



Vital Village Safeguarding Policy - July 2024

1. Introduction

1.1. Vital Village is committed to creating a nurturing and safe environment where holistic well-being and sustainable living are prioritised for community members of all ages. This Safeguarding Policy underlines our dedication to protect all individuals associated with our community, including children, young people, vulnerable adults, employees, and volunteers.

2. Policy Objectives

2.1. To ensure the safety and protection of everyone in our community, this policy aims to:

- Prevent and address all forms of abuse and harm.
- Promote a culture of safety, respect, and inclusivity.
- Guide clear and effective procedures for reporting and managing safeguarding concerns.

3. Scope and Definitions

3.1. The policy applies to all individuals involved in Vital Village, including staff, volunteers, participants, and visitors.

3.2. Due to the nature of Vital Village's activities and low safeguarding risks associated with our operations, this policy covers the basic principles and does not address specific legal implications for organisations working in different areas of the voluntary and charity sector. All organisations using the Vital Village facilities should consider their own policies, including specific safeguarding controls, as appropriate.

3.3. In this policy:

- Children: Individuals under the age of 13.
- Young People: Individuals aged 13 to 20.
- Vulnerable Adults: Individuals who may be at risk of harm due to age, disability, illness, or other factors.
- Volunteers: Individuals who offer their time and services to support Vital Village.
- Employees: Those individuals formally employed by Vital Village.
- Visitors: Community members that visit Vital Village's Community Hub either to attend a specific event or just for casual use of the space.

4. Safeguarding Responsibilities

Every member of the Vital Village community shares a responsibility for safeguarding. Responsibilities include recognising and reporting concerns, adhering to best practices, and participating in training and awareness programs.

- Staff:
 - Vigilance: Staff members are responsible for being vigilant and observant regarding the safety and well-being of all participants, especially vulnerable individuals.
 - Reporting: If staff members become aware of or suspect any form of abuse, harm, or neglect, they must promptly report their concerns to the designated safeguarding officer (DSO).
 - Support: Staff should provide support and assistance to participants who disclose concerns or experiences of abuse. They should also guide participants on how to report such incidents.
 - Training: Staff members are required to undergo regular safeguarding training to recognise signs of abuse and understand their responsibilities.
- Volunteers:
 - Awareness: Volunteers should be aware of the safeguarding policy and procedures within Vital Village.
 - Observation: Volunteers should be observant during their interactions with participants and promptly report any concerns to staff or the DSO.
 - Follow Procedures: Volunteers should follow the same reporting procedures as staff when they encounter safeguarding concerns.
 - Cooperation: Volunteers should cooperate with staff and the DSO during investigations or interventions related to safeguarding concerns.
 - Training: Volunteers are required to undergo regular safeguarding training to recognise signs of abuse and understand their responsibilities.
- Participants:
 - Personal Safety: Participants have a responsibility to ensure their own personal safety. They should report any concerns about their safety to staff or the DSO.
 - Respect for Others: Participants should treat others with respect and not engage in any form of abusive behavior or harm towards fellow participants, staff, or volunteers, as well as observe Vital Village's Code of Conduct.
 - Reporting: Participants who witness or experience any form of abuse, harm, or neglect should report it to staff or the DSO.
- Visitors:
 - Awareness: Visitors should be aware of the safeguarding policy and procedures in place within Vital Village.

- Respect: Visitors should respect the dignity and well-being of all participants and avoid any actions that may cause harm or discomfort.
- Reporting: Visitors who witness or become aware of any safeguarding concerns should report them to staff or the DSO.

5. Reporting Procedures

5.1. Anyone (including staff, volunteers, visitors and participants) who is concerned about a potential safeguarding issue should follow the following process:

- Respond
 - If someone is at immediate risk or needs medical attention dial 999 for emergency services.
 - Take brief details but do not produce or conduct an investigation.
 - Decide whether the individual can give consent to report the concern. If not, and you decide to act against their wishes, record your decision and the reasons.
- Report
 - Report your concerns to the DSO.
- Record
 - Prepare a written record of the incident which should include contemporaneous details.
 - Sign and date the record, remembering that the record must remain confidential.
 - Pass a copy to the DSO and avoid storing the record anywhere where individuals involved in the incident (including alleged victim and abuser) may have access to.
- Refer
 - The DSO will decide whether to refer the incident or concern to the police and/or Surrey County Council safeguarding team.

5.2. The Designated Safeguarding Officer is identified at the end of this policy and displayed on notice boards at the Vital Village Hub. They are appointed to manage reports and liaise with external agencies when necessary.

6. Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO)

The DSO is responsible for:

- Responding to any concerns raised and deciding whether to refer the concern.
 - In doing so they should take into account the victim's wishes and preferred outcome.
 - Consider whether the victim has the ability to make an informed decision about their own safety.
 - Consider the safety and wellbeing of other vulnerable individuals.
- Keep a record of any reported incidents or concerns, including:
 - Ensuring reports are kept confidential and secure.

- Document the reasons each step taking, including the decision on whether to report the concern or incident to the police or Surrey County Council safeguarding team.
- Ensuring steps are taken to support all those involved in the incident
 - This includes the alleged victim(s), alleged abuser(s), witness and individuals reporting their concerns.
 - The victim should be kept informed and involved throughout the process, wherever possible.
 - Where it is not possible to keep individuals informed, such as the alleged abuser(s), witness and individuals reporting their concerns, the DSO will explain the reasons to those individuals.

If the person reporting the concern is unhappy with the DSO response, they should raise the issue with the Chair of the board or consider contacting the Surrey County Council safeguarding team directly to raise their concerns.

7. Recognising and Responding to Abuse and Harm

7.1. Safeguarding issues can encompass various types of abuse and harm, and it's crucial to be aware of the signs and indicators associated with each category.

- Physical Abuse: involves intentionally causing physical harm or injury to an individual. Signs of Abuse:
 - Unexplained bruises, cuts, or injuries in various stages of healing.
 - Frequent or unexplained injuries or falls.
 - The individual may be fearful, defensive, or reluctant to discuss their injuries.
 - Inconsistent or implausible explanations for injuries.
- Emotional or Psychological Abuse: includes actions or behaviors that harm an individual's emotional well-being or mental health. Signs of Abuse:
 - Unexplained changes in behavior, mood, or personality.
 - Extreme fear, anxiety, or depression.
 - Social withdrawal or isolation.
 - Low self-esteem or self-worth.
 - Verbal threats, humiliation, or constant criticism.
- Sexual Abuse: any non-consensual sexual activity or exploitation. Signs of Abuse:
 - Unexplained pain, bleeding, or discomfort in the genital area.
 - Sudden changes in sexual behavior or knowledge inappropriate for their age.
 - Fear or avoidance of specific individuals.
 - Regressive behaviors, such as bedwetting or thumb-sucking.
- Neglect: occurs when an individual's basic needs, such as food, shelter, or medical care, are not adequately provided for. Signs of Neglect:

- Poor hygiene, unwashed clothes, or untreated medical conditions.
 - Malnutrition or dehydration.
 - Living in hazardous or unsanitary conditions.
 - Frequent illnesses or infections.
 - Lack of appropriate clothing for the weather.
- Financial or Material Abuse: involves the misuse or theft of an individual's money or possessions. Signs of Abuse:
 - Unexplained withdrawals from bank accounts.
 - Missing valuables or personal belongings.
 - Sudden financial difficulties despite having resources.
 - Coercion or pressure to change financial arrangements or wills.
 - Discriminatory Abuse: abuse occurs when an individual is treated unfairly or subjected to prejudice based on their race, religion, gender, disability, or other characteristics. Signs of Abuse:
 - Verbal abuse or hate speech targeting the individual's characteristics.
 - Social exclusion or isolation based on their identity.
 - Unequal treatment compared to others in similar situations.
 - Domestic Violence: involves abusive behaviors within a familial or intimate partner relationship. Signs of Abuse:
 - Frequent injuries or explanations that do not align with injuries.
 - Isolation from friends and family.
 - Constant fear or anxiety around a specific individual.
 - Controlling or coercive behaviors.
 - Organisational Abuse: involves poor practices and inadequate care leading to the mistreatment of a vulnerable person. Signs of Abuse:
 - Social exclusion or isolation

8. Training and Development

Ongoing training programs are operated to provide staff and volunteers with the knowledge and skills needed to recognise and respond to safeguarding issues. Anyone who feels they have not received up to date or appropriate training should contact the DSO.

9. Safe Recruitment and Management of Staff and Volunteers

Robust procedures for recruitment, including background checks and references as appropriate, ensure that staff and volunteers are suitable for working with vulnerable groups. They are described in Vital Village's Handbook.

10. Review and Compliance

10.1. The policy is reviewed annually to remain up-to-date with legal requirements, best practices, and the evolving needs of the Vital Village community.

10.2. Compliance with the policy is mandatory, and non-compliance is addressed through the Vital Village disciplinary policy.

11. Conclusion

Vital Village's Safeguarding Policy reflects our commitment to a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment for all. It is a vital component of our broader mission to foster holistic well-being and sustainable living within the community.

12. Useful contacts

Emergency services	Phone 999
Police (non-emergency)	Phone 101
Vital Village designated safeguarding officer (DSO)	Phone 07511524982
Vital Village designated safeguarding officer (DSO)	Email hello@vitalvillage.co.uk
Chair of board (if unhappy with a safeguarding concern)	Phone xxx
Chair of board (if unhappy with a safeguarding concern)	Email xxx
Surrey County Council (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)	
Safeguarding concerns (adult or child)	Phone 0300 470 9100
Adult safeguarding online referral	online link
Children's Services 'Single Point of Access	Email cspa@surreycc.gov.uk
Surrey County Council (evenings, weekends and bank holidays)	
Emergency Duty Team	Phone 01483 517898
Emergency Duty Team	Email edt.ssd@surreycc.gov.uk