

LIBRARIES DEPARTMENT

SERVICE SPECIFIC CHILD SAFEGUARDING STATEMENT

August 2022

1 INTRODUCTION

The Libraries Department provides services to the public, including children and vulnerable persons, through a network of branch libraries, mobile library vans, a housebound service and a local studies and archives section. Included in these services are book related transactions and activities, information provision, and the organisation, management, and delivery of events, such as storytelling, author visits, ICT classes, book clubs, children's entertainment, workshops and talks on a wide range of subjects, as part of national programmes such as Right to Read, Healthy Ireland, Creative Ireland, Europe Direct and Work Matters. The nature of these services is such that library staff have contact with children and vulnerable persons in their daily routine work and through programmed activities.

The Libraries Department also employs contractors to organise, manage and deliver events and programmes, and to carry out other services and work, in collaboration with and on behalf of the Libraries Department. These contractors come into contact with children and vulnerable persons who attend and participate in these events.

The purpose of this Service Specific Child Safeguarding Statement is to examine and put in place principles and procedures to be observed in delivering library services to ensure, as far as practicable, that children and vulnerable adults availing of these services are safe from harm. This Service Specific Child Safeguarding Statement is to be read in conjunction with the Corporate Child Safeguarding Statement.

2 UNDERSTANDING RISKS

The Children First Act 2015 defines risk as "any potential for harm to a child while availing of a service. Harm in relation to a child is defined as:

- (a) assault, ill-treatment, or neglect of the child in a manner that seriously affects or is likely to seriously affect the child's health, development, or welfare, or
- (b) sexual abuse of the child, whether caused by a single act, omission, or circumstance or a series or combination of acts, omissions, or circumstances or otherwise".

3 DEFINITIONS

- a. **Child:** Person who has not attained 18 years of age, excluding a person who is or has been married.
- b. **Employee:** Any person who works for a local authority under a contract for employment. This contract may be expressed or implied and be oral or in writing. An employee may be employed full time or part time or in a temporary capacity.
- c. **Concern:** "A 'concern' within the context of this policy is defined as the knowledge or suspicion that a child is at risk of or has been subjected to abuse or neglect. Such concerns shall be supported by evidence or indicators of abuse and/or neglect".

- d. **Contractor:** Any individual, employer, or organisation whose employees undertake work for a fixed or other sum and who supplies the materials and labour (whether their own labour or that of another) to carry out such work or supplies the labour only on behalf of a local authority.
- e. **Volunteer:** Any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives. Central to this definition is the fact that volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual. This can include formal activity undertaken through public, private and voluntary organisations as well as informal community participation.
- f. **Vulnerable person** means a person, other than a child, who –
 - (a) Is suffering from a disorder of the mind, whether as a result of mental illness or dementia,
 - (b) Has an intellectual disability
 - (c) Is suffering from a physical impairment, whether as a result of injury, illness, or age, or
 - (d) Has a physical disability, which is of such a nature or degree –
 - (i) As to restrict the capacity of the person to guard himself or herself against harm by another person, or
 - (ii) That results in the person requiring assistance with the activities of daily living including dressing, eating, walking, washing, and bathing.

4 Principles to Safeguard Children from Harm when availing of library services

Fingal County Council is committed to a child-centred approach to our work with children in the delivery of all our services and activities. The Council acknowledges that it has an overall corporate duty and responsibility to safeguard the children accessing our services and activities.

Fingal County Council is committed to:

- Promoting general welfare, health development and safety of children;
- Ensuring safe management procedures are in place for all staff and contractors, including: robust recruitment, selection, supervision and support procedures;
- Developing guidance and procedures for staff and contractors who may have reasonable grounds for concern about the possible abuse or neglect of a child involved in the services or activities of the Council;
- Ensuring Designated Child Protection Liaison Officers are appointed and accessible;
- Ensuring that the Council has procedures in place to deal with an allegation of abuse made against an employee/contractor;
- Raising awareness in the organisation about potential risks to children's safety/welfare;
- Developing procedures for responding to accidents and complaints;
- Developing and maintaining clear record keeping procedures;

Guidelines for risk of harm at opening times outside normal working hours: My Open Library MOL

- All children under the age of 16 years will be accompanied by a responsible adult while using my open library.
- Only parents/guardians and carers can bring children into the library during My Open Library hours and must be present at all times with the children.

- Young people aged 16-17 years can use my open library unaccompanied having been inducted and with written parental consent.
- A parent/guardian/carer must be present at induction and registration as a My open library User and will be contacted if any issues regarding my open library arise.
- A parent/guardian/carer are responsible for the safety of their children and for the behaviour during this unsupervised service.

Fingal County Council’s child-centred approach means to:

- Treat all children equally
- Listen to and respect children
- Involve children as appropriate
- Provide encouragement, support, and praise (regardless of ability)
- Use appropriate language (verbal and physical)
- Have fun and encourage a positive atmosphere
- Offer constructive criticism when needed
- Treat all children as individuals
- Respect a child’s personal space
- Use age-appropriate teaching aids
- Lead by example
- Be aware of child time limitations e.g., school/exams when scheduling activities
- Create an atmosphere of trust
- Be aware of the *Equal Status Act 2000-2010* which relates to discrimination based on nine grounds:
 - Gender
 - Civil Status
 - Family Status
 - Age
 - Race
 - Religion
 - Disability
 - Sexual Orientation
 - Membership of the Traveller community
- Use all information in respect of children only for the purpose for which it is given, subject to child protection concern(s).

5 Making the Child Safeguarding Statement Available

This Service Specific Child Safeguarding Statement will be made available to all staff working in Libraries and to contractors employed by the Libraries Department. Where appropriate, it will be displayed publicly, and it will be made available to Parents & Guardians, TULSA and members of the public upon request. It will be reviewed every 2 years or sooner if there has been a material change in any of the issues to which it refers.

6 Selection of Staff

All library staff are garda vetted before taking up employment with the Council, as are contractors who organise, manage, and deliver events and programmes on behalf of the Libraries Department.

7 Information and Training

All staff in Libraries will receive adequate and appropriate Child Welfare & Protection Information and Training. They will also be provided with good quality information on the recognition and reporting of Child Protection and Welfare concerns. Training will also include clear information about the role of the Statutory Agencies with primary responsibility in Child Protection and Welfare, namely, TUSLA and An Garda Siochana.

The Council will also produce a Code of Behaviour for the protection and safeguarding of Children for distribution to staff who interact with children in the performance of their duties associated with this Programme.

8 Procedure for Reporting a Child Protection or Welfare Concern

All Employees and Contractors must inform the Designated Child Protection Liaison Officer or Deputy if they have reasonable grounds for concern that a Child may have been, is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected. The procedure for reporting a concern is as follows:

Reporting Procedures for Suspected/Disclosed abuse

Employee/contractor has a concern or suspicion



Inform the Designated Child Protection Liaison Officer using form in Appendix 2 (in the event of an emergency or the non-availability of the Child Protection Person, the report should be made directly to Tusla and/or An Garda Siochana)



Designated Child Protection Liaison Officer to consult/inform Child and Family Agency



Designated Child Protection Liaison Officer to inform parent(s)/guardian(s) if making a report
unless doing so would endanger the child or undermine the investigation



Designated Child Protection Liaison Officer to report to An Garda Siochana if unable to reach social worker – i.e., during an emergency or during out of hours

All concerns reported, actions taken, and outcomes should be recorded by the Designated Child Protection Liaison Officer in line with Data Protection Act, 2003.

Where the Designated Child Protection Liaison Officer or Deputy decides not to report concerns to TUSLA or An Garda Siochana, the individual Employee or Contractor who raised the concern will be given a clear written statement of the reasons why action is not being taken. The Employee or Contractor will be advised that if they remain concerned about the situation, they are free as individuals to consult with, or report to TUSLA or An Garda Siochana.

9 Procedure for Child Protection/Safeguarding Allegations against an employee

- a. Where an allegation of abuse of a child is made against an Employee or Contractor the Reporting Procedure outlined at 8 above will be followed.

- b. It is important to note that the investigation of suspected child abuse is the responsibility of the Statutory Authorities. Fingal County Council is required to take any necessary protective measures that are proportionate to the level of risk and will balance its obligations to its Employee with its obligations in respect of the best interests of children.
- c. When an allegation of Child Abuse is made against an employee or contractor, the following procedure shall be followed:
 - (i) The Designated Child Protection Liaison Officer will be informed of the allegation;
 - (ii) The Designated Child Protection Liaison Officer will inform the Director of Corporate Affairs and Governance and the Senior Executive Officer, H.R., of the allegation;
 - (iii) The Designated Child Protection Liaison Officer will follow the Standard Reporting Procedure to Tusla (TUSLA);
 - (iv) The employee/volunteer will be informed, in confidence, that an allegation has been made against him/her, the nature of the allegation and their response will be noted and passed on to TUSLA;
 - (v) The key priority will be to ensure that no child is exposed to unnecessary risk. Fingal County Council shall as a matter of urgency take any necessary protective measures. These measures will be proportionate to the level of risk.
 - (vi) The action to be taken by Human Resources will be guided by the agreed internal procedures i.e., Council's Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures, the applicable employment contract, and the rules of natural justice, where appropriate;
 - (vii) The Chief Executive will be informed as soon as possible of the allegation by the Director Corporate Services.
- d. Employees/contractors may be subjected to erroneous or malicious allegations. Therefore, any allegation of abuse shall be dealt with sensitively and support will be offered to employees/ contractors via the Council's Staff Welfare Officer

10 Governance

The County Librarian will have ultimate responsibility for the protection and welfare of all children using library services and attending / participating in events. In undertaking this responsibility, she will: - ---Produce & review, where appropriate, a Service Specific Child Safeguarding Statement

- Ensure Library Staff report child protection and welfare concerns to the Designated Child Protection Liaison Officer or deputy
- Ensure Library staff are adequately informed and trained in Child Protection and welfare matters.
- Ensure that where actions are taken by the Human Resources Department in response to alleged child abuse, such actions are guided by the agreed internal procedures
- Ensure that where erroneous or malicious allegations of abuse are made against employees, such allegations are treated sensitively, and support is offered to employees via the Staff Welfare Officer.

Senior Executive Librarians and library branch /service point managers will assume responsibility for the protection and welfare of all children on a day to day basis while they are using library services. In undertaking this responsibility, he/she will:

- Ensure Library staff report child protection and welfare concerns to the Designated Child Protection Liaison Officer or deputy.
- Ensure Library staff comply with the Code of Behaviour on child protection and welfare.
- Ensure Library staff are adequately informed and trained in child protection and welfare matters.

All Library staff will assume responsibility for the protection and welfare of children using library services. In undertaking this responsibility, they will:

- Attend Awareness Training on Child Protection
- Be familiar with the Corporate & Services Specific Child Safeguarding Statements relating to children in libraries
- Adhere to the Code of Behaviour for the protection and safeguarding of children availing of services provided by the Council
- Inform the Designated Child Protection Liaison Officer or Deputy if they have reasonable grounds for concern that a child may have been, or is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected.

11 Implementation

This Service Specific Child Safeguarding Statement has been developed in line with requirements under the Children First Act 2015, The Children First: National Guidance, and TUSLA's Guidance on Developing a Child Safeguarding Statement. It is recognised that implementation is an on-going process. Fingal County Council is committed to the implementation of this Service Specific Child Safeguarding Statement and the procedures that support our intention to keep children safe from harm while availing of our services.