# SP19 Safeguarding Adults at Risk & Children Policy (2024)

## Scope of policy

Soha is committed to identifying, supporting, and protecting adults at risk[1] and children who live in Soha properties.

An **adult** at risk is aged over 18 and is, or may be, in need of community care services by reason of:

- physical disability
- learning disability
- physical or mental illness
- immigration status
- barriers to speaking and understanding English with fluency
- reduced capacity owing to age
- dependency on drugs or alcohol
- being a young care leaver
- suffering from forced marriage, harassment or abuse – see SP24 Domestic Abuse Policy

An **adult** at risk may also be unable to take care of themselves, or unable to protect themselves against harm and exploitation.

Soha recognises the rights of every **child** to protection from abuse of any kind and is committed to promoting and safeguarding the welfare of children in our communities.

A **child** is defined as anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. The Children Act 2004 states those between 16 and 18 are still children even if they live alone, are in the armed forces or in prison or hospital.

*Child abuse can take four forms, all of which can cause long-term damage to a child: physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and child sexual abuse. Bullying and domestic violence are also forms of child abuse*.' NSPCC

A child or adult at risk can also be subject to exploitation such as Child Sexual Exploitation, Modern Day Slavery, Radicalisation and 'County Lines' drug couriering.

Domestic Abuse is covered specifically under Policy SP24, Domestic Abuse Policy. Children who are present during a domestic abuse incident are considered victims of abuse. Children's' social care should be contacted as soon as Soha becomes aware.

[1] An 'Adult at Risk' (formerly defined as a vulnerable adult) is someone who has needs for care and support, is experiencing abuse, or is at risk of abuse, and is unable to protect themselves owing to their care needs. The phrase vulnerable adult is still used in legislation, such as Consumer Standards.

## Aim

We will support **adults** at risk and **children** by:

- making sure that it is easy for referrals to be made from residents and members of the public and that people making a report are assigned a staff contact to support them.
- making positive used of data on our customers and their changing needs and providing services that assist them (such as age, disability, risk of harm or abuse, etc.).
- maintaining professional links with statutory and voluntary agencies supporting children and adults, such as Oxfordshire Adult / Child Safeguarding Boards.
- monitoring customer satisfaction with the support we provide to people at risk.
- providing all customers with clear and easily accessible information about our services offering information in alternate formats in line with our corporate publications. This policy and relevant procedure will be made available in Easy Read format.

We understand the important role our staff & contractors can play in their day-to-day work, from recognising **child** welfare issues to working with local authorities to enable them to fulfil their duties to children at risk. All staff & contractors contacting children, young people and families in their everyday work have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people. Soha will ensure all directly employed staff, temporary placements, and contractor staff are DBS checked, in line with government guidelines. In addition, all care staff working with Soha residents are DBS checked and will continue to have checks in line with county council contracts.

We will apply this policy consistently and fairly. We will not discriminate against any person on grounds of their race, colour, ethnic or national origins, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gender, age, or any other matter that may cause a person to be treated with injustice.

We monitor safeguarding cases by diversity strands. This is to:

- Increase our understanding of who safeguarding victims are
- Determine whether some groups might not be reporting abuse or whether certain groups are disproportionately represented amongst victims
- Tailor our services accordingly.

Soha is committed to creating an environment that is safe, inclusive, and respectful for all individuals, particularly adults at risk and those with additional needs. We believe that everyone has the right to express their concerns and complaints about our services without fear of retaliation or discrimination. To ensure this, we have established a clear and accessible complaints procedure. This includes providing necessary support such as translation services, easy-read materials, reasonable adjustments (for example on time limits) or advocacy support to help individuals understand and navigate the process. We also ensure that all complaints are taken seriously, thoroughly investigated, and responded to in a timely manner. Furthermore, we are dedicated to using feedback from these complaints to improve our services and practices. In doing so, we not only address the immediate concerns of the complainant but also contribute to the broader goal of enhancing the quality of our services for all users.

## Policy Statement

Soha recognises that **adults** at risk can experience barriers to accessing affordable housing and services and we will aim to remove those barriers. Our Tenancy Support Service works sensitively with those with complex needs, recognising that people's circumstances can change, and our approach must be flexible. The service also recognises the financial barriers suffered by people at risk and that they can be both claimants and respondents of anti-social behaviour.

Soha recognises that adults and children at risk of eviction or homelessness can become a safeguarding risk. Soha will work with local authorities to share timely information to avoid evictions and avoid evictions into homelessness, especially for households with children or adults at risk.

Soha will ensure all staff members and contractors are aware of their responsibility to be vigilant about **child** protection issues, their own conduct, and how to respond to any concerns or suspicions they may have. This policy is committed to actively preventing child abuse and setting out the course of action if any member of staff has concerns relating to child abuse. Soha aims to take all responsible measures to secure the health, safety and welfare of children and young people involved in its work.

We will listen to and act upon any report or allegation of **child** abuse, in the communities where we work. This includes allegations made against members of staff or contractors. This does not mean that Soha will judge whether abuse has occurred but will follow the correct procedures to ensure that we refer any concerns confidentially and sensitively to the correct agency that will be responsible for investigation.

## Implementation

Soha has implemented effective procedures setting out how our staff should identify, support and protect **adults** and **children at risk**. This includes Soha continuing to work in partnership with other agencies (statutory and voluntary) both formally and informally. We agree clear action plans outlining what support we will offer to adults and children at risk. We will maintain clear channels of communication with statutory agencies where we believe abuse or neglect of adults or children at risk might be taking place.

Soha will train and support all staff to identify signs of vulnerability, neglect or abuse and be aware of how to arrange support or report concerns appropriately.

## Resident Involvement

Soha has consulted the resident Customer Services portfolio holders as well as the Disability Awareness Action Group and the Seniors Group. We involved residents on the EDI Steering Group for a review of this policy.

## Appeals

Sometimes a customer may not be happy that we are handling their report in accordance with Soha's policies and procedures. They will be able to access our complaints process and the case will be reviewed by a senior manager.

## Responsibility

The Director of Housing and Communities is responsible for the effective implementation of this policy. However, all staff have a duty to support and protect **adults** at risk and **children** in our communities.

## Monitoring and review

We will monitor this policy to ensure it meets best practice and current legislation and will review it within no less than 2 years.

**Adults** at risk and **children** may be initially identified as 'at risk' by staff, or by a relevant agency or person. Soha will have clear procedures in place about storing this information, access to it and sharing of it. These will conform to our Data Protection Policy and Privacy Notices.

## Context

Soha Housing Staff Code of Conduct
SP06 Data Protection Policy
Data Protection Act 2018
SP15 Confidentiality (Whistleblowing) Policy
Children Act 2004
Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013
Housing Act 2004
Mental Capacity Act 2005
Disability and Discrimination Act 2005

Homeless Reduction Act (2017)

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| SLT Approved | 24 July 2024 | Members' Forum (for information) | 18 July 2024 |
| EIA Completed | 25 July 2024 | Review Due Date | By July 2026 |
| DPIA Completed | 25 July 2024 | | |