Safeguarding Policy

Created by: Safeguarding Lead
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Nov 2024	Policy reviewed – board member updated.
December 2025	Policy reviewed.
Jan 2026	Policy updated - board members updated. Additional information at 1.5, 2.3, 4.3

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Statement

Libraries Unlimited is committed to providing a safe and secure environment in which everyone can thrive. We're also committed to the safeguarding of everyone who uses our libraries and services, as well as staff and volunteers, and especially children and vulnerable adults. Our focus is on upholding high standards of safeguarding practice across the charity, in accordance with government guidance and key industry legislation (Appendix 1). We recognise that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, and all staff and volunteers will be expected to read this policy and understand their role in safeguarding.

1. Our Commitment to Safeguarding

1.1 Libraries Unlimited is committed to providing a safe environment for all our customers, staff and volunteers. Our safeguarding responsibilities particularly include all children and vulnerable adults who access our library services, in libraries, online, or in any other environment, or who may work as staff or volunteers. We recognise that as a public space, it will not always be possible to identify who is a child or vulnerable adult, and therefore we need to acknowledge that anyone we interact with could have additional needs.

1.2 This policy applies to all staff (including senior managers and those who work in the support teams), volunteers, agency staff, freelancers, trustees or anyone working on behalf of Libraries Unlimited. We understand that we're all responsible for safeguarding and we recognise our duty to support vulnerable people.

1.3 We agree to work cooperatively with the relevant agencies, to ensure our safeguarding practices are effective and up to date.

1.4 We ensure that all safeguarding incidents are recorded, reported and reviewed in a timely manner.

1.5 Information for members of the public:

- Members of the public should report safeguarding concerns direct to library staff regarding an event, activity or incident at any Devon or Torbay library – this will be reviewed and escalated where necessary, following internal safeguarding procedures. You can report a concern at a different library if that is more convenient or appropriate for you to do so, or email: safeguarding@librariesunlimited.org.uk
- While we take all safeguarding concerns and complaints seriously, we will not tolerate harassment or abuse of staff, including contacting multiple members of staff with the same complaint or information.
- If a member of the public would like to make a complaint, please see our Complaints policy for details.

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2. What is the aim of this policy?

2.1 The aim of this policy is to ensure:

- Effective safeguarding rules are in place, with particular focus on children and vulnerable adults in all library settings.
- Staff and volunteers are aware of their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding.
- Staff are adequately supported in dealing with incidents of suspected or actual abuse, neglect or harm.
- Procedures are in place to minimise the risk of inappropriate behaviour taking place or false allegations of inappropriate behaviour being made.

2.2 The policy applies to:

- Both physical and virtual environments (in libraries, on social media and online).
- Not only staff and volunteers, but also those who run activities in our physical and virtual environments, will be expected to read, understand and complete the Safeguarding Statement form to confirm their agreement to act consistent with it.
  This could include (but is not limited to):
  - Anyone from an external organisation who comes in to run a session for children or vulnerable adults, such as a craft event.
  - Any children's authors running an event.
  - Any performer doing a show for children.
  - Any external organisation showcasing information, advice or products in our spaces.

2.3. Staff are advised to use due diligence when running events with partners and external organisations in public spaces.

To reduce risks when holding events:

- Where the library has directly commissioned an external performer or organisation for an event or activity, they should carry out basic checks, for example, review websites, social media for information and reviews.
- The Safeguarding Statement form must be completed prior to the event and risk assessment updated with any relevant information.
- Staff should refer to and follow the Safeguarding Procedures document.

3. Key Definitions

3.1 The term 'child' refers to any person below the age of 18.

3.2 The term 'vulnerable adult' refers to any person aged 18 or over who has need of care or support and is experiencing (or is at risk of experiencing) discrimination, harm or neglect because of their needs. These needs include (but aren't limited to):

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- Requiring community care services due to a mental or physical disability, age, or a health condition
- Being unable to take care of themselves
- Being unable to protect themselves from abuse, harm or exploitation

3.3 The terms ‘harm’ or ‘abuse’ include (but aren’t limited to):

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Psychological abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Financial abuse
- Exploitation
- Discrimination
- Neglect or self-neglect
- Bullying
- Radicalisation
- Online abuse or grooming
- Trafficking
- Institutional abuse

4. Our Policy

Unless otherwise stated, we do not provide a caring or supervisory service for children or vulnerable adults within our libraries.
Children and vulnerable adults will remain the responsibility of their parent or carer while in the library, and children under the age of eight should be accompanied at all times.
Staff or volunteers should never agree to care for a child or vulnerable adult, unless that is part of an agreed service we are providing (such as a children’s book club, craft session or code club for children above the age of eight where parents and carers may not be present, etc.).

In those situations, a risk assessment must:

- Reflect that staff involved in those sessions are taking on additional responsibility.
- Include specific guidance to minimise the risk.

The required level of criminal records check (DBS) assessed for that activity should have been carried out and should be up to date for any staff or volunteers involved.

We recognise that we come into contact with children and vulnerable people on a daily basis, and in some cases, get to know people well enough to notice changes in their appearance or behaviour. We also pride ourselves in being trusted places where people can come if they need help with a range of issues. It is therefore important that we all have a good knowledge of safeguarding and the possible signs of abuse, and a clear understanding of what steps to take if we have concerns about an individual or if someone discloses information to us.

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4.1 Our policy is guided by the following principles:

- Every library user has the right to be protected from all types of harm, discrimination or abuse, regardless of age, disability, racial heritage, religious belief, language, sex, sexual orientation, gender or identity. See the Bullying & Harassment Policy for further details.
- The welfare of the child or vulnerable adult is paramount. We're dedicated to safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, while respecting the rights of other library users. In instances of conflict, the protection of the child or vulnerable adult will always come first.
- Children and vulnerable adults have a right to be heard, listened to, respected and taken seriously.
- Our priority in safeguarding is to protect children and vulnerable adults. In making any decisions about actions to take, we will work to ensure that there is no harm or distress caused, whilst recognising that some actions which could cause distress may be necessary to ensure the safety of that child or vulnerable adult.
- We aim to always work in partnership with children and vulnerable adults, parents and carers, and associated agencies.

4.2 We're committed to:

- Safe recruitment, selection and appropriate vetting of employees and volunteers. These are outlined in the relevant Human Resources and Volunteering policies and procedures.
- Providing effective management of staff and volunteers with support and ongoing training.
- Ensuring employees know that they must report safeguarding incidents, and how to report concerns about staff conduct (details of this can be found in the Whistleblowing Policy).
- Taking seriously all concerns and allegations of abuse and responding appropriately.
- Informing children, vulnerable adults and carers of our safeguarding policy and procedures as appropriate.
- Ensuring all staff have access to clear guidelines for relevant reporting procedures and processes
- Carrying out appropriate risk assessments for all activities in the library (and organised activities outside the library), with care taken to provide adequate protection for all customers, especially children and vulnerable adults.
- Ensuring that any organisations or individuals invited onto library premises to run activities have read, understood and signed our Safeguarding Statement and have appropriate DBS checks where required, check with HR or the DSL if you are unsure.

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- Ensuring that any contractors are signed into and out of the library premises.

4.3 The Libraries Unlimited Board of Trustees will nominate board members with responsibility for Safeguarding. There will also be a named Safeguarding Lead in the Libraries Unlimited Leadership Team who will put in place structures, procedures and guidelines for the management of safeguarding incidents and situations. However, it is the responsibility of all staff and volunteers to embed safeguarding best practice in everything we do.

The library manager (most senior member of staff) is the point of contact and responsible for safeguarding queries or concerns in a library space, in the first instance, which can then be escalated as necessary to the Designated Safeguarding Lead or Service Delivery Managers.

4.4 Libraries Unlimited will ensure that information of a confidential nature is communicated on a 'need to know' basis and stored securely.

5. Our Safeguarding Code of Conduct

5.1 This code of conduct aims to:

- Protect the children and vulnerable adults using our libraries
- Protect library staff

5.2 Staff and volunteers will:

- Act in a way that safeguards the welfare of all library customers, staff and volunteers, especially children and vulnerable adults.
- Give careful thought to their attitudes, demeanour and language, ensuring that their conduct does not give rise to comment or speculation. This includes when posting on social media channels or elsewhere online.
- Be committed to preventing any form of discrimination (direct or indirect) against any person on grounds of age, disability, race, sex, gender reassignment, marital status, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation, and religion or belief.
- Be committed to preventing any form of bullying and to report any concerns.
- Listen to children and vulnerable adults and treat them with respect.
- Ensure all communication with children and vulnerable adults is appropriate to the age and understanding of the child or adult. Libraries Unlimited recognises that this is especially important for children and vulnerable adults with disabilities that might affect their ability to communicate, or whose preferred language is not English.

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- Try to ensure another member of staff is present when involved in a difficult situation or conversation, especially where that involves a child or vulnerable adult.

5.3 Staff will never:

- Use abusive language. This includes demeaning or sarcastic remarks that may cause loss of self-esteem or confidence.
- Let allegations that a child or adult makes go unchallenged or unrecorded.
- Spend prolonged amounts of time alone with a child or vulnerable adult within their working capacity, unless part of an agreed role with appropriate checks in place.
- Make sexually suggestive comments to or within earshot of any of our customers.
- Exchange personal contact details or arrange to meet outside the library with any children or vulnerable adults you meet through your role.
- Make links with children or vulnerable adults who you meet through your role via social media or anywhere else online.
- Undertake activities of a personal nature for children or vulnerable adults.
- Allow or engage in touching of any kind where that can be avoided. Physical contact isn't usually necessary when working with customers in libraries. If physical contact is unavoidable, it should always be limited as much as possible and only used in response to the needs of the individual. Staff should always consider if physical contact is necessary and, where appropriate, ask permission or explain the reasons for touching. If someone is obviously distressed, try and comfort them verbally.
- Take photographs of children or young people without first obtaining the written consent of a parent/carer using the appropriate consent form.
- Put the full name of a child or vulnerable person on social media or allow it to be visible in photographs
- Accompany anyone into a toilet cubicle.
- Agree to hold or 'keep an eye' on children/vulnerable adults for a parent/carer.
- lead a child or vulnerable adult by the hand in search of a parent/carer. Keep them safe until the parent/carer returns or call the police or Children's Services if you have cause to believe that the child has been abandoned or forgotten. Never escort them home.
- Engage in rough, physical games.
- Physically restrain a child or vulnerable adult, unless you have received the appropriate training. In a situation where there is a risk to people, you should follow these three steps:
  1. Ensure your safety by removing yourself from the situation (e.g., stepping back, leaving the room, or putting something between you and the individual).
  2. Make others around you as safe as you can, including the person who is reacting.
  3. Seek appropriate help, by calling for trained staff or contacting the Police.

6 Reporting a Safeguarding Incident

6.1 All staff and volunteers have a responsibility to report safeguarding incidents, and every allegation is taken seriously. Please note the following:

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- It's your responsibility to report, not resolve.

- When a safeguarding incident occurs, the focus should be on the safety and welfare of the child or vulnerable adult involved.

- Staff should not place themselves in an unsafe situation. If concerned about the immediate safety of the child or vulnerable adult, or your own safety and the safety of other staff/volunteers and library users, you should call the police immediately.

- Staff should gather as much information as possible for the report, including name, address, date and time, and the nature of the incident. Personal data stored on Spark or other systems should only be accessed if there is a compelling reason to override our GDPR responsibilities – for example, if you need information about a child or vulnerable adult to pass onto MASH or the Safeguarding Adults Partnership. This should take place in a suitably safe location. You shouldn't attempt to interview the child or vulnerable adult and should not ask 'leading' questions. You should be aware that in some instances, it may not be appropriate or safe to obtain information.

- Confidentiality or anonymity should never be promised to the child or vulnerable adult involved. Reassure them that details will only be passed to people who need to know, and who can support them.

- Consent to report the incident should be obtained from the child or vulnerable adult. In some instances, it may be appropriate to report the incident without consent, especially if a child or vulnerable adult is at risk of harm. However, their objection to the referral should be noted in writing.

- The designated Safeguarding Lead will not investigate the allegations. Their role is to advise and, if necessary, pass their concerns on to a professional advisor at either Devon County Council or Torbay Council's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), Devon / Torbay and Devon Safeguarding Adults Partnership, or to the police. They might be given advice on how to address the incident, which should then be conveyed in the appropriate manner.

- It may be appropriate for another manager or staff member to contact the MASH instead of the Safeguarding Lead. Unless there is an immediate risk of harm, however, the advice received should then be discussed with the Safeguarding Lead and/or other senior managers before any further action is taken.

For further information on how to report a safeguarding incident, please refer to Safeguarding: Procedures for Library Staff.

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7 Data Protection, Data Storage and Sharing Information

7.1 All safeguarding reports, referral forms and other related documents relating to a safeguarding incident will be securely stored in the OSHENS system, and for reporting purposes, within Libraries Unlimited's systems. It will be stored and retained in accordance with current data protection guidelines. Access to safeguarding records will be limited to those who have a direct need to see them.

7.2 Information relating to a safeguarding incident is usually shared with the child's parents or carers. The only exception to this is if sharing would result in serious harm to the child or another person. In some instances, a third-party agency or organisation may explicitly state that the information should not be shared. The Safeguarding Lead is responsible for making the final decision regarding withholding or sharing information, after having received guidance from professionals.

7.3 Anonymised information about incidents may be shared with members of the Board or Leadership team as part of regular reporting. This is to ensure appropriate oversight, identify themes, or to consider necessary changes in policy.

8 Authority (correct January 2026)

Policy Sponsor: The Chief Executive Officer (Alex Kittow) is the Policy Sponsor

Policy Contact: The Safeguarding Lead (Sophie Crofts) is the Policy Contact

Designated Board members: Morgen Witzel and Alan Nash

9 Related Documents and policies

- Safeguarding: procedures for library staff
- Complaints Policy
- Recruitment and Selection procedures
- Equal Opportunities and Dignity at Work Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Room Hire Policy
- Social Media Policy
- Grievance Policy
- Acceptable Use Policy for the internet and PC use in libraries
- Photography Policy

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Appendix 1 - Legislation and sources of reference

- **The Children Acts – 1989 and 2004**

Library staff should always be guided by the essential principle in the Children Act (2004) - that the welfare of the child is paramount. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/contents

- **Working together to safeguard children**

Statutory guidance on inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2

- **A Safe Place for Children**

Guidelines for public library services (June 2015) produced by Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP). https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.cilip.org.uk/resource/group/4c3a9620-1f19-4980-a6e8- f4f625f5c658/news/ylg_safe_place_for_children_.pdf

- **Devon Children and Families Partnership - Devon and Torbay Safeguarding Children Boards (DSCB and TSCB)**

Bringing together the main agencies working in partnership with children, families and communities to provide an effective system which safeguards and promotes the welfare of children in need of protection. Their websites are helpful and provide a quick way to access advice and information. https://www.devonchildrenandfamiliespartnership.org.uk/

- **Devon County Council**

Child protection procedures and guidelines can be found at: https://new.devon.gov.uk/educationandfamilies/child-protection

- **Torbay Council**

Child protection procedures and guidelines can be found at: http://www.torbaysafeguarding.org.uk/

- **Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 - The Prevent Duty**

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protecting-children-from-radicalisation-the-prevent- duty -

- **Equality Act 2010 – protected characteristics**

Protected characteristics | EHRC (equalityhumanrights.com)

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