Child safeguarding policy

Policy	Child safeguarding policy
Date adopted	November 2024
Date of next review	November 2027
Version	1.4
Responsible board	Housing Plus Group Board
Responsible officer	Director of Care and Support
Equality Impact Assessment Date	2025

Our promise to you

We are committed to providing excellent customer service so that every time you contact us you have a good experience. Our Child safeguarding policy sets out what you can expect from us when we are managing and reporting safeguarding concerns. Safeguarding is about protecting a person's right to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect.

A child is defined as anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday as defined under the Children Act 1989, irrespective of circumstances and including unborn children.

Current legislative Child Safeguarding categories are:

- self-neglect
- neglect
- physical abuse
- emotional or psychological abuse
- domestic abuse
- online abuse
- controlling behaviour
- coercive behaviour
- organisational abuse
- sexual abuse
- child sexual exploitation
- radicalisation and extremism
- discriminatory abuse
- financial abuse
- trafficking
- forced marriage.
- female genital mutilation

Examples of the types of abuse can be read in Appendix 2.

The Adult safeguarding policy should be read in conjunction with this document.

We will:

- Do as much as possible to prevent abuse happening by raising awareness and understanding.
- Focus on working together to support people to make decisions about the risks they face in their lives and protecting those individuals whose circumstances that put them at higher risk.
- Prepare a bespoke and dedicated action plan to remedy any issues that have been found, once an inspection has taken place.

1. What the policy covers

This policy applies to everyone within Housing Plus Group and for the purposes of safeguarding, any child refers to those under 18yrs who is:

- experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect.
- unable to protect themselves

Housing Plus Group (HPG) recognises that people can be at risk of abuse wherever they live.

Our policy also applies to safeguarding situations that may involve HPG staff , where there are concerns or evidence that a member of staff may be at risk of abuse, suffering harm or perpetrating abuse or neglect upon another person, whether that person is a customer or service user of HPG.

2. We will:

- Engage with those who we believe need safeguarding while treating them with respect and discuss any referrals or signposting with them when it is safe to do so.
- Ensure that responsibilities are understood including how Directors and senior members of staff lead our organisation by:
    1. Making sure that clear policies and procedures are in place and that we actively share information and work with partner agencies.
    2. Taking care to link this policy to other key policies and procedures.
    3. Training all HPG staff (and those who work with us) to identify signs of abuse and know how to respond to concerns appropriately.
    4. Providing staff and managers, who are responsible for making decisions about dealing with concerns, with support, guidance, and supervision.
    5. Putting in place effective mechanisms to capture, analyse, monitor, and review all concerns, and share learning. The Safeguarding and Wellbeing Committee will manage all cases including when to close them.

When we are made aware of a safeguarding issue and the threshold is not met or the local authority do not accept the referral, we will look to support the customers in terms of raising and managing a wellbeing concern. There is a different procedure for managing these concerns in Care Plus and general needs accommodation.

3. Guidance

Our policy and procedures are underpinned by the six principles of safeguarding – see Appendix 1.

Through implementation of this policy, we will not discriminate on the grounds of any protected characteristic and due regard will be given to individual differences including age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, race and ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation, caring responsibilities, culture, language, marital or civil partnership status.

- All HPG officers have a responsibility to comply with our safeguarding policies, undertake training in line with company expectations and act when they become aware of, or suspect a safeguarding situation may exist.
- All staff should report suspected or actual abuse as soon as possible after they become aware of it. In all instances line managers should be made aware unless there is a belief, they engaged in the abuse in which case a more senior manager should be approached. Any member of the Safeguarding and Wellbeing Committee can give advice and support to staff or managers who have concerns about a possible safeguarding incident.

- A case should be created as this allows an audit trail of the issues identified, and actions taken. All safeguarding and wellbeing concerns should be logged and where they meet the risk threshold discussed at the monthly Safeguarding and Wellbeing Committee meetings.
- We understand colleagues may not be sure whether a matter is a safeguarding issue or not and we encourage everyone to raise possible safeguarding incidents so that we can ensure people are protected.
- Adults who work with children are responsible for their own actions and behaviour and should avoid any conduct which would lead any reasonable person to question their motivation and intentions. Staff who organise activities for children and young people who are not primary clients should ensure they gain informed parental consent.
- Lessons learnt are included in the quarterly safeguarding steering group report and meeting, so we have the chance to learn and share knowledge that makes people safer and staff better able to identify and react to potential abuse or risk.

4. Making sure we do what we say

Safeguarding is embedded in our corporate framework through the Safeguarding and Wellbeing Committee, Safeguarding steering group and reports presented to the Audit and Risk Committee, links with other policies, our values, our competency framework and training programmes.

Our approach emphasises the need for a balance between risk avoidance and risk appraisal, considering a person's preferences, circumstances, and tolerance of acceptable risks. HPG's risk register includes reference to safeguarding from a governance perspective, with the Audit and Risk Committee.

The procedures which support this policy aim to ensure that our staff, managers, and People team know what to do when any concerns become known, including where a member of staff may be implicated. Our procedures have been formulated in accordance with local authority multi-agency procedures and include requirements for recording of information, information sharing, assessing risk and assessments.

Our Executive team and senior managers have a responsibility for ensuring this policy and its associated procedures are effectively implemented and supporting managers and staff in dealing with all concerns.

- Our approach includes regular training of staff on basic awareness to advanced level training for senior managers and key front-line staff.
- Training includes the links to local authority multiagency procedures as well as to other key procedures. E-learning is available for all staff and locally based training, via local authorities, is also utilised.

Awareness-raising with customers is undertaken through a variety of communication channels, including information leaflets, articles in customer newsletters and e-bulletins, websites and discussions with customers in supported housing as part of support planning and tenancy reviews.

HPG also recognises that it could be expected to make enquiries for a Local authority in line with their duties under Section 42 of the Care Act.

Guidance at SSASPB- Section 4 Safeguarding Enquiries section 42 care act 2014 (ssaspb.org.uk)

HPG is also committed to cooperating and participating fully in any safeguarding reviews.

We are committed to safe recruitment and ensuring no vulnerable child is placed at risk where our recruitment practice could have foreseen and prevented the risk occurring. Our Recruitment and selection policy covers our approach to recruiting: ensuring that we take all reasonable steps to protect vulnerable individuals from harm such as the use of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and enhanced checks.

If we receive an allegation that a colleague has abused or neglected a customer, we will report this to our People team, the local police, our safeguarding team and to the DBS as appropriate. We will work with the police and local authority safeguarding team to investigate.

5. We will look at this policy again

In three year's time unless anything changes. (Nov 2027)

Appendix 1- Principles of Safeguarding

- **Empowerment** – People should be supported to retain control of their own lives, and their wishes, feelings, values, and beliefs should be fully considered. The role of HPG staff is to support the person to make informed decisions throughout the process.
- **Protection** – The safeguarding framework should support people to safeguard themselves from abuse or be protected if they are unable to make their own decisions about their safety.
- **Prevention** – This is the primary goal and includes increasing awareness and understanding and supporting people to safeguard themselves. Arrangements should be in place to minimise the risk of abuse.
- **Proportionality** – Responses to concerns must be proportional to the assessed risk and the nature of the concern. Where a person lacks mental capacity, any decisions made on their behalf must be made in their "best interest" and be least restrictive to their rights and freedoms in Accordance with the Mental Capacity Act.
- **Partnerships** – Working collaboratively to prevent and respond effectively to concerns of abuse. This includes with the person, other partners, statutory agencies, relatives, friends, informal carers, and advocates to achieve good outcomes.
- **Accountability** – Decisions made should be transparent, recorded, and defensible. There should be good governance of safeguarding including review and learning. The Boards and staff need to understand what is expected of them, fulfil their responsibilities, and work collaboratively with others.

Acting without consent should only be done if there is a clear justification to act contrary to the person's wishes.

Our safeguarding arrangements will be compliant with the Care Act 2014 with the Mental Capacity Act 2005 (MCA), its principles and associated Code of Practice to ensure that any decisions made on behalf of those who lack capacity are always made in the person's best interests and as least restrictive as possible. The policy will be adopted to take account of any changes in relevant legislation, which always takes precedence over HPG policy if there is any incompatibility or conflict. We also recognise that there could be overlaps with deprivation of liberty issues and safeguarding.

HPG intends that safeguarding is embedded in all our activities raising awareness with our customers and communities and working together with them and other agencies, we will provide effective support ensuring staff have the confidence to deal with concerns and where necessary, "blow the whistle."

Safeguarding is fundamentally about prevention, wherever possible. By ensuring that our staff are observant means that we can make a real difference through early and positive interventions.

This policy also ensures that our own housing support services comply with safeguarding standards as set out in local authority contracts. Compliance with local authority procedures is a common requirement of service contracts with local authority commissioners. The policy provides for precedence of local authority procedures where contracts include this requirement. HPG will assess local authority requirements to ensure they are acceptable before submitting binding tenders or an application to join service frameworks.

Appendix 2- Examples of the types of safeguarding

Self-neglect - being smelly or dirty

Neglect - Neglect is the ongoing failure to meet a child's basic needs and the most common form of child abuse. A child might be left hungry or dirty, or without proper clothing, shelter, supervision, or health care. This can put children and young people in danger. And it can also have long term effects on their physical and mental wellbeing.

Physical abuse - Physical abuse is when someone hurts or harms a child or young person on purpose. It includes:

- hitting with hands or objects
- slapping and punching
- kicking
- shaking
- throwing
- poisoning
- burning and scalding
- biting and scratching
- breaking bones
- drowning
- It is important to remember that physical abuse is any way of intentionally causing physical harm to a child or young person. It also includes making up the symptoms of an illness or causing a child to become unwell.

Emotional or psychological abuse - Emotional abuse is any type of abuse that involves the continual emotional mistreatment of a child. It is sometimes called psychological abuse. Emotional abuse can involve deliberately trying to scare, humiliate, isolate, or ignore a child.

- threatening, shouting at a child or calling them names
- making the child the subject of jokes, or using sarcasm to hurt a child
- blaming and scapegoating
- making a child perform degrading acts
- not recognising a child's own individuality or trying to control their lives
- pushing a child too hard or not recognising their limitations
- exposing a child to upsetting events or situations, like domestic abuse or drug taking
- failing to promote a child's social development
- not allowing them to have friends
- persistently ignoring them
- being absent
- manipulating a child
- never saying anything kind, expressing positive feelings or congratulating a child on successes
- never showing any emotions in interactions with a child, also known as emotional neglect.

Domestic abuse - Domestic abuse is any type of controlling, bullying, threatening or violent behaviour between people who are, or have been, in a relationship. It can also happen between adults related to one another. It can seriously harm children and young people, and experiencing domestic abuse is child abuse.

Online abuse - Online abuse is any type of abuse that happens on the internet. It can happen across any device that is connected to the internet, like computers, tablets, and mobile phones. And it can happen anywhere online, including:

- social media
- text messages and messaging apps
- emails
- online chats
- online gaming
- live-streaming sites.

Organisational abuse - Organisational abuse is where poor working practices and inadequate care in a specific setting leads to the mistreatment and/or harm of children at risk. This level of abuse focuses on organisations and their explicit rules and informal norms. It occurs when the individual's wishes and needs are sacrificed for the smooth running of a group, service or organisation.

Sexual abuse - When a child or young person is sexually abused, they are forced, tricked, or manipulated into sexual activities. They might not understand that what is happening is abuse or that it is wrong for the abuser to do this to them. They might be afraid to tell someone or behave as though this is normal for them to experience, both are valid for the child to be displaying. Sexual abuse can happen anywhere – and it can happen in person or online.

It is never a child's fault they were sexually abused – it is important to make sure children know this.

Child sexual exploitation - Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a type of sexual abuse. It happens when a child or young person is coerced, manipulated or deceived into sexual activity in exchange for things that they may need or want like gifts, drugs, money, status and affection. Children and young people are often tricked into believing they are in a loving and consensual relationship so the sexual activity may appear consensual. This is called grooming and is a type of abuse. They may trust their abuser and not understand that they are being abused. CSE does not always involve physical contact and can also occur using technology.

Radicalisation and extremism - Radicalisation is the process through which a person comes to support or be involved in extremist ideologies. It is a form of harm. Extremism was defined by the Home Office in 2011 as a vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs (HM Government, 2011).

Financial abuse - To put it simply, financial child abuse is when someone intentionally exploits a child's finances for their own economic gain. Unlike physical abuse, financial abuse is often invisible. It can be hard for people, especially children, to even know they are being financially abused until it is too late.

Trafficking - Trafficking is where children and young people are tricked, forced or persuaded to leave their homes and are moved or transported and then exploited, forced to work or sold. Children are trafficked for:

- benefit fraud
- forced marriage
- domestic slavery like cleaning, cooking, and childcare
- forced labour in factories or agriculture
- committing crimes, like begging, theft, working on cannabis farms or moving drugs.

Appendix 3 - Process for managing cases

- Colleagues, contractors or customers call through to the Customer Services Contact Centre (CSC) or email the Community safety team.
- CSC transfer the call to General needs duty officer or for retirement living properties to the Safeguarding duty officer
- The duty officer triages the call using prescribed template and enters onto the case management system.
- Triage form identifies risk by looking at threshold criteria.
- The duty officer makes a call to the local Safeguarding authority as appropriate and then passes on to the relevant Neighbourhood officer or Retirement living manager to complete the action plan.
- Case referred to Safeguarding and Wellbeing Committee for monthly reviews.