Safeguarding and Protecting Children Policy

Introduction

Lytchett Matravers Parish Council is committed to providing a safe environment for children. The purpose of this policy is to safeguard children who come into contact with representatives of the council and to facilitate the best possible professional practice from the council, its staff, elected members, and volunteers.

Policy Statement

Lytchett Matravers Parish Council is committed to facilitating and maintaining the safest possible environment for children, enabling them to enjoy the play areas, open spaces, buildings, and any activities provided by or on behalf of the Parish Council while ensuring that their safety is respected.

The Aim of the Policy

To provide a safe and healthy environment for those children who come into direct contact with the council's staff, parish councillors, and volunteers while on council premises and property.

Policy Objective

To contribute to the personal safety of all children using the facilities and resources of the Parish Council through actively promoting awareness, good practice, and sound procedures.

Implementation of Policy

In order to implement the child protection policy, the Parish Council will undertake to:

- Promote a safe and supportive environment for all children in play areas, open and indoor spaces managed by the Council.
- Ensure that all staff of Lytchett Matravers Parish Council and elected members are aware of the importance of child protection issues and their responsibilities arising from the policy.
- Ensure that any activity carried out by staff and elected members of Lytchett Matravers Parish Council that involves any exposure to children is sound in terms of child protection as regards personnel, practices, and premises.
- All meetings/consultations involving children to be open to all and held in a public place.
- A minimum of two adults to be present at all times during the meeting/consultation.

Legislation and Guidance

This policy aligns with the latest UK legislation and guidance, including:

- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 (Statutory guidance from the Department for Education)
- Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill 2024 (Pending legislation introducing mandatory reporting of child abuse)
- Children Act 1989 & 2004 (Core legislation outlining child welfare responsibilities)
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (Recognizing children as victims of domestic abuse)
- New Child Criminal Exploitation Laws 2025 (Providing protections for children against grooming and exploitation)

Allegations against Employees/Councillors/Volunteers

If a child, parent, or guardian makes allegations to the Parish Council against any person working for or acting on behalf of the Parish Council, it will be recorded by the Parish Clerk. On receipt of the complaint, the Parish Clerk will contact Dorset County Children's Services Social Care and/or the Police to appraise them of the situation.

The Parish Clerk should inform the person against whom an allegation has been made as soon as possible unless there appears to be a case that this might prejudice a criminal investigation. – This will require consultation with the Police to ascertain the correct procedure.

The course of action to be taken will be decided based on the nature of the allegation(s). An employee may be suspended from duty while allegations are being investigated.

In the event that the allegation is made against the Parish Clerk or a Council member, the above procedures will be dealt with by the Chairman or Vice Chairman of the Parish Council.

Reporting of Concerns

Those working on Parish Council activities, including council members, have a duty to ensure that any suspicion, incident, allegation, or other manifestation relating to child protection is reported to the Parish Clerk (the "Designated Person"). The Parish Clerk will take appropriate action and report to the Police and/or Children's Services Social Care.

Under no circumstances should anyone within or acting on behalf of the Parish Council begin to carry out an investigation into suspicions or concerns about a child. This is the role of the statutory services, and any concerns or worries should be passed to the Parish Clerk, who will notify the authorities.

Review of this policy

The Parish Council shall review this policy, its effectiveness, and its implementation annually and will ensure that employees and statutory authorities' input is sought as appropriate.

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