

## Agenda item 7

### For decision – Safeguarding at FTC

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#### Summary

FTC had always had a safeguarding policy. However, as FTC's role in the community has become more far reaching and with the Town Hall as a somewhat focal point for many residents it has moved further up our agenda. At the end of 2023 we asked Bob Ashford, former Chair of Fair Frome, and with a career with safeguarding at its core, to help advise FTC on ways it could improve its approach to safeguarding and to provide training for staff, Cllrs, volunteers, and community groups. This report recommends some improvements to processes and amendments to the policy.

#### Improvements

With Kate Hellard's departure we have reviewed the named safeguarding lead. On Bob's advice and considering the needs of FTC there is recommended to be a team of three. These being Laura Flaherty, Executive Assistant, Nikki Cox, Partnership Lead and Hannah Stopford, Engagement Lead. Having a small team of leads gives staff and Cllrs more of a chance to call on someone for advice, also having responsibility shared is a much more pragmatic approach to safeguarding.

From the training it was agreed to produce a simple flow chart to help decide on whether something is a safeguarding or welfare issue. Alongside this a need for a simple form for recording a safeguarding concern and steps taken to report it onwards. The flow chart can be found at [Appendix 7.1 on the website here](#) and the report template can be found at [Appendix 7.2 on the website here](#).

Other areas being looked into are the use of the signing in book at the front desk to ensure it is both GDPR and safeguarding compliant. In addition, adding to our terms and conditions for hiring/leasing room at the Town Hall to ensure hirers are safeguarding compliant.

Paul Wynne has suggested to Somerset Association of Local Councils to add Safeguarding for councils and Cllrs to their training offer. We await to see if this will be implemented.

We were pleased to be able to offer the safeguarding training from Bob to community groups at no cost. Hannah and Nikki are currently reviewing our community group training offer to ensure it complements what is already available in the town. It is possible that this training or something similar could be offered more regularly in the future.

As part of our wider review of our recruitment strategy we will include how safeguarding can be included to improve safer recruitment. This will include how to ensure those with convictions are not employed in roles that they are prohibited from; it will also consider how an as employer we don't discriminate against those with past convictions or cautions that have been unfairly overlooked in recruitment before. How we will do this will be reported at a future

council meeting. We will continue to perform DBS checks for new and existing employees/stewards/volunteers when it is necessary for the role.

One area of discussion in the training was the need for DBS checks for Cllrs. This does not have a clear-cut answer. Taking Bob's advice, we agree that ideally DBS checks should be part of the recruitment process of Cllrs before they are elected as Cllrs and come to FTC. A DBS check for an already elected Cllr is possibly too late in the process. However, this could be an onerous task when there may be four or five candidates for each ward and one that FTC has no platform to enforce. On reflection, we think it is best to keep this under review, not decide now but do decide in advance of the next election. In April 2023, Simon Bailey's Independent Review of the Disclosure and Barring Regime was published. He had reviewed the need for DBS checks for Cllrs and he recommended that those Cllrs appointed to committees with responsibilities for children's services or services for vulnerable adults should be required to have an enhanced DBS check. The letter to Leaders of Unitary and Upper Tier Authorities in England can be read here <https://bit.ly/48ReCJ6> Unfortunately, the report does not make a recommendation for Cllrs of town or parish councils.

There is a time and cost implication to conducting DBS checks that should also be considered. For the top level, an enhanced check, the cost to FTC is £55 per application. To keep checks 'up to date,' for non-volunteers there is a £13 per year charge on top of the application fee to sign up to the update service. An annual check is conducted against the individual to ensure their status has not changed. I am currently the only person in the organisation able to conduct DBS checks. This is an admin heavy task and one that might not be sustainable for just one person in future if it were to be decided that every employee, steward, volunteer, and candidate Cllr has a DBS check at any level. At present it is workable, so this is just to note that if the task becomes bigger, I may need to share the task.

Whether Cllrs are DBS checked or not, we did feel it was important that our safeguarding procedure at FTC is part of the new Cllr induction post-election. This will be reviewed for the next induction in 2027.

Finally, we will bring an annual report to the Oversight Committee of safeguarding including a review of the policy.

### Safeguarding policy

Suggested improvements to the policy have been made in a track change version, to view this please request a copy. The updated version of the policy is at [Appendix 3.2 on the website here](#). In summary the amendments are as follows:

- The flow chart and report template have been included at 5.2 to make the reporting process clearer.
- In 6.2, the addition of training on ihasco for new starters
- An additional point in section 7 to include working with partners and other organisations to ensure they have their own safeguarding procedures in place.
- An additional in section 9, to confirm GDPR and data protection principles will be followed at all times.
- Update references from Somerset County Council to Somerset Council
- Update references to the Safeguarding joint leads

- Inclusion of the Safeguarding flow chart on page 9 and Safeguarding report form in Appendix 2
- In Appendix 6 we extended the list of types and indicators of abuse to include bullying and social media, gang membership and county lines.

**Recommendation**

1. Agree to the changes to the policy, Chapter 21 Child, and vulnerable adult protection policy.