

Healthwatch Reading Safeguarding Policy

Introduction

Healthwatch Reading (HWR) is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and vulnerable adults and understands safeguarding to be everyone's responsibility, to report concerns and not to decide whether or not it is abuse or investigate allegations.

The purpose of this policy is to outline the duty and responsibility of staff, volunteers, and trustees working on behalf of HWR in relation to the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults from abuse.

The fundamental principle that underpins this policy is that all children and adults have the right to be safe from harm and should be able to live free from fear of abuse, neglect and exploitation.

The key objectives of this policy are:

- To explain the responsibilities HWR and its staff, volunteers and trustees have in respect of child and vulnerable adult protection.
- To provide staff with an overview of child and vulnerable adult protection
- To provide a clear procedure that will be implemented where protection issues arise.

Responsibilities

HWR will:

- Ensure there are procedures in place to enable the reporting of concerns
- Provide training to identify signs of abuse and the procedures for reporting concerns
- Ensure that there is a Designated Safeguarding Manager (DSM)
- Ensure all staff and Authorised Representatives are able to identify signs and symptoms of abuse and understand reporting procedures
- Ensure that a member of the Board takes lead responsibility for Safeguarding and oversees Safeguarding arrangements

Information Sharing & Confidentiality

Staff, volunteers and trustees have a professional responsibility to share relevant information about protection with other professionals, particularly investigative agencies and social services.

Clear boundaries of confidentiality will be communicated to all.

All personal information will be kept confidential. All written records will be kept in a secure area for a specific time as identified in data protection guidelines. Records will only record details required in the initial contact form.

If an child or adult confides in a member of staff and requests that the information is kept secret, it is important that the member of staff tells the child or adult sensitively that he or she has a responsibility to refer cases of alleged abuse to the appropriate agencies.

Within that context, the child or adult should, however, be assured that the matter will be disclosed only to people who need to know about it.

Where possible, consent should be obtained from the child or adult before sharing personal information with third parties. In some circumstances obtaining consent may be neither possible nor desirable as the safety and welfare of the child or adult is the priority.

Where a disclosure has been made, staff should let the adult or child know the position regarding their role and what action they will have to take as a result.

Staff should assure the adult that they will keep them informed of any action to be taken and why. The adults' or child's involvement in the process of sharing information should be fully considered and their wishes and feelings taken into account.

Mental Capacity

HWG recognises that it is the right of adults who have capacity to make their own choices, irrespective of how unwise HWG may consider that decision to be. HWG accepts the definition of mental capacity as defined in the Mental Capacity Act 2005 unless a person's apparent comprehension of a situation gives rise to doubt.

Procedure in the event of a disclosure

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

Promises of confidentiality should not be given as this may conflict with the need to ensure the safety and welfare of the individual/child.

A full record shall be made as soon as possible of the nature of the allegation and any other relevant information. This should include information in relation to the date, the time, the place where the alleged abuse happened, your name and the names of others present, the name of the complainant and, where different, the name of the adult who has allegedly been abused, the nature of the alleged abuse, a description of any injuries observed, the account which has been given of the allegation.

Responding to an allegation

Any suspicion, allegation or incident of abuse must be reported to the HWR Chief Executive or Safeguarding Lead Officer on that working day where possible. A written record of the date and time of the report shall be made and the report must include the name and position of the person to whom the matter is reported.

Staff Members should take the following actions depending on the nature of the disclosure:

If the disclosure comes from an individual concerned for himself or herself or someone they know. The staff member shall telephone and report the matter to the safeguarding officer at Reading Borough Council.

In the event of an incident or disclosure:

DO

- Make sure the individual/child is safe
- Assess whether emergency services are required and if needed call them
- Listen
- Offer support and reassurance
- Ascertain and establish the basic facts
- Make careful notes and obtain agreement on them
- Ensure notation of dates, time and persons present are correct and agreed
- Take all necessary precautions to preserve forensic evidence

- Follow correct procedure
- Explain areas of confidentiality; immediately speak to your manager for Support and guidance
- Explain the procedure to the individual making the allegation if appropriate
- Remember the need for ongoing support.

DONT

- Confront the alleged abuser
- Be judgmental or voice your own opinion
- Be dismissive of the concern
- Investigate or interview beyond that which is necessary to establish the basic facts
- Disturb or destroy possible forensic evidence
- Consult with persons not directly involved with the situation
- Ask leading questions
- Assume Information
- Make promises
- Ignore the allegation
- Elaborate in your notes
- Panic

It is important to remember that the person who first encounters a case of alleged abuse is not responsible for deciding whether abuse has occurred. This is a task for the professional adult protection agencies.

Definitions

Vulnerable adults

An 'adult' means a person aged 18 years or over.

Some adults 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. The broad definition of a 'vulnerable adult' referred to in the 1997 Consultation Paper 'Who decides?' issued by the Lord Chancellor's Department, is a person:

"Who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness; and who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation".

Children and young people

A child is defined as a person under the age of 18 [The Children's Act 1989].

Abuse

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

Abuse may consist of a single act or repeated acts. It may be physical, verbal or psychological, it may be an act of neglect or an omission to act, or it may occur when a vulnerable person is persuaded to enter into a financial or sexual transaction to which he or she has not consented, or cannot consent. Abuse can occur in any relationship and it may result in significant harm to, or exploitation of, the person subjected to it.

- Physical abuse- including hitting, slapping, pushing, kicking, misuse of medication, restraint, or inappropriate sanctions. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces illness in a child.

- Sexual abuse- including rape and sexual assault or sexual acts to which the vulnerable adult or child has not consented, or could not consent or was pressured into consenting. 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.
- Psychological abuse- including emotional abuse, threats of harm or abandonment, deprivation of contact, humiliation, blaming, controlling, intimidation, coercion, harassment, verbal abuse, 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, adequate nutrition and heating.
- Discriminatory abuse- including racist, sexist, that based on a person's disability, age or sexuality and other forms of harassment, slurs or similar treatment.

Temporary Vulnerability

It should be considered that under the 'Protection of Freedoms Act 2012' the term 'vulnerable' may be applied to adults for periods of time and for specific situations. An adult in hospital 'may' be vulnerable for a period of their recovery; or an adult with Dementia 'may' only be vulnerable in regards to a specific area of their life. Safeguarding arrangements that do not take this into consideration may breach the adult's right to a private life.

Whistleblowing statement

If the disclosure raises concern about a HWR member of staff or volunteer, the concerns will be investigated in line with the HWR Disciplinary Procedure and in the first instance should be reported to the Chief Executive.

If a member of staff is concerned that the Chief Executive is not taking sufficient action the member of staff should notify the HWR Board Safeguarding Lead, Monica Collings.

Recruitment procedure

HWR operates procedures that take account of the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of vulnerable adults and children, including arrangements for appropriate checks on new staff, volunteers and trustees where applicable.

Where permitted under the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 RVA will request DBS checks on new members of staff/volunteers or staff/volunteers moving into a new role.

HWR will ensure that all staff and volunteers have a role description that outlines the work they do. Each role description will state whether a DBS check will be required, at what level and for which workforce. If the role will be supervised, and involves working with children, the supervision arrangements will be attached to the role description.

Policy review

To be reviewed: August 2015