

Safeguarding Children Policy & Procedure

Adopted – July 2011

Date of last review: Oct 2022

Next review date: October 2025 or unless significant legislative or statutory requirements come into effect

Stevenage Borough Council Safeguarding Children Vision Statement

Stevenage Borough Council supports children's rights as defined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989. These rights must be realised for children to develop their full potential, free from hunger and want, neglect and abuse.

Adults and other children can harm a child's wellbeing, by abusing them. It's not always obvious when a child is being abused, there may be specific signs or your instinct may tell you something is wrong.

Child abuse is never acceptable in any circumstance, and every child has the right to be safe. Safeguarding, the protection of children and their rights, is everyone's business.

Working in partnership with the community and Safeguarding authorities, Stevenage Borough Council aims to make sure that children using its services are listened to and protected from abuse. The Council's staff must report all incidents or concerns they have relating to the wellbeing of a child.

Councillor Sharon Taylor
Leader

Matt Partridge
Chief Executive

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1 Introduction

In July 2011 Stevenage Borough Council adopted its first council wide Safeguarding Children Policy. An implementation Strategy and Action Plan have established the structure and processes to ensure the Council's Policy intentions are being delivered. This revised Policy updates the original with inclusion of national developments and government guidance.

2 Stevenage Borough Council's Duty to Safeguard

2.1 Valuing and protecting children

The purpose of this policy is to inform the Council's staff, volunteers, contractors and councillors as well as the public of the Council's commitment to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, in a legal and ethical context. The Children Act 2004 imposed the duty on all organisations that have contact with children to ensure they make sufficient arrangements to protect them.

The Safeguarding Children Policy and Procedure document will be operated in line with Stevenage Borough Council's values of:

- Excellent
- Caring
- Responsive
- Innovative
- One Team
- Straightforward

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare and wellbeing of children is defined as:

- Protecting children from maltreatment;
- Preventing impairment of children's health or development;
- Ensuring that children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care.
- Enabling children to have optimum life chances and to enter adulthood.

Stevenage Borough Council is an extended partner of the Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) and has accepted the responsibility to inform Hertfordshire County Council of any concerns about a child's wellbeing. Stevenage Borough Council's Safeguarding Children Policy has been developed in line with the HSCP County wide safeguarding procedures manual. All Stevenage Borough Council staff working with children and young people must follow this policy. This includes volunteers and councillors.

2.2 *The law protecting children*

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

This is an international agreement setting out the minimum standards for protecting children's rights. The convention refers to all children up to the age of 18 years. In relation to safeguarding children, it states that:

- the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration when action is taken concerning them;
- children are to be protected from all forms of discrimination;
- every child has the inherent right to life, survival and development;
- children should not be punished cruelly or in a way that belittles them;
- children have the right to be protected from all forms of abuse and neglect, and be given proper care by those looking after them;
- children who are victims of abuse are entitled to the care and treatment needed to recover from the effects of their mistreatment.

The Children Act 1989

This brought together legislation on caring for and protecting children and provides the framework for safeguarding children and promoting their welfare. The Act 1989 is underpinned by the following principles:

- **Welfare principle** – the child's welfare is the paramount consideration in any decision that affects them
- **Parental responsibility** – replaces parental rights. Parents share parental responsibility with the local authority for a child in care
- **Partnership** – professionals and families must work together for the welfare of children
- **The child's voice** – a child's wishes and feelings should be sought and taken into account in making decisions affecting them (if they are old enough to understand)
- **Family is best** – a child's own family is the best place for a child to be brought up
- **No order principle** – a court order should not be made unless it is needed to improve the child's life
- **Diversity issues** – racial, cultural, religious and linguistic background must be taken into account in all decisions.

The main safeguarding provisions of the Act are:

- **Child protection** (section 47) – a local authority shall make inquiries where there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child or young person living in the area is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm.
- **Children in need** (section 17) – a local authority has a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within the area who are in need – unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable level of health or development, or whose health or development is likely to be significantly or further impaired without the provision of services – and to promote the upbringing of such children by their families.
- **Inter-agency working** – health, education and other public sector agencies are required to assist Children's Social Care in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children

- **Court orders** – a court can order a child to be taken into care or to be under a supervision order. It can also order a child to be given emergency protection or to be assessed.

The Children Act 2004

The Act works alongside the Children Act 1989 Act and makes it statutory to safeguard and promote the welfare of children across all statutory agencies. It also set out that every local authority establish a Safeguarding Children Board to oversee all work to safeguard children.

2.3 Our priorities

The Children Act 2004 places responsibilities upon Stevenage Borough Council, as a relevant partner to Hertfordshire County Council's Children's Services, to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Children have a right to be safe and should be protected from all forms of abuse and neglect. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and it is better to help children as early as possible before issues escalate and become more damaging. Children and families are best supported and protected when there is a coordinated response from all relevant agencies.

In line with the Children Act 2004 Stevenage Borough Council must (section 10) cooperate to improve wellbeing and (section 11) have arrangements in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

To meet the requirements of section 11 of the Children Act 2004, Stevenage Borough Council should have regard to statutory guidance 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' (HM Government 2018). The Council has accepted its duty to co-operate with Hertfordshire County Council's Children's Services and it will ensure that it meets the requirements set out by the Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership.

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) sets out the following priorities which all organisations providing services for children, parents or families should demonstrate to fulfil their commitment to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Stevenage Borough Council has agreed to be audited regularly on these outcomes by the Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership:

- Clear priorities for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.
- Clear commitment by senior management to the importance of safeguarding and promoting children's welfare.
- A clear line of accountability within the organisation for work on safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.
- Recruitment and human resources management procedures that take account of the need to protect children and young people including arrangements for appropriate checks on new staff and volunteers.
- Procedures for reporting and dealing with allegations of abuse against members of staff, Councillors and volunteers.
- Arrangements to ensure all staff undertake and refresh appropriate training to equip them to carry out their safeguarding responsibilities effectively.

- Policies in place for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in line with guidance from Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership.
- Arrangements to work effectively with other organisations to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, including arrangements for sharing information.
- A culture of listening to and talking with children to ensure their views on actions and intervention are taken into account.

3 Guarding the Door

3.1 *Employing and maintaining safer staff*

“The harsh reality is that if a sufficiently devious person is determined to seek out opportunities to work their evil, no one can guarantee that they will be stopped. Our task is to make it as difficult as possible for them to succeed.”¹

In line with the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 Stevenage Borough Council are committed to safer recruitment and will take reasonable steps to ensure that staff working with children and young people, are safe to do so. Posts will be appropriately assessed to determine their level of contact with children and young people.

Where required Stevenage Borough Council, in line with its Safer Recruitment Policy, will vet potential employees using the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) to support safer recruitment decisions and prevent unsuitable people from working with at risk groups. There are three types of check:

- Standard check - this will check for spent and unspent convictions, cautions, reprimands and final warnings.
- Enhanced DBS check - the same as the standard check plus any additional information held by local police which is reasonably considered relevant to the post being applied for.
- Enhanced with list checks – same as the enhanced check, but includes a check of the DBS Barred lists.

All disclosures for unsupervised work with children and young people, that meet the definition of regulated work, will be at an enhanced level.

Additionally, all individuals recruited to Stevenage Borough Council undergo pre-employment referencing covering a three-year period.

Further information on the Recruitment Process and pre-employment checks can be found In the Stevenage Borough Council Recruitment Policy.

¹ Bichard, Sir Michael, 2004, *The Bichard Inquiry Report*

4 Working to Protect Children

4.1 *Safeguarding children: everyone's responsibility*

Every member of staff, volunteer, contractor or Councillor, who, during their work have any kind of contact (direct or indirect) with children and their families, or who have access to information about them, has a responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

Protecting the vulnerable is not just a moral duty, Government guidance makes it clear that it is a shared responsibility, and depends upon effective joint working between agencies and professionals that have different roles and expertise.

For the Council this duty means that:

- Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is not just the duty of those working directly with these groups of people. This commitment must be demonstrated at all levels of the organisation:
 - Political** - The lead Councillor for Communities and Neighbourhoods takes the role of Political Champion for Safeguarding Children.
 - Strategic** - The Council delegates the Strategic Officer Champion role for safeguarding children to the Chief Executive Officer.
 - Operational** - The operational leadership role of Designated Senior Manager is delegated to the Community Safety Manager. Deputy Designated Senior Manager is delegated to the Safeguarding Co-ordinator. Other delegated roles include Strategic Designated Senior Persons (DSPs).
- Stevenage Borough Council must ensure that no act or omission on the part of the organisation/staff/partner agencies puts a child inadvertently at risk.
- A rigorous system is in place to proactively safeguard and promote the welfare of children and support staff in fulfilling their obligations.
- This duty applies to the Council's independent contractors who are required to meet the standards of the Council in protecting children and promoting their welfare in responding to concerns about a child or a member of staff.

Stevenage Borough Council will create a safer Council for children through its Safeguarding policy and procedures. This is in line with other key corporate policies which are maintained in accordance with safeguarding legislation:

- Whistleblowing Policy
- Recruitment and Selection Policy
- Disciplinary Procedure
- Code of Conduct
- Health and Safety Policy
- Equalities and Diversity Policy
- Complaints Procedure
- Data Protection and Security
- Information Sharing Protocol
- Safer Working Practice with Children and Young People
- Safeguarding Adults at Risk Policy 2019
- Domestic Abuse Strategy and Action Plan

4.2 Staff trained and developed to safeguard children

The responsibility of Stevenage Borough Council is to ensure that all staff that work with or have contact with children, receive appropriate training. Although not all staff, volunteers, contractors or Councillors will work directly with children or have direct access to their information, they must understand the responsibility they have to protecting children from harm. All staff must complete mandatory online training modules on Child Protection & Safeguarding and Radicalisation upon induction to the organisation. Completion will be monitored by line managers. Further training is offered to staff who have incidental contact with children in the course of their work (Level 1). Advanced Child Protection training is provided to staff nominated to perform the duties of Designated Senior Person / Safeguarding lead for individual Business Units. It is the role of DSPs to make referrals to HCC Children's services and contribute to multiagency meetings if required.

All staff, volunteers, contractors and Councillors will be appropriately trained and managed to ensure their skills and knowledge match the level of contact they have with children through their work. Training is audited by the Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership.

4.3 Behaviour standards for staff, volunteers, contractors and councillors

Staff will provide the highest level of care ensuring a child's welfare is a primary guide to their actions whilst maintaining professional standards of conduct with children who use the Council's services. Staff, volunteers, contractors and Councillors should never act in such a way that could leave them open to allegations of abuse or inappropriate behaviour or relationships with a child.

Everyone working for or involved with the Council should be alert to behaviours, which may be inappropriate and addressed where relevant. Further guidance can be found in the Council's Safer Working Practice with Children: a guide for employees, councillors, volunteers and contractors working with children and young people.

4.4 Contracted services

Legislation and Statutory Guidance place a duty on the Council to ensure that safeguarding children is considered in the procurement process. A Contact Manager's Toolkit has been developed which can be found on the SBC intranet. Guidance is also provided in relation to the hiring of community buildings with the requirement for completion of an assessment. This is linked in to the Prevent agenda. (Counter terrorism strategy: Contest 2018)

5 Abuse

5.1 What is abuse?

Child abuse/maltreatment is any action by another person – adult or child – that causes significant harm to a child. A child is defined as anyone who has not reached 18 years of age. If a concern arises for anyone ages 18 and over the SBC Safeguarding Adult at Risk Policy must be followed. Further guidance is available from the Hertfordshire Safeguarding Adult's Board.

5.2 Types of abuse

The Council's staff will come into contact with a wide range of families who have differing beliefs, values and identities. The Council values the diversity of its residents and acknowledges the range of beliefs. At the same time, the Council's staff must ensure that the abuse of children is not accepted based upon a family's race, religion or cultural background.

Child abuse can be categorised by:

- **Physical abuse** – deliberately hurting a child causing injuries such as bruises, broken bones, burns or cuts.
- **Emotional abuse** – on going emotional maltreatment or emotional neglect of a child that can seriously damage a child's emotional health and development. This includes bullying and abuse that takes place online (cyberbullying). This also includes children who witness domestic abuse.
- **Sexual abuse** – forcing or persuading a child to take part in sexual activities. This does not have to be physical contact and it can happen online.
- **Neglect** – on going failure to meet a child's basic needs.

Alongside these types of abuse, additional forms of abuse include the following:

- **Child sexual exploitation** – a type of sexual abuse in which children are sexually exploited for money, power or status
- **Honour based abuse** – a crime or incident which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of the family and/or community.
- **Female genital mutilation** – a range of procedures which; involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia for non-medical reasons.
- **Forced marriage** – a marriage conducted without the valid consent of one or both parties and where duress is a factor.
- **Domestic abuse** – any incident, or pattern of incidents, of controlling, coercive and threatening behaviour or violence. A child may suffer from domestic abuse by seeing or hearing the maltreatment of another.
- **Radicalisation** – the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and extremist ideologies associated with terrorist groups
- **Online abuse (cyberbullying)** – any type of abuse that happens on the web, whether through social networks, playing online games or using mobile phone.
- **Faith/ritual abuse & spirit possession** - belief in concepts of witchcraft and spirit possession, demons or the devil acting through children or 'leading them astray'

(traditionally seen in some Christian beliefs), the evil eye or djinns (traditionally known in some Islamic faith contexts) and dakini (in the Hindu context).

- **Child trafficking** – children are recruited, moved or transported and then exploited, forced to work or sold. Children are trafficked for child sexual exploitation, benefit fraud, forced marriage, domestic servitude, such as cooking, cleaning and childcare, forced labour in factories or agriculture, criminal activity such as pick pocketing, begging, transporting drugs, working on cannabis farms, selling pirated DVDs, bag theft.
- **Grooming** – when someone builds an emotional connection with a child to gain their trust for purposes of sexual abuse or exploitation.
- **Harmful sexual behaviours** – using sexually explicit words and phrases, inappropriate touching, using sexual violence or threats, full penetrative sex with other children or adults.

5.3 Children in complex situations

Council staff may, through their daily duties, come across children in complex situations. These may include

- **Substance misuse and alcohol abuse** - As well as the emotional harm that witnessing abuse of substances (drugs) or alcohol can cause children, the behaviour of parents, family members or other people within the family can have a direct and immediate impact on a child. Children themselves can misuse drugs and alcohol. This may have a significant impact on their wellbeing and safety, making them extremely vulnerable to abuse in addition to the effects on their wellbeing.
- **Other people in the family** – it is important that when considering the impact of risks on a child all aspects of the child's life, including key relationships are considered. This should also include lodgers within the family home.
- **Adult customers** – those who present with complex needs to the Council, staff should consider the impact of their needs has on the wellbeing of children and families. Part of the assessment of need should include an assessment of risks to children associated/cared for by the adult.
- **Disabled Children** - may be especially vulnerable to abuse for a number of reasons:
 - Many disabled children are at an increased likelihood of being socially isolated with fewer outside contacts than non-disabled children.
 - Their dependency on parents and carers for practical assistance in daily living, including intimate personal care, increases their risk of exposure to abusive behaviour.
 - They have an impaired capacity to resist or avoid abuse.
 - They may have speech, language and communication needs which may make it difficult to tell others what is happening.
 - They often do not have access to someone they can trust to disclose that they have been abused, and/or
 - They are especially vulnerable to bullying and intimidation.
- **Private fostering** - A privately fostered child is a child under the age of 16, or 18 if they are disabled, who is being cared for by someone who is not their parent or a close relative (step parents, grandparents, brother/sister or aunt/uncle) for a period of more than 28 days. Private foster carers are legally required to notify Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) of their role.

- **Refugee and unaccompanied asylum seeking children** - are open to a number of risks which need to be taken into account in any assessment or provision of service. If they are not known to services, they may be living with people or in settings which pose a danger to them.
- **Animal abuse** - can be a part of a constellation of family violence, which can include child abuse and domestic violence. However, this does not imply that children who are cruel to animals necessarily go on to be violent adults and adults who harm animals are not necessarily also violent to their partners and/or children.²
- **Gangs** - Children and young people involved with gangs might be victims of violence or they might be pressured into doing things like stealing or carrying drugs or weapons. They might be abused, exploited or put into dangerous situations. For lots of young people, being part of a gang makes them feel part of a family so they might not want to leave. Even if they do, leaving or attempting to leave can be a really scary idea. They might be frightened about what will happen to them, their friends or their family if they leave.

5.4 Signs and indicators of abuse

The signs of child abuse are not always obvious and a child might not tell anyone what's happening to them. Children might be scared that the abuser will find out and worried that the abuse will get worse. They might think that there is no-one they can tell or that they will not be believed. Sometimes, children do not even realise that what is happening is abuse. There are some common signs of abuse, which may suggest that abuse has occurred and can present in some of the following behaviour, which may be unusual for the child/young person:

- withdrawn
- suddenly behaves differently
- anxious
- clingy
- depressed
- aggressive
- problems sleeping
- eating disorders
- wets the bed
- soils clothes
- takes risks
- misses school
- changes in eating habits
- obsessive behaviour
- nightmares
- drugs
- alcohol
- self-harm
- thoughts about suicide

² NSPCC and RSPCA (2007) *Understanding the link: child abuse, animal abuse and domestic violence*. Information for professionals

These behaviours are not exhaustive and do not always mean abuse is happening. Further guidance can be found in the SBC Signs and Indicators of Child Abuse and Neglect guidance.

5.5 Responding to safeguarding concerns

A child is a **Child in Need** if:

- He/she is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him/her of services by a local authority;
- His/her health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision for him/her of such services; or
- He/she is disabled.

A child is a **Child at risk** if:

- There is reasonable cause to suspect a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm whether a single incident or an accumulation of events which interrupt damage or change a child's development
- Significant ill-treatment or the impairment of health or development including, for example, impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another

Where a Council employee, volunteer or councillor is concerned that a child is “in need” or may be “at risk of significant harm” they will need to follow the Council’s procedure as outlined in Appendix A. For most staff this will mean contacting their Designated Senior Person. To ensure a clear line of accountability, Designated Senior Persons across the Council are responsible for dealing with staff concerns and taking action to safeguard children, making the appropriate referral. Prior to making any referral, best practice shows that parents should be notified of the intended referral, although only if doing so would not put the child at further risk of harm.

Further information about thresholds for support can be found on the Hertfordshire County Council website by accessing the threshold document: *Meeting the Needs of Children and Families in Hertfordshire* document. Further guidance for advice and support can be found in Appendix B.

5.6 Acting on allegations against staff, councillors and volunteers

An allegation is any information which indicates that a member of staff, volunteer or Councillor may have:

- Behaved in a way which has, or may have harmed a child;
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against/related to a child;
- Behaved toward a child in a way which indicates s/he is unsuitable to work with children.

This applies to any child the member of staff/volunteer has contact with in their personal, professional or community life.³

³ HM Government, (2018), *Working Together to Safeguard Children*

5.7 Keeping, accessing and sharing children's information safely

Effective sharing of information between practitioners and local agencies is essential for early identification of need, assessment and service provision.⁴

Within Stevenage Borough Council, children's information must be stored, accessed and shared in accordance with legislative and recognised best practice recommendations. This information could range from personal details such as name, address and school name to sensitive information such as ethnicity and family information on benefits but also include concerns arising about the wellbeing of the child which staff of Stevenage Borough Council have deemed appropriate to record under the scope of this policy. Staff are required to record any safeguarding concerns and the Designated Senior Person (DSP) is responsible for creating and updating the file. A copy of the online portal submission should be downloaded where applicable, as well as any correspondence in relation to the concern. This information is to be stored only in the secure E drive. Personal data must be communicated appropriately, in line with the Information Commissioners Office Data Sharing Code of Practice (statutory); and the Seven Golden rules for information sharing. The standard applied by the Council conforms to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Regulation (EU) 2016/**679**).

⁴ HM Government, (2018), *Working Together to Safeguard Children*

6 Conclusion

This safeguarding children policy meets the legislative and moral duty of Stevenage Borough Council by setting out its understanding of the requirement to make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. This policy provides a foundation for the Council's in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and their families using the Council's services.

7 Useful Resources

7.1 Linked/related legislation and statutory guidance

[Handling cases of forced marriage: multi-agency practice guidelines 2014](#)

[Female genital mutilation: guidelines to protect children and women 2014](#)

[Serious Crime Act 2015](#)

[Counter terrorism strategy: Contest 2011](#)

<https://www.itai.info/what-is-prevent/>

[Modern Slavery 2014](#)

[United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989](#)

[GDPR 2018](#)

[Human Rights Act 1998](#)

[Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004](#)

[The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006](#)

[Children and Young Person's Act 2008](#)

[Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018](#)

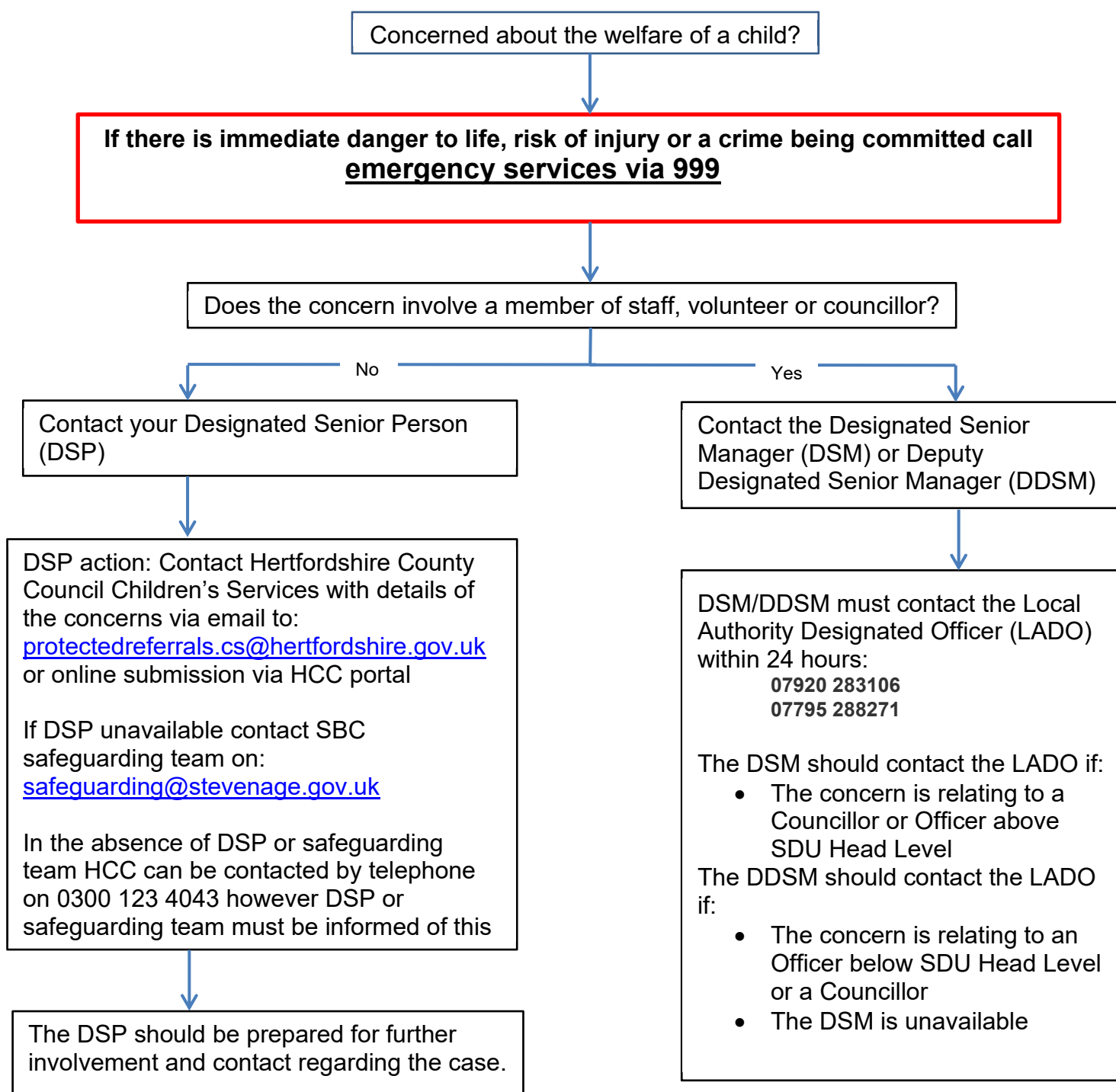
[Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Board Inter-agency Child Protection and Safeguarding Children Procedures](#)

[Children and Families Act 2014](#)

[Children and Social Work Act 2017](#)

HSCP [Contents \(proceduresonline.com\)](#)

Appendix A: Safeguarding children concern pathway



Key Contacts:

DSM – Senior HR Manager: 01438 242164

DDSM – Community Safety Manager: 01438 242521

DSP - This can be found on the SBC intranet under Safeguarding

HCC Children's Services: 0300-123-4043 protectedreferrals.cs@hertfordshire.gov.uk

NSPCC: 0808-800-5000

Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Board: www.hertssafeguarding.org.uk

Appendix B: Advice and Guidance for Safeguarding Children

Stevenage Borough Council

Children's Champion

Executive Councillor for Communities and Neighbourhoods

Safeguarding Champion

Chief Executive Officer

Designated Senior Manager

Community Safety Manager

Deputy Designated Senior Manager

Safeguarding Co-ordinator

Designated Senior Person

refer to intranet - DSP Contact list

Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership - *Responsible for ensuring all statutory partners, including the Council, adhere to the Children Act 2004 section 11 requirements*

0300 123 4043

[Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership](#)

NSPCC - *Advice for parents, professionals and the public via the helpline. Concerns may also be reported via the NSPCC who will refer to CSF or the Police. Also offers a helpline for children called ChildLine.*

NSPCC

0808 800 5000

ChildLine

0800 1111

Police Child Abuse Investigation Unit

0845 33 00 222

Operation Halo – *police team investigation child sexual exploitation*

101/999

Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) 01992 556976 / 556986

07795288271 / 07795288271

LADO Support Officer

01992 555420

Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) - *provide advice and training on perpetrators of sexual abuse and trafficking, as well as services for children including reporting internet based crime (sexual abuse, cyber bullying) and training for children through the Thinkuknow programme.*

0870 0003344

www.ceop.gov.uk

www.thinkuknow.co.uk