Witness Service

Safeguarding Policy

20 March 2026

1. Policy statement

The Witness Service is brought to you by Victim Support.

Victim Support (VS) believes that:

- No-one should ever experience abuse or harm of any kind
- We have a responsibility to promote the welfare and best interests of all people to keep them safe and to carry out our work in ways that protect them

We are committed to:

- Protecting all service users, including children and young people, who are offered or receive VS's services, from any type of abuse or harm. This includes the children and families of adults who use our services or any vulnerable adult, child or young person that comes to our notice in the course of our work
- Protecting anyone working for, or on behalf of VS, whether staff (including sessional or agency staff, secondees or students) or volunteers, from any type of abuse or harm
- Ensuring that all our activity is undertaken within the overarching principles that guide our approach to safeguarding and that those working for VS undergo appropriate checks and continually uphold our commitments to safeguarding

We recognise that:

- The welfare of our service users, their children and family is paramount in the work we do and in all the decisions we take when offering a service
- All services users, regardless of race, ethnic origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity/trans status, marriage or civil partnership status, disability, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief have an equal right to protection from all types of harm or abuse
- Some service users, their children and families are more vulnerable because of the impact of previous experiences, their level of dependency, communication needs or other issues
- Working in partnership with our service users, their children and families and other agencies is essential in the protection against abuse or harm.

2. Purpose

VS is committed to providing effective and safe services.

This policy is supplemented by the “Safeguarding Toolkit” which provides further procedures and guidance for staff and volunteers who work directly with adults at risk and CYP. Staff and volunteers will be required to make themselves familiar with aspects of the safeguarding toolkit as directed by their line manager and DSOs.

We safeguard and promote the welfare and protection of adults at risk and CYP in the following ways:

- Valuing, listening to and respecting them
- Making safeguarding personal by involving adults at risk in decision making as far as possible to achieve the outcomes that they want while adhering to the six principles of safeguarding embedded in the Care Act 2014
- Robust safeguarding procedures which include National Safeguarding Lead Officer, National Head of Safeguarding, Lead Trustee for safeguarding and DSOs to promote a culture of safeguarding
- Safer recruitment and vetting of staff and volunteer’s policy
- Additional policies and procedures to promote the culture of safeguarding including Code of conduct, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy, Whistleblowing policy and procedure, Complaints and Feedback Policy and Procedure *and* Health and Safety policy
- Implementing a culturally informed approach by acknowledging the diverse experiences and identities of our service users in taking account all parts of someone’s identity, including but not limited to language, ethnicity, religion or faith, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, values and beliefs
- Support for staff and volunteers, including training, supervision, and access to support services including wellbeing guidance and the Employee Assistance Programme
- Using our procedures to manage any allegations against staff and volunteers appropriately in a timely manner
- Recording, storing and using information professionally and securely, in line with GDPR data protection legislation and providing guidance for sharing information about safeguarding and good practice with all service users we safeguard
- Safeguarding expectations for external agencies and partners delivering on behalf of VS
- Raising awareness about safeguarding and rights with victims and witnesses who use our services and by having appropriate systems in place that support and allow them to give feedback, both positive and negative.

All our service users have the right to receive our services regardless of race, colour, ethnic origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity/trans status, marriage or civil partnership status, disability, religion or belief and socio-economic status.

At VS we practice trauma-informed working, with care and compassion both for the people we support and our teams. We recognise that the work we do to support victims and survivors of crime can be challenging and our Care and Compassion model strives to ensure VS practice operates through a trauma-informed lens.

2.1 Related policies and procedures

All related policies and procedures, and the most up to date, approved version of this document are available on VS's intranet (Surf) site for staff and volunteers. Any policy or procedure mentioned in this document, or gap in practice not available on Surf should be brought to the attention of Director of Operations, Service Design and Innovation and VS's National Head of Safeguarding.

This policy is supplemented by the Safeguarding Toolkit which provides further procedures and guidance for staff and volunteers who work directly with adults at risk and CYP.

The Safeguarding Toolkit

- *Designated Safeguarding Officer Procedures and Guidance*
- Children and Young People Safeguarding Guidance
- Multi-agency Statutory Meeting Checklist

2.2 Application

This policy and procedure applies to all staff, volunteers including trustees and partner agencies working on behalf of VS. Put simply, safeguarding is everyone's business and priority.

Staff and volunteers sign their agreement to comply with this policy and procedure on completion of their safeguarding foundation training, recorded in their induction checklist on Wave, and thereafter by completing the mandatory safeguarding foundation e-learning, which is recorded on Wave, and monitored for compliance at our quarterly management review meetings (MRMs).

Having minimum standards in place for those we work with and contract to ensure that they operate suitable safeguarding practice in line with their safeguarding policy and procedures. We review this document annually to stay aligned with new legislation and best practice.

2.3 Legislation and policy framework

This policy and procedure is informed by legislation, policy and statutory guidance that seeks to protect adults and children in England and Wales.

We will safeguard adults at risk, defined by the Care and Support Act (2014), the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and CYP under the Children Act (1989 and 2004 as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017) and Working Together guidelines 2023 (and also in the Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014 and Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015).

The Counterterrorism and Security Act 2015 introduced a duty on certain authorities known as the *prevent duty*, to prevent people from becoming involved in, or supporting terrorism or related activity. Our *prevent* duty is a safeguarding issue and so we help to prevent CYP and adults at risk from being harmed by any involvement in terrorist or related activity by following this safeguarding procedure.

As effective safeguarding practice is fundamental to VS, our policy and procedure is signed off, and led by, the National Board of Trustees (the Board) and Chief Executive Officer (CEO), who is also our National Safeguarding lead officer (NSLO) and Chair of the National Safeguarding Panel.

2.4 Roles and responsibilities

Board of Trustees

VS's Board of Trustees are responsible for safeguarding governance and practice throughout the organisation led by a national safeguarding trustee lead.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

The Chief Executive Officer is the National Safeguarding Lead Officer (NSLO) for VS who holds overall accountability for safeguarding and ensures that there are effective arrangements in place for all CYP and adults at risk, which are complied with and monitored.

Any safeguarding concerns about the Chief Executive Officer would be handled by the Safeguarding lead on the Board, Debbie Gillatt, or in their absence another trustee.

National Head of Safeguarding (NHOS)

National Head of Safeguarding (NHOS) acts as deputy in the National Safeguarding Lead Officer's absence. The NHOS is the DSO for VS's non-operational staff.

The NHOS acts as a central contact for DSO when a decision is needed on whether to make a safeguarding referral and is the national Prevent lead.

The NHOS ensures there is an up-to-date list of approved DSOs. They oversee that mandatory training is in place, refreshed and recorded and that audits on safeguarding practice are completed with appropriate action taken to correct issues identified.

Annually, the NHOS reports on safeguarding trends, improvements, incidents and complaints to the Board, and provides regular updates to the lead Board for safeguarding where appropriate – and via regular Safeguarding panel meetings.

The NHOS is supported in these duties by a panel of experts – below.

Safeguarding Panel (SP)

The Safeguarding Panel is the primary strategic group that oversees and develops our safeguarding arrangements, including identifying safeguarding priorities to inform the annual business plan, monitoring the Safeguarding Risk Register, compliance with the safeguarding policy and procedure, and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements in protecting our service users, staff and volunteers.

The Panel is chaired by the CEO and meet bi-monthly. Its membership includes Service Directors, the Director of Business Services, the National Head of Safeguarding, the lead Trustee for safeguarding and an independent member. The Panel reports to Senior Management Team, People Committee and The Board. The Safeguarding Panel is supported by the Safeguarding Operational Group (SOG), a sub-group of the Safeguarding Panel.

Safeguarding Operational Group (SOG)

SOG is a sub-group of the Safeguarding panel. It is chaired by the National Head of Safeguarding and meets six times per year. The group brings together operational experience, sharing good practice and co-ordinating and reviewing internal safeguarding case audits.

Designated Safeguarding Officers

DSOs are the main source of safeguarding advice, support and decision making for the team by providing safeguarding advice to staff and volunteers. DSOs:

- Make defensible decisions on all adult and CYP safeguarding concerns to determine if they meet the threshold for a Local Authority (LA) Referral. (Need to be familiar with LA threshold of needs and reporting procedures).
- Train and support staff and volunteers to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to complete and follow up referrals.
- Agree and keep up to date with local referral protocols with LA safeguarding boards and ensure local systems are secure.
- Notify the National Head of Safeguarding about concerns raised about staff/volunteer behaviour or incidents, organisational risks.
- Keep staff and volunteers up to date with VS and LA safeguarding procedures and requirements.
- Submit local data to National Head of safeguarding in relation to local safeguarding audits.
- Being VSs Local Prevent Lead. Knowing your LA Prevent referral process to safeguarding CYP and adults at risk from extremist ideologies and radicalisation.

Operation Managers

Operational responsibilities:

Service managers ensure that actions directed by the DSOs are taken.

Support and Volunteer Managers

When a safeguarding or welfare concern is identified, supporters/volunteer managers must complete a Safeguarding Recording Form and/or a Welfare Check Recording Form and refer the concern to a Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO). The DSO will advise on appropriate next steps. If a referral to the Local Authority Safeguarding Team or Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), is required, it is the responsibility of the supporter or volunteer manager to complete and submit it, ensuring timely and appropriate escalation to the DSO.

HR and Service Managers

Safe recruitment responsibilities

Managers and Human Resources are responsible for risk assessing all job descriptions to identify which are likely to involve regular and/or substantial unsupervised contact with CYP and adults at risk and that DBS checks are sought where an employee’s (or volunteer’s) role involves substantial, regular or unsupervised contact with children.