

Safeguarding Children Policy

1. Policy Scope

Bernicia provide housing services to a wide range of individuals throughout the North East of England, and we recognise that we will come into contact with vulnerable children while delivering services to our customers.

The processes that relate to this policy are in place to guide and inform the practice of members of staff to protect children. The processes should be applied in all situations where the possibility of abuse cannot be ruled out and they apply to any child who lives in or visits any of our housing schemes, services, or offices.

This policy will be actioned when a report of a potential safeguarding issue is highlighted by a resident or colleague. The aim is to set out how any child living in or visiting our schemes and services is protected and kept safe from harm and also to:

- Provide a framework that defines the basic values and principles that govern professional practice when providing services
- Ensure we are accountable and can demonstrate our decision making in this area.
- Set the parameters of what is and is not acceptable behaviour towards children living in our properties or visiting our housing schemes and services.
- Protect and inform workers, volunteers, and clients by clarifying what types of behaviour cause concern.
- Give staff confidence to react to different situations.
- Encourage high standards of approach and consistency between staff.

The Head of Care & Support will provide the relevant Boards with statistics to form a judgement on the services we provide in relation to Safeguarding. It is the responsibility of Directors and managers to ensure that these policy standards are adhered to and implemented.

2. Policy Standards

This policy has been produced to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Through the implementation of the policy its purpose is to protect children from abuse (with regard to the relevant legislation and issues of consent) and to support the abused child and their families. We believe in the following:

- Everyone has the right to live their life free from fear, violence, or harm.
- All children have the right to be protected from harm or abuse.
- Acting in a way that supports the rights of the individual
- Treating all children and their families positively regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, gender reassignment or religion.
- Protecting children from maltreatment;
- Preventing impairment of children's physical and mental health or development;

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- Ensuring that children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care.
- Undertaking that role so as to enable children to have optimum life chances and to enter adulthood successfully.

We are committed to working collaboratively with our partner agencies and statutory authorities to prevent or reduce the risk of abuse or the mistreatment of children. This will involve action on our part and in order to properly implement the policy we will:

- Raise awareness and recognition of potential signs and indicators of abuse.
- Take action when abuse is suspected.
- Ensure that staff have a knowledge and understanding of our policy and procedures through appropriate training.
- Support monitoring, reviewing and evaluation of our own practices.
- Ensure that the public, people who use our services and carers have access to information about safeguarding children, this policy, and the associated procedures.

Many forms of abuse to children are a criminal offence and it is important that employees are able to recognise signs of abuse and help to prevent it. We seek to provide a safe environment for all of our clients, staff, and visitors. We strive to protect them from all forms and levels of abuse by encouraging management and staff to work together collaboratively to achieve this objective. We all have a duty of care to protect vulnerable people in our society and to raise awareness to ensure concerns about abuse dealt with promptly and effectively

Children have the right to be protected against neglect, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, to be safe, to be educated, to be given boundaries that are consistent and age appropriate, to be given choices, depending on age, and understanding and to be believed.

We recognise that the vast majority of staff who work with children or who come into contact with children while at work are caring people. It is further recognised that the behaviour of some children, particularly those who have been abused before may continue to raise suspicion of abuse. Due to adverse childhood experiences, children may relate to adults in a way that means that adults in close contact with them are vulnerable to allegations of abuse. It should, however, also be recognised that abuse of a child by a member of staff is always a possibility.

A safeguarding complaint made against a member of staff must be reported in line with disciplinary procedures to ensure full investigation and relevant action is taken in relation to the allegation.

All members of staff and any representatives working on behalf of the organisation have a personal responsibility and a professional duty to the child who is the subject of concern, to ensure that the concerns are fully discussed with a Responsible Person within the organisation who has been nominated for this purpose.

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When abuse is suspected it is important that a report is made in accordance with the relevant inter-agency Safeguarding Children Procedures.

Through investigation procedure, if it is also identified that an adult is being abused then a referral must be made to the relevant local authority in accordance with Safeguarding Adults Policy and Procedure.

Standard 1: Legal Context

The law in respect of the abuse of children is found in various sections of separate acts of Parliament. They constitute a framework of legislation which promotes the welfare of children and sets out responsibilities and procedures to ensure children are safeguarded.

Local authorities have a duty to investigate (S47 of the Children Act 1989) where a Local Authority is informed that a child who is living, or is found, in their area is either subject to an Emergency Protection Order, Police protection or they have reasonable cause to suspect that the child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm they must make such enquiries as necessary to promote or safeguard the child's welfare. Children's Services Social Care undertake this responsibility on behalf of the Authority once a referral has been made.

In September 2003, the Government published a document called *Every Child Matters*.

The document (Every Child Matters) builds on existing plans to strengthen preventative services by focusing on four key themes,

- Increasing the focus on supporting families and carers – the most critical influence on children's lives.
- Ensuring necessary intervention takes place before children reach crisis point and protecting children from falling through the net.
- Addressing the underlying problems identified in the report into the death of Victoria Climbié – weak accountability and poor integration.
- Ensuring that the people working with children are valued, rewarded, and trained.

The Children's Act 2004 legally underpins Every Child matters.

Section 7 of the Children's Act 2004 places a duty on local authorities to make arrangements through which key agencies cooperate to improve the well-being of children and young people. To ensure that, within this partnership working, safeguarding children continues to be given priority. The Act places a responsibility for key agencies to have regard to the need to safeguard children and promote their welfare in exercising their normal functions. We are committed to our obligation as a key agency to safeguard children who live in or visit our schemes and promote their welfare.

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Standard 2: Roles and Responsibilities

In most instances where there is a relationship between an organisation and a person who uses their service it is simply stated that a duty of care exists. In reality there will actually be various different duties operating concurrently which will overlap and complement one another.

All adults working with, or on behalf of children, have a responsibility to protect children. Within the organisation the following individuals have special responsibilities:

Key roles:

- Alerter – Any person in contact with, or who has knowledge of a child at risk, and who has concerns about the health, safety, and well-being of that child. Anyone can be an Alerter. The Alerter is responsible for passing all concerns on to the Responsible Person.
- Responsible Person – A person who receives and considers concerns passed to them by the Alerter. The Responsible Person has the responsibility for reporting concerns, where the possibility of abuse cannot be ruled out, to the local authority in line with local authority procedures.

The Responsible Person will ensure appropriate safeguarding measures are in place to reduce immediate risk if necessary, they will contribute to any strategy discussion meetings on behalf of a person or agency, making decisions and taking forward any actions including investigating and monitoring as identified.

The Responsible Persons are identified in the Safeguarding Reporting Triangle.

- Designated Organisation Lead – is someone who can act as a source of information and support for staff and volunteers within Bernicia particularly how the safeguarding process operated.

The Designated Organisation Lead is identified in the Safeguarding Reporting Triangle

- Safeguarding Manager – a person with managerial responsibility for all safeguarding matters within the organisation

The Responsible Person will be informed immediately by an employee, volunteer or other persons which includes the parents, child, or members of the public, in the following circumstances

- Suspicion that a child is being harmed
- There is evidence that a child is being harmed

The Responsible Person will keep a full record of concerns raised and make referrals to Children's Services Social Care/Police if necessary. The Safeguarding Manager will be kept informed at all times.

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The Safeguarding Procedure will provide clear guidance on how to report concerns and clearly identifies roles aligned with the Safeguarding Reporting Triangle.

Failure to act / follow the referral procedure will initiate a near miss enquiry the purpose of which is to identify any gaps in process and implement learning where appropriate. The Safeguarding Incident/Near Miss Report applies to all colleagues who may interact with our customers and tenants.

Standard 3: What is Abuse?

Abuse relies on the exploitation of differences in power within relationships where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm to an individual. This can be by act or omission.

Abuse is the result of individual, group or institutional wrongdoing that result in pain, anguish and /or harm to an individual and can be defined as “a violation of an individual’s human and civil rights by any other person or persons.”

- Abuse may consist of single or repeated acts.
- Abuse may be intentional or unintentional.
- Abuse may be an act of neglect or an omission or failure to act.
- Abuse can occur in any relationship and may result in significant harm to, or exploitation of, the person subjected to abuse.
- Abuse may cause harm temporarily or over a period of time.

Children are at risk of being abused by relatives, parents, another child or children, professionals, neighbours, friends, and strangers. All staff have an active role to play in the prevention, reduction and reporting of abuse directed at children.

Standard 4: Categories of Abuse

Neglect

The persistent failure to provide for a child an adequate standard of physical and/emotional care, or failure to protect a child from danger, resulting in significant impairment of the child’s health and development, including failure to thrive.

This includes the following:

- Neglect during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse
- Persistent failure to provide a standard of warmth & shelter, clothing, nourishment, and hygiene appropriate to the child’s age or developmental stage.
- Persistent exposure of the child to danger, e.g. by leaving the child alone, unsupervised or with unsuitable carers.
- Persistent failure to provide stimulation and age appropriate opportunities for social development.
- Persistent failure to provide age appropriate and consistent warmth and affection.

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Physical Abuse

Physical injury, which has been inflicted or knowingly not prevented, including, deliberate poisoning suffocation and inflicted illness (Fabricated or Induced Illness).

This includes physical injury (or harm) which is known to have been inflicted (or not prevented) or which is strongly suspected to have been inflicted (or not prevented) because of one the following factors:

- Absence of an unacceptable explanation.
- Explanation which is confused or inconsistent.
- Explanation which is not consistent with the child's developmental stage.

Sexual Abuse

The involvement of dependent developmentally immature children and adolescents in sexual activities which they do not truly comprehend and to which they are unable to give informed consent, or which violate the sexual taboos of family roles.

Sexual abuse is the exploitation of a child by someone who has the power over that child (e.g. adult/child) and or age, gender, or physical strength. It is behaviour which the abuser expects will gratify their own needs. Pressure imposed on the child either by threats, coercion or by more subtle means, is commonly associated with child sex abuse, and there is an absence of true consent. This definition includes situations where the abuser is also a child or young person, if the above factors apply.

Emotional Abuse

The severe adverse effect on the emotional, physical, or behavioural development of the child, or on the child's health, including failure to thrive, as a result of persistent or severe emotional ill-treatment or rejection.

Emotional abuse includes:

- Persistently acting negatively towards the child, e.g. by ridiculing, humiliating, name calling and scapegoating
- Persistent punishing for normal desirable behaviour
- Persistently expecting the child to act in a way which is beyond their capabilities or level of development.
- All abuse or neglect of a child will involve a degree of emotional abuse.

Standard 5: Signs of Abuse

All staff must be vigilant to recognise the signs and indicators of abuse. We recognise that children who are abused or who witness violence may find it difficult to develop a sense of self-worth and to view the world in a positive way. We, therefore, recognise that in these circumstances children might exhibit challenging and defiant behaviour and must take careful note of the context of such behaviour. We also recognise that some children who have experienced abuse may in turn abuse others. This requires a considered and sensitive approach in order that the child can receive appropriate help and support.

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Standard 6: Protection Against & Prevention of Abuse

A range of actions need to be taken to:

- Promote the safety of children through reducing the likelihood of abuse.
- Ensure good practices based upon inter-departmental and inter-agency procedures and guidance to be followed in the event of abuse.

A number of commitments are outlined which will be effective in contributing to the prevention of abuse. These include:

- Rigorous recruitment practices (including volunteers).
- Internal guidelines for staff.
- Training.
- Information for clients and the general public including encouraging awareness and usage of the Complaints Procedure.

Standard 7: Colleague Training

Staff training is a key element in safeguarding children from abuse as well as supporting staff. Policy and Procedure training is given as part of the induction process in addition, all Supported Housing staff are provided with training organised by the local authority within which they work. This ensures that staff are trained to the correct protocol for their location.

Standard 8: Provision of Support

We will endeavour to support children and young people through:

- Our ethos, which promotes a positive, supportive, and secure environment and which gives all children, young people, and adults a sense of being respected and valued
- Liaison with other professionals and agencies who support children and parents
- A commitment to develop productive, supportive relationships with parents whenever it is in the child's interest to do so
- The development and support of a responsive and knowledgeable staff and volunteer group whose role it is to respond appropriately in Safeguarding situations.

3. Definitions

Word/Phrase	Definition
Child	Anyone who has not yet reached their 18 th birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people' throughout.

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Version Number: V12.0

Effective From: January 2026

Applicable To: This policy and its procedures apply to all members and colleagues of Bernicia Group, including Board Members, Trustees, Independent Committee Members, Directors, Involved Tenants, and colleagues whether full-time, part-time, fixed-term, casual employees, and volunteers of Bernicia, and subsidiaries of the group.

Associated Documents:

The following resources support the Safeguarding Adults policy and Bernicia colleagues to deliver responsive services to adults at risk. These can be found on the right of the Connect policy page:

- Safeguarding Children Process
- Signs and Symptoms of Abuse Guidance Note
- Safeguarding Reporting Triangle
- Attraction, Recruitment, and Selection Framework
- Domestic Abuse Policy
- Complaints Procedure
- Safeguarding Adults Policy
- Disclosure and Barring Service Policy

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion: An ED&I Assessment was completed in January 2025. Please contact the Governance team if you require a copy.

Approved By: Executive Director of Communities

Policy Author: Head of Care & Support

Policy Owner: Executive Director of Communities

Next Review: January 2027

Reference Number: POL-0103

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4. Change Control

Version Number	Effective Date	Amendment made by	Version approved by	Description of changes
V12.0	January 2026	Head of Care & Support	Exec Dir of Communities	Standard 6 and 7 amalgamated to one standard, new added text regarding Safeguarding Incident/Near Miss report in Standard 2
V11.1	11/02/2025	Safeguarding & Compliance Coordinator	Head of Care & Support	Additional text added to Policy Scope section, regarding Bernicia's responsibilities in actioning the policy and responsibility.
V11.0	21/01/2025	Head of Care & Support	Director of Housing	Minor grammatical changes. No changes to legislation/process. New template

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