HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

Safeguarding children and young people policy

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Date of Re approval:	

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IN ORDER TO FULFIL THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE SAFEGUARDING POLICY STATEMENT. THE FOLLOWING PROCEDURES WILL BE FOLLOWED BY ALL EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OF HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL.

1.	**POLICY STATEMENT**
1.1	**The purpose of this policy statement is:** ➢ To protect children and young people who receive Houghton Regis Town Council's services from harm. ➢ To provide staff and volunteers, children and young people and their families, with the overriding principles guiding our approach to child protection. This policy applies to anyone working on behalf of Houghton Regis Town Council, including senior managers, Councillors, paid staff, volunteers, sessional workers, agency staff and students.
1.2	**Legal Framework** This policy is based on legislation, policy, and guidance designed to safeguard children in England.
1.3	**Supporting Documents** This policy should be read alongside related organisational policies, procedures, and guidance, including: 1. Role description for the designated safeguarding officer. 2. Procedures for handling disclosures and concerns regarding children or young people. 3. Managing allegations against staff and volunteers. 4. Guidelines on recording concerns and information sharing. 5. Child protection records retention and storage. 6. Code of conduct for staff and volunteers. 7. Behavioural guidelines for children and young people. 8. Guidance on photography and image sharing. 9. Safer recruitment policies. 10. Online safety policies. 11. Anti-bullying policies. 12. Complaints management. 13. Whistleblowing procedures. 14. Health and safety measures. 15. Induction, training, supervision, and support protocols. 16. Adult-to-child supervision ratios.
1.4	**Our Beliefs** We firmly believe that: ➢ Children and young people must never experience abuse of any kind. ➢ We are responsible for promoting the welfare of all children and young people, ensuring their safety, and practising in a manner that protects them from harm.
1.5	**Our Commitment** We recognise that: ➢ The welfare of children is paramount in every decision we make and action we take. All children, regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation, are equally entitled to protection from harm and abuse. ➢ Some children may face additional vulnerabilities due to factors such as past experiences, dependency, communication needs, or other circumstances. ➢ Collaboration with children, young people, their parents, carers, and other agencies is essential for safeguarding and promoting welfare.
1.6	**How We Protect Children and Young People**

	We are committed to safeguarding children and young people by: ➢ Valuing, listening to, and respecting them. ➢ Appointing a designated safeguarding officer for safeguarding. ➢ Adopting and adhering to best practices in safeguarding through robust policies, procedures, and staff and volunteer codes of conduct. ➢ Developing and enforcing an effective online safety policy. ➢ Providing staff and volunteers with supervision, training, support, and quality assurance to ensure they are confident and competent in following our policies and procedures. ➢ Recruiting staff and volunteers safely, including conducting all necessary checks. ➢ Recording, storing, and handling information securely and professionally in line with data protection laws and guidance. ➢ Sharing safeguarding information and promoting good practices with children and families through various channels, such as leaflets, posters, group sessions, and one-to-one discussions. ➢ Ensuring children, young people, and their families are aware of how to seek help or raise concerns. ➢ Using established safeguarding procedures to share concerns and relevant information with appropriate agencies while involving children, young people, parents, carers, and families as necessary. ➢ Managing allegations against staff and volunteers appropriately through our safeguarding procedures. ➢ Promoting an anti-bullying environment supported by a clear policy and effective responses to incidents of bullying. ➢ Implementing effective complaints and whistleblowing mechanisms. ➢ Ensuring a safe physical environment for children, young people, staff, and volunteers by adhering to health and safety laws and guidance. Cultivating a safeguarding culture where , including staff, volunteers, children, young people, and their families, treats each other with respect, and the families treat each other respectfully and feel empowered to raise concerns.
2.	**STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT**
2.1	Houghton Regis Town Council is fully committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children and young people. We firmly believe that: ➢ Every child and young person has the right to feel safe, valued, and protected from harm. ➢ Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, and we are dedicated to fostering a culture of vigilance and care. ➢ All concerns regarding the safety and wellbeing of children and young people will be taken seriously and dealt with in line with our safeguarding policies and procedures.
2.2	To demonstrate this commitment, we will: Ensure all staff, volunteers, and associates understand their roles and responsibilities in safeguarding children and young people through comprehensive training and clear guidance. ➢ Implement effective policies, procedures, and practices that comply with legal and regulatory requirements to protect children and young people from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and harm. ➢ Promote a safe environment where children and young people feel empowered to speak up about concerns or abuse, confident they will be listened to and supported. ➢ Work collaboratively with families, communities, and external agencies to ensure the safety and welfare of all children and young people in our care. ➢ Regularly review and improve our safeguarding measures to ensure they remain effective and appropriate. Houghton Regis Town Council is steadfast in safeguarding children and young people. It will act decisively to uphold their rights to safety, dignity, and well-being.

3.	**INTRODUCTION**
3.1	Houghton Regis Town Council (HRTC) is committed to safeguarding children and young people. All individuals working within HRTC, regardless of their specific role, share the collective responsibility for ensuring the welfare and protection of these individuals. The following outlines the responsibilities of Senior Managers, the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), Staff, and Trustees in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of those at risk.
3.2	**Responsibilities of Tier 1 and 2 Management** Managers are responsible for safeguarding children, young people, and vulnerable adults within HRTC. Their duties include: ➢ **Ensuring Safeguarding Policies are in Place:** Senior managers must establish and enforce safeguarding policies and procedures to comply with statutory requirements, including Section 11 of the Children Act 2004. ➢ **Promoting a Culture of Safeguarding:** They are responsible for embedding a safeguarding culture across the organisation, ensuring that safeguarding is prioritised in all aspects of HRTC's activities. ➢ **Ensuring Staff Awareness:** Senior managers must ensure that all staff members and volunteers are trained and fully aware of their responsibilities in safeguarding, including how to respond to concerns and make appropriate referrals. ➢ **Monitoring and Reviewing Safeguarding Practices:** They are tasked with regularly reviewing and evaluating safeguarding practices to ensure that all activities comply with legal requirements and best practices. ➢ **Liaising with External Agencies:** Senior managers will work closely with local safeguarding authorities and external organisations to ensure safeguarding criteria thresholds are upheld.
3.3	**Responsibilities of the Designated Safeguarding Lead** The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) plays a pivotal role in ensuring the protection and well-being of children and young people. Their responsibilities include: ➢ **Central Point of Contact:** The DSL is the first point of contact for any safeguarding concerns within HRTC. They are responsible for managing and overseeing the safeguarding processes. ➢ **Monitoring Safeguarding Concerns:** The DSL must ensure that any allegations or suspicions of abuse, neglect, or poor practice are dealt with promptly and appropriately. ➢ **Making Referrals to Authorities:** The DSL is responsible for making referrals to the local authority or police when necessary, ensuring that concerns are addressed in accordance with local safeguarding protocols as identified in APPENDIX A safeguarding procedure. ➢ **Ensuring Staff Training:** The DSL is responsible for ensuring all staff members are trained on safeguarding procedures, including recognising signs of abuse and knowing how to report concerns. Staff to attend annual safeguarding training that is relevant to their role and responsibilities, and the context of delivery. ➢ **Record Keeping and Confidentiality:** The DSL ensures that all records related to safeguarding are maintained accurately and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act, the Freedom of Information Act, and Information Sharing Protocols as outlined in Houghton Regis Town Councils Data Retention Policy and Data Protection Act 2018 Policy.
3.4	**Responsibilities of Staff** All staff members at HRTC have a direct and legal responsibility to protect children, young people, and vulnerable adults under their care. Their responsibilities include: ➢ **Understanding and Following Safeguarding Policies:** Staff must understand and follow HRTC's safeguarding policy and procedures, knowing what actions to take if they have concerns about a child or young person. ➢ **Reporting Concerns:** Staff must report any suspicions or allegations of abuse or neglect promptly to the DSL as outlined in APPENDIX A Safeguarding procedure or other appropriate authorities, ensuring that concerns are addressed in a timely manner.

	➢ **Protecting Vulnerable Individuals:** Staff are responsible for providing a safe and supportive environment for young people and vulnerable adults, ensuring that they are protected from harm, including neglect, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. ➢ **Maintaining a Safe Environment:** Staff must ensure that children and young people are participating in a safe, enjoyable environment, free from abuse, neglect, or discrimination. ➢ **Participating in Training:** Staff members must complete mandatory safeguarding training and stay informed about best practices and new safeguarding requirements.
3.5	**Responsibilities of the Councillors** As the corporate governing body of HRTC, Councillors hold ultimate accountability for ensuring that safeguarding is integrated throughout the organisation. Their responsibilities include: ➢ **Strategic Oversight:** Councillors are responsible for ensuring that safeguarding policies and procedures are developed, reviewed, and implemented effectively across HRTC's activities. ➢ **Ensuring Legal Compliance:** Councillors must ensure that HRTC complies with all statutory safeguarding duties, including those under the Children Act 2004 and other relevant legislation. ➢ **Providing Support to Senior Managers and DSL:** Councillors should provide strategic direction and support to senior managers and the DSL in the implementation of safeguarding policies. ➢ **Reviewing Safeguarding Effectiveness:** Councillors are responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of safeguarding practices within HRTC, ensuring that safeguarding issues are addressed at the highest level. ➢ **Ensuring Resources are Allocated:** Councillors must ensure that adequate resources, including staff training and external support, are allocated to maintain and enhance safeguarding efforts across HRTC.
3.6	**Key Safeguarding Principles for All** ➢ **Everyone's Responsibility:** Safeguarding children and young people is everyone's responsibility within HRTC. All staff, Councillors, and volunteers must remain vigilant and proactive in ensuring the safety and well-being of those at risk. ➢ **No Assumptions:** No one should assume that someone else will act if they have a concern. All concerns should be raised immediately with the appropriate person or authority. ➢ **Right to Protection:** All children and young people regardless of their background or identity, have the right to be protected from all forms of abuse. They also have the right to participate in activities in a safe and supportive environment. ➢ **Confidentiality and Data Protection:** All safeguarding information should be treated confidentially, and shared only with appropriate external agencies, ensuring compliance with relevant data protection laws and protocols.
3.7	HRTC recognises its statutory responsibility to work with the Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership (LSCP) to ensure the safety and well-being of young people and vulnerable adults in all its activities. Everyone working within HRTC must understand and adhere to these safeguarding responsibilities, working together to create a protective environment for those at risk.
4.	**LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**
4.1	Our safeguarding practices are underpinned by key UK legislation and statutory guidance designed to protect children and young people from harm. These include: **Children Act 1989** ➢ Establishes the duty of local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need. ➢ Introduces the concept of parental responsibility and provides mechanisms for emergency protection and care orders.

https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents

Children Act 2004
➢ Strengthens safeguarding frameworks introduced by the 1989 Act.
➢ Establishes Safeguarding Partnerships to oversee multi-agency practices.
➢ Created the role of the Children's Commissioner for England to advocate for children's rights.
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/contents

Children and Social Work Act 2017
➢ Strengthens local arrangements for safeguarding children.
➢ Requires local authorities, clinical commissioning groups, and police to collaborate on safeguarding.
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/16/contents

Working Together to Safeguard Children
➢ A statutory guidance document outlining the responsibilities of all organisations working with children.
➢ Emphasises the importance of collaboration between agencies to safeguard children effectively.
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2

Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006
➢ Establishes the framework for the vetting and barring of individuals who pose a risk to children.
➢ Supports the work of the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) to ensure safe recruitment.
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/47/contents

Children and Families Act 2014
➢ Enhances support for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and strengthens services for vulnerable children.
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents

The Human Rights Act 1998 and Equality Act 2010
➢ Protect children and young people from discrimination and uphold their right to safety and well-being.
➢ Imposes duties on public authorities to act in accordance with these Acts.
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42/contents

Prevent Duty (Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015)
➢ Requires organisations to prevent children and young people from being drawn into terrorism.
➢ Outlines the need for staff training to identify and support at-risk individuals.
https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/counter-terrorism-and-security-bill

Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 (Amended in 2015 as part of the Serious Crime Act 2015)
➢ Criminalises the act of carrying out, assisting, or failing to prevent female genital mutilation (FGM).
➢ Introduces a mandatory reporting duty for professionals.
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/31/contents

Serious Crime Act 2015
➢ Includes provisions to protect children from sexual exploitation, grooming, and online abuse.
➢ Recognises coercive and controlling behaviour as a criminal offence.
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/9/contents

	Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Recognises children exposed to domestic abuse as victims in their own right, strengthening their protection. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/contents **Online Safety Legislation** ➤ Frameworks such as the Digital Economy Act 2017 and the forthcoming Online Safety Bill aim to protect children from harmful online content and behaviours. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/30/contents These legislative measures guide our safeguarding approach, ensuring the safety, well-being, and rights of children and young people are central to everything we do
5.	**SERVICES DELIVERED TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**
5.1	HRTC staff and volunteers have regular contact with children and young people. The Council provides youth work sessions up to four evenings a week, along with various events and activities for families. In these settings, staff and volunteers may find themselves in situations where they become aware of potential child neglect or abuse or where a child or young person may disclose that they or someone else is at risk or in harm's way.
5.2	The sessions delivered by HRTC include: ➤ **Events and Activities:** Children and young people attend a variety of events and activities throughout the year, usually accompanied by parents or guardians. ➤ **Youth Council:** Meets every other week and has volunteering opportunities for young people aged 12-18 years old. ➤ **Youth Work:** Up to four youth work sessions each week, including open access, outreach, detached work, holiday activities, and residentials, for young people aged 12-18 years.
5.3	Additionally, HRTC regularly organises ad-hoc activities and events and provides a reception service at the main office. These services could create situations where children or young people disclose abuse or neglect or present themselves as being at risk.
6.	**SCOPE OF THE POLICY**
6.1	This safeguarding policy applies to everyone involved with HRTC, including but not limited to: ➤ **Staff and Employees** • All full-time, part-time, and temporary employees. • Contractors, consultants, and agency staff engaged by the organisation. ➤ **Volunteers** • Individuals providing unpaid support to the organisation. ➤ **Councillors** • Those with governance responsibilities. ➤ **Service Users** • Individuals who access or benefit from the organisation's services, programmes, or activities. ➤ **Partners and Third-Party Organisations** • External organisations or entities collaborating or partnering with Houghton Regis Town Council to deliver services. ➤ **Visitors and Participants** • Individuals attending events, programmes, or premises associated with Houghton Regis Town Council.
6.2	This policy is designed to ensure the safety and well-being of all individuals, particularly those who are vulnerable or at risk, by outlining the responsibilities of everyone involved in the organisation. All

	individuals covered by this policy are expected to understand and adhere to its principles and guidelines.
7.	**MONITORING PROCEDURES**
7.1	Houghton Regis Town Council's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy will be monitored annually, with a full policy review conducted every two years to ensure it remains robust, compliant with legislation, and effective in practice. The following situations may also trigger an immediate review of the policy: ➢ Any changes in legislation that impact safeguarding or child protection protocols. ➢ Any changes in youth governance, including updates to council programmes involving children and young people. ➢ The outcome of a significant safeguarding incident, either locally or nationally, which may necessitate changes to strengthen procedures.
7.2	**Staff Training and Feedback:** ➢ All staff and volunteers will undergo safeguarding training, with their understanding regularly assessed through follow-up sessions and feedback forms. ➢ Feedback from staff and volunteers will also be collected to identify potential improvements or concerns in day-to-day safeguarding practices.
7.3	**Incident Reporting and Analysis:** ➢ A log of all safeguarding incidents and concerns will be maintained, ensuring they are reviewed regularly to detect trends or patterns that may highlight procedural weaknesses. Lessons learned from incidents will inform updates to the policy and training sessions.
7.4	**Engagement with Stakeholders:** ➢ Regular consultation with parents, carers, young people, and external safeguarding agencies to ensure the policy is responsive to the needs of the community.
7.5	The council is committed to maintaining a culture of continuous improvement in safeguarding and will ensure that all monitoring activities are documented and reviewed by the relevant committees.
8.	**SAFEGUARDING FLOWCHART (APPENDIX A)**
8.1	The safeguarding flowchart, which can be found in Appendix A, is a practical guide to ensure that all concerns regarding the safety and wellbeing of children and young people are addressed consistently and effectively. It forms an integral part of the council's safeguarding policy, providing clear steps for staff, volunteers, and youth workers to follow when identifying, reporting, and addressing safeguarding concerns. using this flowchart, the council ensures compliance with statutory safeguarding responsibilities and demonstrates its commitment to creating a safe and inclusive environment for all young people engaging with its services and activities.
9.	**SAFER RECRUITMENT**
9.1	HRTC is committed to creating a safe environment for all individuals, including children, young people, and vulnerable adults. As part of this commitment, we follow a robust safer recruitment process to ensure that only those suitable to work with vulnerable individuals are employed or engaged with our organisation, regardless of whether their role involves direct contact with children and young people.
9.2	**Recruitment and Selection Procedures** **1. Job Advertisements and Role Descriptions**

All job advertisements and role descriptions will include a statement confirming our commitment to safeguarding and the requirement for the successful candidate to undergo background checks as part of the recruitment process. For roles involving direct contact with children, young people, or vulnerable adults, safeguarding responsibilities will be clearly outlined.

2. Application Forms

We require all candidates to complete an application form and provide accurate personal information, employment history, qualifications, and relevant experience. Candidates expected to work directly with children and young people will also be asked to declare any criminal convictions, cautions, or disciplinary actions related to safeguarding concerns.

3. Interviews

All candidates, including those applying for roles that do not involve direct contact with children or vulnerable adults, will undergo a thorough interview. Interview questions for roles involving children, young people, or vulnerable adults will assess the candidate's understanding of safeguarding principles, their ability to recognise and respond to safeguarding concerns, and their personal values with respect to the safety and welfare of others.

4. Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Checks

We require candidates for roles involving direct contact with children, young people, or vulnerable adults to undergo a DBS check at an appropriate level (e.g., enhanced check). This check will confirm whether the individual has any criminal convictions or is on the barred list that would prohibit them from working with vulnerable groups.

5. References

We will request references from at least two previous employers or relevant professional sources who can verify the candidate's character, work ethic, and suitability for the role. One of these references should be from the candidate's most recent employer, specifically regarding their work with children or vulnerable adults, where relevant.

6. Right to Work Checks

We will verify candidates' legal right to work in the UK. We will check all necessary documents, such as passports, visas, or work permits, and securely store photocopies.

7. Ongoing Safeguarding Training

All staff and volunteers working directly and indirectly with children and young people will receive safeguarding training as part of their induction and regularly thereafter. This will include understanding the signs and symptoms of abuse, how to report concerns, and the organisation's safeguarding policies and procedures.

8. Probationary Period

New employees and volunteers will be subject to a six-month probationary period. During this time, their performance, conduct, and adherence to safeguarding policies will be closely monitored. Any concerns raised during this period will be addressed immediately.

9.3	**Commitment to Continuous Review** Our safer recruitment process is regularly reviewed to ensure that it reflects best practices, relevant legislation, and any changes to safeguarding standards. We aim to continually improve our recruitment practices to effectively safeguard vulnerable individuals.
10.	**GUIDELINES FOR BEST PRACTICE**
10.1	All staff, associates, and volunteers must demonstrate exemplary behaviour to protect young people and themselves. This includes:

➢ Adopting and adhering to Houghton Regis Town Council's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Procedures.

➢ Promoting the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy to those they manage, including their teams, associates, and volunteers.

➢ Ensuring that one-to-one sessions with young people are held in open, public spaces, where others are present, where possible.

➢ Treating all young people fairly, with respect and dignity.

➢ Always prioritising the welfare of young people over organisational objectives.

➢ Building and maintaining safe, professional, and appropriate relationships with young people.

➢ Encouraging young people to be involved in decision-making processes.

➢ Attending training as required.

➢ Acting as a positive role model for young people.

➢ Respecting the confidentiality of sensitive information and complying with data protection regulations.

➢ Maintaining clear professional boundaries with young people and avoiding any form of inappropriate communication or behaviour.

➢ Reporting any safeguarding concerns or incidents immediately to the designated safeguarding officer or relevant authority.

➢ Receiving appropriate supervision and support to ensure staff, associates, and volunteers are confident and competent in safeguarding practices.

➢ Carrying out appropriate risk assessments to ensure the safety of young people in all activities and settings.

➢ Ensuring all young people are treated inclusively, fairly, and with respect, regardless of their background, ethnicity, gender, or disability.

11.	**RELATIONSHIP OF TRUST**
11.1	The power and influence a member of staff or someone in a leadership role has over someone attending a group activity cannot be underestimated. Therefore, staff are expected to act within appropriate boundaries with young people, in relation to all forms of communication. Staff should be mindful of any physical contact and should not have intimate or sexual relationships with young people. "It is an offence for a person aged 18 or over to involve a child under that age in sexual activity. where he or she is in a specified position of trust in relation to that child. This includes those who care for, advise, supervise or train children and young people." (Sexual Offences Act 2003).
12.	**CODE OF CONDUCT (APPENDIX B)**
12.1	This Code of Conduct in Appendix B outlines the behavioural expectations for all staff and volunteers involved in activities with young people. Its purpose is to ensure a safe, respectful, and professional environment that fosters positive relationships and safeguards the welfare of all participants.
13.	**SUPERVISION RATIOS**
13.1	HRTC recognises the importance of assessing staffing requirements as part of the Risk Assessment to ensure young people are effectively supervised, and any associated risks are appropriately managed during youth work programmes.
13.2	**General Guidance** There are no statutory staffing or supervision ratios specifically mandated for youth work. Consequently, it is neither possible nor appropriate to provide fixed ratios for every group or activity. Instead, staffing decisions should be based on the specific needs of each programme, taking into account factors such as:

	➢ The competence and experience of staff or workers in relation to the planned activities. ➢ The location and nature of the environment where the programme will take place. ➢ Characteristics of the group, including its size, and the age, gender, abilities, and behavioural, medical, emotional, or educational needs of the young people involved. ➢ The nature and duration of the planned activities. ➢ The potential impact of a staff member being unavailable unexpectedly, and the feasibility of contingency plans to ensure ongoing supervision.
13.3	**Specific Considerations** Those delivering youth work should take note of the following: ➢ **Activity-Specific Ratios:** Certain activities, particularly those considered adventurous, are subject to minimum supervision ratios set by National Governing Bodies. These should be treated as baseline requirements, which may need to be adjusted to meet the specific needs of the group. ➢ **Worker Participation:** If staff or workers lack experience in a specific activity (e.g., kayaking), they may need to be counted as part of the group when determining supervision levels.
13.4	**Gender Considerations** While there is no legal requirement for staff to be of the same gender as the young people, safeguarding and privacy needs should be carefully considered in advance. For younger groups, particularly those in residential settings, it is generally good practice to have staff of each gender available to address any potential concerns effectively.
13.5	**Contingency Planning** For activities in remote locations or abroad, robust contingency plans must be in place to ensure adequate supervision continues in the event of a staff member becoming unavailable (e.g., due to illness, injury, or accompanying a young person to hospital). This may involve making significant adjustments to the itinerary or planned activities. HRTC prioritises safeguarding and risk management in all youth work activities. To ensure the safety and well-being of young people, all supervision arrangements must reflect these principles.
14	**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATION**
14.1	HRTC is committed to safeguarding children and young people while respecting their rights and ensuring their voices are heard in all youth work activities. To support informed and appropriate participation, the following consent procedures are in place: ➢ **Parental/Guardian Consent** Children under 18 must have written consent from a parent or guardian to participate in youth work activities organised by the Council. Consent forms will provide key details, including the purpose, location, duration of the activity, and any associated risks. ➢ **Young Person's Consent for Ages 12 and Above** While parental or guardian consent is legally required for those under 18, the Council will also seek the agreement of young people aged 12 and over before their participation. This approach recognises their ability to understand and make informed decisions about their involvement, promoting respect and empowerment. ➢ **Higher-Risk Activities** Additional consent may be required for activities considered higher-risk (e.g., overnight stays, adventurous activities, or those involving significant commitments). In such cases, parents/guardians and young people will be provided with detailed information and may be invited to discuss the activity with the Council before giving consent. ➢ **Photo and Media Consent** The Council may take photographs or videos during youth work activities for use in promotional materials, reports, or on its website and social media

	platforms. Parental or guardian consent will be sought for any young person under 18 before their image is used. Young people aged 12 and over will also be asked for their agreement to ensure they are comfortable with how their image may be used. Any refusal will be respected, and pictures of that individual will not be used. ➢ **Data Protection and Privacy** All consent-related documents will be managed per the Council's Data Protection Policy. Information will only be accessed by authorised personnel to ensure the safety and wellbeing of participants. ➢ **Clear and Accessible Information** Information about activities will be provided clearly and age-appropriately, ensuring that both young people and their parents/guardians fully understand the activity before giving consent.
14.2	By implementing these measures, Houghton Regis Town Council ensures that all youth work activities are conducted with the highest standards of safeguarding while encouraging young people to take an active role in their participation.
15	**SAFEGUARDING AND THE USE OF THE INTERNET (E-SAFETY) (APPENDIX C)**
15.1	The internet is a powerful tool but also presents risks, including the distribution of harmful content such as indecent images of children and young people. Adults may also use the internet to make contact with minors to groom them for inappropriate or abusive relationships.
16.	**DEFINITIONS OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT (APPENDIX D)**
16.1	Children can experience more than one type of abuse, which can have serious, severe, and long-lasting impacts on their lives. The main categories of abuse include neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse including sexual exploitation.

APPENDIX A

SAFEGUARDING PROCEDURE
The safeguarding flowchart is a practical guide to ensure that all concerns regarding the safety and well-being of children and young people are addressed consistently and effectively. It forms an integral part of the council's safeguarding policy, providing clear steps for staff, volunteers, and youth workers to follow when identifying, reporting, and addressing safeguarding concerns. Using this flowchart, the council ensures compliance with statutory safeguarding responsibilities. It demonstrates its commitment to creating a safe and inclusive environment for all young people engaging with its services and activities.

Step 1: Recognise a Concern

What to Look For: Signs of harm, abuse, neglect, or any situation where a young person's safety or wellbeing is at risk.

Your Role:
➢ Stay calm, listen carefully, and take what the child or young person says seriously.
➢ Record factual information only (include date, time, observations, and the child or young person's exact words where possible).
➢ Do not promise to keep information confidential, explain that it may need to be shared to ensure their safety.

Step 2: Report the Concern
Who to Inform:
➢ Immediately report your concern to a lead youth worker or manager who will then report to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL).
➢ If the Young Person is in Immediate Danger:
  o Call **999** for emergency services.
  o Contact Central Bedfordshire Children's Services directly if urgent.
  o Share your recorded information with the DSL as soon as possible.

Step 3: Action by the DSL
Assessment and Next Steps:
➢ The DSL will review the concern, follow the organisation's safeguarding policies, and decide on the appropriate course of action.
➢ The DSL may consult the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) for guidance.

Possible Actions:
➢ Speak to the child or young person or their family if appropriate (and if it does not increase the risk).
➢ Refer the concern to Children's Services or the LADO for further investigation.

Step 4: Referral to External Agencies
If a Referral is Made:
➢ The DSL will provide detailed information to Children's Services (including the recorded concern and observations).
➢ Ensure written confirmation of the referral is obtained.

Follow Guidance:
➢ Collaborate with external agencies to ensure the young person receives appropriate support.

Step 5: Monitor and Support
Within the Organisation:

> ➢ Continue to support the young person through youth work activities in a safe and inclusive environment.
> ➢ Monitor their well-being and maintain communication with external agencies if required.

Record Keeping:
Ensure all safeguarding records are kept secure, confidential, and up to date.

Key Contacts:
> ➢ Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL): Ian Haynes, 07961668688, ian.haynes@houghtonregis-tc.gov.uk
> ➢ Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL): Tara Earnshaw, **07498 026370,** tara.earnshaw@houghtonregis-tc.gov.uk
>
> ➢ Central Bedfordshire Council Children's Services: , 0**300 300 8585** immediately (office hours). For out-of-hours reports call **0300 300 8123.**
> ➢ Emergency Services: **999**

APPENDIX B

CODE OF CONDUCT

Introduction
This Code of Conduct sets out the behavioural expectations for all staff and volunteers involved in activities with young people. Its purpose is to ensure a safe, respectful, and professional environment that fosters positive relationships and safeguards the welfare of all participants.

General Behaviour
- **Respect for Young People:** Treat all young people with dignity, respect, and fairness, regardless of their background, beliefs, or identity.
- **Professionalism:** Maintain a professional attitude at all times. Staff and volunteers must avoid behaviour or conduct that could be seen as unprofessional or inappropriate.
- **Boundaries:** Establish and maintain appropriate boundaries in all interactions with young people. This includes ensuring that physical contact, conversations, and all forms of communication are respectful and appropriate.
- **Confidentiality:** Respect the confidentiality of young people, staff, and volunteers. Personal information must not be shared unless there is a safeguarding concern, in which case the appropriate procedures should be followed.
- **Equality and Diversity:** Create an inclusive environment where all young people feel valued. Discrimination, harassment, or bullying on the grounds of race, gender, sexuality, disability, religion, or any other personal characteristic will not be tolerated.

Communication
- **Appropriate Communication:** Ensure communication with young people is professional and relevant. Avoid developing personal relationships, and ensure that all communication, whether verbal, written, or online, is related to the organisation's activities.

Social Media and Online Communication:
- **Professional Use Only:** Staff and volunteers should not engage with young people on personal social media accounts or any online platforms unless directly related to the organisation's work and approved by leadership.
- **Official Channels:** Communication with young people via social media should only take place through official, organisation-approved accounts or platforms (e.g., group pages for activities, organisational email accounts).
- **No Private Messaging:** Private messaging with young people on personal accounts is strictly prohibited. Communication should occur in public or group settings that can be monitored by relevant staff.
- **Online Content:** Avoid sharing or engaging with inappropriate or unprofessional content online. Ensure that all posts and interactions align with the organisation's values and policies.

No Inappropriate Content:
- Do not share, request, or tolerate any inappropriate or explicit content in any form of communication, whether verbal, written, or online.

Physical Contact
- **Respect Personal Space:** Avoid unnecessary physical contact with young people. If physical contact is essential (e.g., administering first aid or during sports), it must be carried out respectfully and professionally.
- **No Intimate Contact:** Under no circumstances should staff or volunteers engage in intimate or sexual behaviour with young people.

Relationships

➢ **Maintaining Professional Relationships:** Staff and volunteers must not develop personal or intimate relationships with young people. All relationships must remain professional at all times.

➢ **Power Dynamics:** Be mindful of the power dynamics inherent in staff/young people relationships. Staff must never exploit their position of trust or authority for personal gain.

Safeguarding and Reporting

➢ **Duty of Care:** Staff and volunteers are responsible for ensuring the safety and well-being of young people during activities. Any unsafe or inappropriate behaviour must be addressed and reported immediately to the designated safeguarding officer.

➢ **Reporting Concerns:** If you suspect or become aware of safeguarding concerns, including abuse, neglect, or exploitation, it is your responsibility to report them promptly, following the organisation's safeguarding procedures.

➢ **Zero Tolerance for Abuse:** Houghton Regis Town Council operates a zero-tolerance policy for any form of abuse, including physical, emotional, sexual, or neglect. Anyone found to be engaging in such behaviour will face disciplinary action and, where appropriate, legal consequences.

Conduct During Activities

➢ **Supervision:** Young people must be adequately supervised during all activities, both indoors and outdoors. Appropriate staff-to-young-people ratios must be maintained as per organisational policy.

➢ **Safe Environment:** All activities should be conducted in a safe environment that complies with health and safety regulations. Risk assessments should be completed before any activity takes place.

➢ **Respect for Property:** Staff and volunteers must respect the property of Houghton Regis Town Council, young people, and others involved in activities.

Compliance and Accountability

➢ **Adherence to the Code:** All staff and volunteers must agree to and follow this Code of Conduct. Failure to comply may result in disciplinary action, including suspension or termination of employment or volunteering duties.

➢ **Ongoing Training:** Staff and volunteers are required to participate in regular safeguarding training to stay informed of best practices and any changes in the law or policies.

Conclusion

The well-being and safety of young people is the highest priority. By adhering to this Code of Conduct, staff and volunteers contribute to a positive, safe, and supportive environment for all participants.

APPENDIX C

SAFEGUARDING AND USE OF THE INTERNET (E-SAFETY)

The internet is a powerful tool but also presents risks, including the distribution of harmful content such as indecent images of children and young people. Adults may also use the internet to make contact with minors with the intention of grooming them for inappropriate or abusive relationships.

If an employee or volunteer is found to have posted or accessed child exploitation material, law enforcement will typically investigate whether the individual is involved in the active abuse of children. Special consideration must be given to the individual's access to young people, and appropriate measures must be taken to protect their safety.

For any project or service providing internet access to users, clear protocols must be in place to ensure safe and responsible usage. Internet access should be monitored to prevent exposure to inappropriate material, including:
  ➢ Sexually explicit content or related material
  ➢ Promotion of illegal activities
  ➢ Content that encourages intolerance, hate speech, or discrimination

Staff Responsibilities:
  ➢ Employees and volunteers who are authorised to use the internet must not download, store, or share illegal, pornographic, or otherwise inappropriate material on any Town Council technical equipment.
  ➢ Staff must not upload or share any content that could be considered offensive, harmful, or disrespectful towards others.
  ➢ If harmful content is unintentionally accessed, the user must immediately exit the website and delete any inappropriate material. Breaches of this policy will be considered gross misconduct and will result in disciplinary action.
  ➢ If a staff member needs to access content that is outside regular guidelines due to the nature of their work, written permission from a manager is required in advance.

Young People's Internet Access:
  ➢ Any service or project allowing young people access to the internet must have strong measures in place to ensure their online safety. This includes using appropriate filtering software to block access to harmful websites.
  ➢ Regular checks and monitoring must be carried out to ensure young people are not exposed to inappropriate content or targeted by online predators.
  ➢ It is essential to provide clear guidelines to young people about the appropriate use of the internet, including what to do if they encounter inappropriate or harmful content or come into contact with strangers online.
  ➢ Staff should also engage in ongoing education for young people about online safety, emphasising the importance of privacy, responsible behaviour, and reporting any concerns.

Incident Reporting and Response:
  ➢ Any incidents of inappropriate content being accessed or shared must be immediately reported to the designated safeguarding lead, who will take the necessary actions to investigate and address the situation.
  ➢ Any suspected abuse or inappropriate behaviour should be treated with the utmost seriousness and reported according to the Town Council's safeguarding procedures.

By establishing a culture of safe internet use, the Town Council aims to protect both staff and young people from the dangers of the online world, ensuring that all interactions remain respectful, safe, and appropriate.

APPENDIX D

DEFINITIONS OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Children can experience more than one type of abuse which can have serious and long-lasting impacts on their lives. The main categories of abuse include neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse including sexual exploitation.

The definitions for the various types of child abuse and neglect shown below have been adapted from the NSPCC's website for the purpose of this document. Additional information can be found on: https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect.

Neglect
Introduction Neglect is not meeting a child's basic physical and psychological needs. It is a form of child abuse that can have serious and long-lasting impacts on a child's life - it can cause serious harm and even death. The four main types of neglect are: 1. **Physical neglect:** not meeting a child's basic needs, such as food, clothing, or shelter; not supervising a child adequately or providing for their safety. 2. **Educational neglect:** not making sure a child receives an education. 3. **Emotional neglect:** not meeting a child's needs for nurture and stimulation, for example by ignoring, humiliating, intimidating, or isolating them. 4. **Medical neglect:** not providing appropriate health care (including dental care), refusing care or ignoring medical recommendations Neglect can happen at any age, sometimes even before a child is born. If a mother has mental health problems or misuses substances during pregnancy, for example, she may neglect her own health and this can damage a baby's development in the womb.

Child Sexual Abuse
Child sexual abuse (CSA) is when a child is forced or persuaded to take part in sexual activities. This may involve physical contact or non-contact activities and can happen online or offline. Children and young people may not always understand that they are being sexually abused. **Contact abuse**: Involves activities where an abuser makes physical contact with a child. It includes: • Sexual touching of any part of the body, whether the child is wearing clothes or not. • Forcing or encouraging a child to take part in sexual activity. • Making a child take their clothes off or touch someone else's genitals. • Rape or penetration by putting an object or body part inside a child's mouth, vagina or anus. **Non-contact abuse**: Involves activities where there is no physical contact. It includes: • Flashing at a child. • Encouraging or forcing a child to watch or hear sexual acts. • Not taking proper measures to prevent a child being exposed to sexual activities by others.

- Making a child masturbate while others watch.
- Persuading a child to make, view or distribute child abuse images (such as performing sexual acts over the internet, sexting or showing pornography to a child).
- Making, viewing or distributing child abuse images.
- Allowing someone else to make, view or distribute child abuse images.
- Meeting a child following grooming with the intent of abusing them (even if abuse did not take place).
- Sexually exploiting a child for money, power or status (child sexual exploitation).

Sexual exploitation

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a type of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity.

Children and young people in sexually exploitative situations and relationships are persuaded or forced to perform sexual activities or have sexual activities performed on them in return for gifts, drugs, money or affection.

CSE can take place in person, online, or using a combination of both.

Perpetrators of CSE use a power imbalance to exploit children and young people. This may arise from a range of factors including:

- Age
- Gender
- Sexual identity
- Cognitive ability
- Physical strength
- Status
- Access to economic or other resources.

Sexual exploitation is a hidden crime. Young people have often been groomed into trusting their abuser and may not understand that they're being abused. They may depend on their abuser and be too scared to tell anyone what's happening because they don't want to get them in trouble or risk losing them. They may be tricked into believing they're in a loving, consensual relationship.

Some children and young people are trafficked into or within the UK for sexual exploitation.

Child sexual exploitation online

When sexual exploitation happens online, young people may be persuaded or forced to:

- Have sexual conversations by text or online.
- Send or post sexually explicit images of themselves.
- Take part in sexual activities via a webcam or smartphone .

Abusers may threaten to send images, video, or copies of conversations to the young person's friends and family unless they take part in further sexual activity. Images or videos may continue to be shared long after the sexual abuse has stopped.

Trafficking and modern slavery

Child trafficking is child abuse. It's defined as recruiting, moving, receiving and harbouring children for the purpose of exploitation (HM Department for Education (DfE) and Home Office, 2011; Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and Police Service of Northern Ireland, 2011; Scottish Government, 2013; Wales Safeguarding Procedures Project Board, 2020).

Child trafficking is a form of modern slavery .

Many children are trafficked into the UK from overseas, but children can also be trafficked from one part of the UK to another.

Children are trafficked for:
- Child sexual exploitation.
- Criminal activity, including:
    - Cannabis cultivation
    - Street crime - such as pickpocketing, begging and bag theft
    - Moving drugs
    - Benefit fraud
    - Immigration fraud
    - Selling pirated goods, such as DVDs
- Forced marriage
- Domestic servitude, including:
    - Cleaning
    - Childcare
    - Cooking
- Forced labour, including working in:
    - Restaurants
    - Nail bars
    - Factories
    - Agriculture
- Illegal adoption
- Unreported private fostering arrangements (for any exploitative purpose).

This list is not exhaustive and children who are trafficked are often exploited in more than one way.

How child trafficking happens
Traffickers may use grooming techniques to gain the trust of a child, family or community. They may trick, force or persuade children to leave their homes.

Child trafficking can involve a network of organised criminals who recruit, transport and exploit children and young people within or across borders. Some people in the network might not be directly involved in trafficking a child but play a part in other ways, such as falsifying documents, bribery, owning or renting premises, or money laundering. Child trafficking can also be organised by individuals and children's own families.

Grooming

Grooming is a process by which a person prepares a child, significant adults and the environment for the abuse of the child. Grooming can happen anywhere, including:
- Online
- In organisations
- In public spaces (also known as street grooming)

Children and young people can be groomed by a stranger or by someone they know – such as a family member, friend or professional. The age gap between a child and their groomer can be relatively small.

Grooming techniques can be used to prepare children for sexual abuse and exploitation, radicalisation and criminal exploitation.

Harmful sexual behaviour (HSB)

What is harmful sexual behaviour?
Harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) is developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour which is displayed by children and young people and which may be harmful or abusive . It may also be referred to as sexually harmful behaviour or sexualised behaviour.

HSB encompasses a range of behaviour, which can be displayed towards younger children, peers, older children or adults. It is harmful to the children and young people who display it, as well as the people it is directed towards.

Technology assisted HSB
Technology assisted HSB (TA-HSB) is sexualised behaviour which children or young people engage in using the internet or technology such as mobile phones. This might include:

- Viewing pornography (including extreme pornography or viewing indecent images of children)
- Sexting

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is defined as deliberately hurting a child and causing physical harm . It includes injuries such as:

- Bruises
- Broken bones
- Burns
- Cuts.

It may involve:

- Hitting
- Kicking
- Shaking
- Throwing
- Poisoning
- Burning
- Scalding
- Drowning
- Any other method of causing non-accidental harm to a child.

Physical abuse may also happen when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child. This is known as Fabricated or Induced Illness.

Breast ironing or breast flattening, a practice of using hard or heated objects to suppress or reverse the growth of breasts, is a recognised form of child abuse.

Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is any type of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between people who are, or who have been in a relationship, regardless of gender or sexuality. It can include physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or financial abuse.

Each UK nation has its own definition of domestic abuse for professionals who are working to prevent domestic abuse and protect those who have experienced it. Domestic abuse can include:

- Sexual abuse and rape (including within a relationship)
- Punching, kicking, cutting, hitting with an object
- Withholding money or preventing someone from earning money
- Taking control over aspects of someone's everyday life, which can include where they go and what they wear
- Not letting someone leave the house
- Reading emails, text messages or letters
- Threatening to kill or harm them, a partner, another family member or pet.

Witnessing and experiencing domestic abuse
Children never just 'witness' domestic abuse; it always has an impact on them. Exposure to domestic abuse or violence in childhood is child abuse.

Children may experience domestic abuse directly, but they can also experience it indirectly by:
- Hearing the abuse from another room
- Seeing a parent's injuries or distress afterwards
- Finding disarray like broken furniture
- Being hurt from being nearby or trying to stop the abuse
- Experiencing a reduced quality in parenting as a result of the abuse.

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is emotional maltreatment of a child, which has a severe and persistent negative effect on the child's emotional development. It's also known as psychological abuse.

Most forms of abuse include an emotional element, but emotional abuse can also happen on its own.

Children can be emotionally abused by anyone:

- Parents or carers
- Family members
- Other adults
- Other children.

There are several categories of emotional abuse.

Denying emotional responsiveness (also known as emotional neglect)
- Ignoring the child
- Not showing affection.

Rejection
- Verbal humiliation
- Name-calling

- Criticism
- Physical abandonment
- Excluding the child from activities.

Isolating
Putting unreasonable limitations on a child's freedom of movement, restricting social interaction and not communicating with the child.

Exploiting or corrupting
Encouraging a child to take part in criminal activities, forcing a child to take part in activities that are not appropriate for their stage of development.

Terrorising
- Threatening violence
- Bullying
- Deliberately frightening a child
- Deliberately putting a child in a dangerous situation

Bullying and cyberbullying

Bullying is when individuals or groups seek to harm, intimidate or coerce someone who is perceived to be vulnerable.

It can involve people of any age and can happen anywhere – at home, school or using online platforms and technologies (cyberbullying). This means it can happen at any time.

Bullying encompasses a range of behaviours which may be combined and may include the behaviours and actions we have set out below.

Verbal abuse:
- Name-calling
- Saying nasty things to or about a child or their family.

Physical abuse:
- Hitting a child
- Pushing a child
- Physical assault.

Emotional abuse:
- Making threats
- Undermining a child
- Excluding a child from a friendship group or activities.

Cyberbullying/online bullying:
- Excluding a child from online games, activities or friendship groups
- Sending threatening, upsetting or abusive messages
- Creating and sharing embarrassing or malicious images or videos
- 'trolling' - sending menacing or upsetting messages on social networks, chat rooms or online games
- Voting for or against someone in an abusive poll
- Setting up hate sites or groups about a particular child
- Creating fake accounts, hijacking or stealing online identities to embarrass a young person or cause trouble using their name.

Bullying can be a form of discrimination, particularly if it is based on a child's disability, race, religion or belief, gender identity or sexuality.

Online abuse

Online abuse is any type of abuse that happens on the internet, facilitated through technology like computers, tablets, mobile phones and other internet-enabled devices. It can happen anywhere online that allows digital communication, such as:

- Social networks
- Text messages and messaging apps
- Email and private messaging
- Online chats
- Comments on live-streaming sites
- Voice chat in games.

Children and young people can be re-victimised (experience further abuse) when abusive content is recorded, uploaded, or shared by others online. This could happen if the original abuse happened online or offline.

Children and young people may experience several types of abuse online:
- Bullying/cyberbullying
- Emotional abuse (this includes emotional blackmail, for example pressuring children and young people to comply with sexual requests via technology)
- Sexting (pressure or coercion to create sexual images)
- Sexual abuse
- Sexual exploitation.

Children and young people can also be groomed online: perpetrators may use online platforms to build a trusting relationship with the child in order to abuse them. This abuse may happen online or the perpetrator may arrange to meet the child in person with the intention of abusing them.

Female genital mutilation (FGM)

Female genital mutilation (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.

The age at which FGM is carried out varies. It may take place:
- When a female baby is newborn
- During childhood or adolescence
- Just before marriage
- During pregnancy.

There are four main types of FGM:
- Type 1 (clitoridectomy) – removing part or all of the clitoris.
- Type 2 (excision) – removing part or all of the clitoris and cutting the inner and/or outer labia.
- Type 3 (infibulation) – narrowing the vaginal opening.

- Type 4 – other harmful procedures to the female genitals including pricking, piercing, cutting, scraping or burning.

Labia elongation (also referred to as labia stretching or labia pulling) involves stretching the labia minora, sometimes using sticks, harnesses or weights.

FGM is child abuse and is illegal in the UK. It can be extremely dangerous and can cause:

- Severe pain
- Shock
- Bleeding
- Infections such as tetanus, HIV and hepatitis B and C
- Organ damage
- Blood loss and infections
- Death in some cases.

Sometimes religious, social and cultural reasons are given to justify FGM, however it's a dangerous practice and can cause long-lasting health problems that continue throughout a child's life, including:

- Incontinence or difficulties urinating
- Frequent or chronic vaginal, pelvic or urinary infections
- Menstrual problems
- Kidney damage and possible kidney failure
- Cysts and abscesses
- Pain during sex
- Infertility
- Complications during pregnancy and childbirth
- Emotional and mental health problems.

Sexting: advice for professionals

Sexting is when people share a sexual message and/or a naked or semi-naked image, video or text message with another person. It's also known as nude image sharing.

Children and young people may consent to sending a nude image of themselves. They can also be forced or coerced into sharing images by their peers or adults online.

If a child or young person originally shares the image consensually, they have no control over how other people might use it.

If the image is shared around peer groups, it may lead to bullying and isolation. Perpetrators of abuse may circulate a nude image more widely and use this to blackmail a child and/or groom them for further sexual abuse.

It's a criminal offence to create or share explicit images of a child, even if the person doing it, is a child. If sexting is reported to the police, they will make a record but may decide not to take any formal action against a young person.

It's important that anyone working or volunteering with children and young people understands the dynamics of sexting. You should know what to do if you ever need to help a young person who has received or sent an explicit image, video or message; or had an image shared without their consent.

Peer-on-peer sexual abuse

Introduction

Peer-on-peer sexual abuse is sexual abuse that happens between children of a similar age or stage of development. It can happen between any number of children and can affect any age group.

It can be harmful to the children who display it as well as those who experience it.

Children can experience peer-on-peer sexual abuse in a wide range of settings, including:
- At school
- At home or in someone else's home
- In public spaces
- Online

It can take place in spaces which are supervised or unsupervised. Within a school context, for example, peer-on-peer sexual abuse might take place in spaces such as toilets, the playground, corridors and when children are walking home.

As children develop healthily, it's normal for them to display certain types of sexualised behaviour. It's important that adults who work or volunteer with children can identify if any sexualised behaviour has become harmful or abusive and respond proportionally to keep all the children involved safe.

County lines

What is county lines?

County lines are a form of criminal exploitation where urban gangs persuade, coerce or force children and young people to store drugs and money and/or transport them to suburban areas, market towns and coastal towns. It can happen in any part of the UK and is against the law and a form of child abuse.

Children and young people may be criminally exploited in multiple ways. Other forms of criminal exploitation include child sexual exploitation, trafficking, gang and knife crime.

County lines gangs are highly organised criminal networks that use sophisticated, frequently evolving techniques to groom young people and evade capture by the police.

Perpetrators use children and young people to maximise profits and distance themselves from the criminal act of physically dealing drugs. Young people do the majority of the work and take the most risk.

Dedicated mobile phone lines or "deal lines" are used to help facilitate county lines drug deals. Phones are usually cheap, disposable and old fashioned, because they are changed frequently to avoid detection by the police.

Gangs use the phones to receive orders and contact young people to instruct them where to deliver drugs. This may be to a local dealer or drug user, or a dealer or drug user in another county.

Phrases that young people may use to refer to county lines include:
- 'running a line',
- 'going OT/out there'
- 'going country'
- 'going cunch'.

These all refer to going out of town to deliver drugs or money.