and carol singing. Occasionally they may be accompanying a member of staff or contractor however much this is discouraged.

The council wishes to encourage residents to have visitors including children, and it is important to strike a balance between the over-riding need to protect the welfare of children, and the danger of over-reaction generated in some sections of the media and elsewhere concerning this issue.

### **3. Definition of Abuse**

This policy will cover any children under the age of 18 visiting sheltered housing.

There are a number of definitions for the term 'abuse', for the purpose of this document 'abuse' means:

“A single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to a person.”

### **4. Statement of Intent**

This is a statement of intent that demonstrates our commitment to safeguard children from harm. The following principles will be applied:

-The welfare of children is paramount.

-All children have the right to protection from abuse regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or beliefs.

-All concerns, and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously by staff and responded to appropriately – this may require a referral to the Department for Children and Families, in serious or emergency situations, the Police.

-A commitment to safe recruitment, selection and vetting of employees. All staff working in sheltered housing will be subject to CRB checks. Similar checks will be required of staff working for contractors employed to work in the schemes where this is appropriate, depending on the amount of time spent on the scheme and the likely level of contact with children related to the work being carried out.

-Reference to principles, legislation and guidance that underpin the policy.

-Arrangements for policy and procedures review – this policy will be reviewed at least annually.

-Reference to associated policies and procedures that promote children’s safety and welfare, for example, with regards to: health and safety, anti-bullying, protection of children online and photography – if children are allowed any access to a resident’s computer and the internet, that resident should supervise that access themselves.

- if photographs are taken at social events on the scheme, consideration should be given to seeking permission regarding any photographs including children, however residents should be encouraged to take any photos of their own grandchildren.

## **5. Child protection procedures and systems**

Our procedures and systems provide clear step-by-step guidance on what to do in different circumstances and clarify roles and responsibilities. We have systems in place for recording information and dealing with complaints to ensure implementation and compliance. The procedures and systems include:

- when a resident invites children, usually their grand-children, to visit them, they will be encouraged to remain aware of where they are on the scheme and to ensure there is appropriate supervision, bearing in mind that there are no resident staff. This supervision is essential regardless of whether the scheme is of an open design, or enclosed and having an entryphone. Where appropriate to their age, residents should be encouraged to remind children of the usual advice regarding “stranger danger”. Children should be discouraged from using any lift if unsupervised, and should not be allowed to roam communal gardens without supervision, as they are not provided as play areas. Tenants should be aware that visitors of any age are their responsibility and any unacceptable behaviour can breach their tenancy agreement.

- In the event of abuse of a child being suspected the matter will be reported to a Senior Housing Support Officer immediately, who will in turn consult their line manager, ie. one of the Housing Managers, with a view to deciding on the appropriate course of action, including the possible involvement of staff from the Children and Families Department or the Police. The Senior Housing Officer will keep a record of the suspected abuse in the log for their team.

- A description of what child abuse is and the procedures for how to respond to it if there are concerns about a child’s safety and welfare or concerns about the actions of a staff member or volunteer. There are relevant contact details for children’s services, police, and NSPCC Helplines.

- A process for recording incidents, concerns and referrals and storing these securely in compliance with relevant legislation.

-A code of behaviour for staff. The consequences of breaching the code are clear and linked to disciplinary and grievance procedures.

Safe recruitment, selection and vetting procedures that include checks into the eligibility and the suitability of all who have direct or indirect contact with children.

- A complaints procedure that is open and well publicised which adults and children can use to report unacceptable or abusive behaviour towards children.

**Staff training covers the following aspects:**

- our overriding duty to protect children from harm
- definition of abuse and identifying signs of abuse - multi-agency working
- confidentiality, health and safety and risk assessment procedures

**Contacts**

Director of Children and Families Department, Wiltshire Council, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, Wiltshire BA14 8JN. Tel. 0345 456 0100

Police – tel. 0845 408 7000 or in emergency tel. 999

NSPCC Helpline tel. 0808 800 5000 or for general enquiries NSPCC, Weston House, 42 Curtain Road, London, EC2A 3NH Tel: 020 7825 2500

**Business Improvement Manager**

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**Dated April 2011**

Review...April 2012

