



Barnardo's independent audit of the National Volunteer Police Cadets safeguarding arrangements and plans for auditing

May 2023

Pat LeRoy, Safeguarding Consultant, Barnardo's Consultancy

Christine Emmott, Safeguarding Consultant, Barnardo's Consultancy

Julie Dugdale, Head of Business, Barnardo's Consultancy.

VPC, Independent audit of the National Safeguarding Unit and its Plans 2023.

Acknowledgement

The review team would like to acknowledge the National Safeguarding and Standards Manager and the Team for their engagement, support, and openness throughout this audit process.

Contents

Executive Summary

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. The Contract and Terms of Reference**
- 3. The Approach Used**
- 4. Understanding the Structure of the Volunteer Police Cadets in the wider context**
- 5. Understanding the Structure of the National Volunteer Police Cadets Team**
- 6. Key Areas of Progress/ Achievements**
- 7. Review Findings**
 - Leadership, Management and Culture
 - Policies, Procedures and Practice
 - Quality Assurance and Implementation of Standards
- 8. Conclusion**

Appendix 1: List of documents reviewed.

Appendix 2: Information about Barnardo's and the Review Team.

Executive Summary

Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults and protecting them from harm is everyone's responsibility, and all organisations that come into contact with the public have an important role to play in addressing these responsibilities.

The National Volunteer Police Cadets clearly acknowledges the responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare and wellbeing of all children, young people, and adults including the volunteers and employees who work with the Cadets. There is a commitment to ensuring all activities and engagement within the wider community are held to the highest standards of safeguarding practice; are compliant with current legislation; are child and young person centred; and that there is accountability.

New Safe to Operate Standards (**'the Standards'**) based on the Youth Safe Spaces Standards were adopted by the National Volunteer Police Cadets (**'NVPC'**) in 2022 and were ratified by the National Police Chief's Council. They were then adopted by all Force areas running cadet schemes. The roll out of the standards has been implemented and this has been followed up by the first annual self-assessment by Forces of their compliance.

In early 2023, a decision was taken by the NVPC Team to commission an independent audit of the NVPC's safeguarding arrangements and its plans to implement the Standards. Barnardo's was, after due process, commissioned to undertake this work and terms of reference were agreed with the National Safeguarding and Standards Manager.

A team of two safeguarding consultants from Barnardo's, overseen by the Head of Business, were tasked with undertaking the review and producing a report to include recommendations. It was agreed the review team would:

- Review existing policies and procedures.
- Meet with the NSSM and the central team.
- Meet with senior leaders from one local volunteer police who have responsibility for cadets in their area.
- Consider the existing safeguarding governance arrangements and identify any scope for improvement.
- Consider processes for the receipt and handling of concerns and any scope for improvement.
- Consider the proposed programme for the quality assurance of the responses from the local self-assessments.

Several individual interviews and focus groups were arranged and an observation of the National Safeguarding and Standards group took place. The reviewers were given access to the electronic resources available to staff and had access to all policies and procedures held by the NVPC Team. All staff co-operated fully with the audit and were keen to understand how improvements might

be made to their safeguarding arrangements. The information from conversations, observations, and numerous policy and procedural documents were then analysed and key findings identified.

The review found that the NVPC Team evidenced a high number of strengths. The current team has a good understanding of safeguarding and high aspirations. There is a good mix of experience, expertise, and knowledge. The NVPC Team has a well-established culture of relationship-based work and builds excellent partnerships within and outside the organisation.

The NVPC Team depends on ongoing buy-in from all police forces to ensure that there is continuous improvement to the VPC in all Forces. The NVPC, with the support of the NPCC has ensured that the roll out of the Standards has occurred. However, continuous improvement will rely on reliable core funding to ensure that quality assurance, monitoring and support is available to the organisation.

The review team found that the greatest risk to the VPC is the ongoing funding of the team at an appropriate level. Without a centralised function, the VPC would not be compliant with youth sector best practice and the agreed Standards may not be met or maintained across Forces. Lessons learned and patterns of risk would not be shared as quality assurance measures would not be systemic. Neglecting quality assurance and audit may result in areas where there are unknown risks to individuals and to the reputation of the VPC. This could lead to avoidable risks and reputational harm to DROs and Chief Constables, impacting on public confidence.

In response to the findings, just nine recommendations were made to improve and strengthen current safeguarding practice and procedures, and these are summarised below:

Recommendation 1

It is recommended that senior leadership of the Police consider increasing the core funding available to the National VPC Team to ensure that safeguarding priorities are achievable. This should be considered by the NPCC. An absence of further core funding to be considered as a risk and reviewed by the CiP Board. The funding of the NPCC VPC Safeguarding Team should be made permanent to become an embedded function and resource.

Recommendation 2

The Terms of Reference for the National Safeguarding and Standards group to be reviewed and the expectation of senior representation at the group by all Forces to be prioritised.

Recommendation 3

The National VPC Team should collate and analyse all data from safeguarding concerns and incidents for presentation and reporting to the National Safeguarding and Standards group. The group should consider and critically analyse this information.

Recommendation 4

A robust process should be in place to ensure that all policies and procedures are version controlled and signed off and periodically updated. The website should be organised to ensure that people are able to access resources according to area of concern.

Recommendation 5

The National Safeguarding and Standards group should consider whether all Forces should have a safeguarding statement and links to policy, procedure, and ways to report on their websites.

Recommendation 6

The National Safeguarding and Standards group should consider whether recording on one central system is possible for all Forces as a joint controller agreement is in place. If this is not considered viable, then the group should consider whether it should be mandatory that all concerns and allegations are reported via another means with the VPC Team.

Recommendation 7

A quality assurance strategy and implementation plan to be developed, costed, and agreed by the National Safeguarding and Standards group and the CiP Board. This should include a clear plan for the following two years and a longer-term strategy.

Recommendation 8

Formal discussions should take place with HMIC to consider whether they plan to include the cadets in their inspections of police forces.

Recommendation 9

The potential risks to other groups of children involved in schemes linked to the cadets should be considered by the National Safeguarding and Standards group and the CiP Board.

Introduction

1. The Volunteer Police Cadets (VPC) is the nationally recognised police uniformed youth group throughout England & Wales; in Scotland they are known as Police Scotland Youth Volunteers. The NVPC is a part of the wider National Citizens in Policing portfolio. All Forces operate under the National Police Chiefs' Council supported framework, sharing the common aims and principles of the NVPC across England and Wales. Forty four police forces across the country currently have VPC groups run by police officers, police staff and volunteers.
2. Membership is open to youths aged 13 to 18, and some branches include Junior Volunteer Police Cadets for those aged 11 to 13.
3. The purpose of the VPC is not to recruit police officers of the future, but to encourage the spirit of adventure and good citizenship amongst its members. The VPC states that young people from all backgrounds are encouraged to join the VPC including those who may be vulnerable to the influences of crime and social exclusion.
4. The Aims of the VPC are: -
 - To promote a practical understanding of policing amongst all young people.
 - To encourage the spirit of adventure and good citizenship.
 - To support local policing priorities through volunteering and give young people a chance to be heard.
 - To inspire young people to participate positively in their communities.
5. Whilst being a national movement, all forces work to a national standard, although local volunteer police cadets operate flexibly in local police forces with individual forces being responsible for their delivery. The sharing of good practice and learning is encouraged at a national level.
6. The NVPC Team was founded in 2016. It is a small team working to the National Chiefs Council portfolio, lead under the direct guidance of a National Safeguarding and Standards Manager ('**NSSM**') who is a serving police officer. This team works to develop national strategy and standards in order to support, advise and aid police forces in the delivery of the VPC and is part of the wider National Citizens in Policing portfolio. Following a period of consultation with internal stakeholders and external partners, in March 2022, the NVPC Team introduced a 'Safe to Operate' standards framework based on the UK Youth Safe Spaces. The aim is to ensure police forces operate to youth sector standards, while providing sufficient flexibility to implement them according to their local circumstances.

The Contract and Terms of Reference

7. In early 2023, a decision was taken by the NVPC Team to commission an independent audit of the VPC and its plans to implement the safeguarding standards. Barnardo's was, after due process, commissioned to undertake this work and terms of reference were agreed with the NSSM.
8. A team of two Safeguarding Consultants from Barnardo's were tasked with undertaking the review and producing a report to include recommendations. It was agreed the review team would:
 - Review existing policies and procedures.
 - Meet with the NSSM and the central team.
 - Meet with senior leaders from one local volunteer police who have responsibility for cadets in their area.
 - Consider the existing safeguarding governance arrangements and identify any scope for improvement.
 - Consider processes for the receipt and handling of concerns and any scope for improvement.
 - Consider the proposed programme for the quality assurance of the responses from the local self-assessments.
 - Produce a report making clear recommendations and indicating the priority of these for continuous improvement to be made.
9. The review team was asked to provide a detailed report for the VPC to consider.

The Approach Used

10. The review took place between March and April 2023. The review team was well supported throughout the review process by the NSSM who provided access to key documents and prepared schedules which were flexible enough to accommodate a variety of requests as the review progressed. The review team was also helpfully supported by the NVPC Team who participated wholeheartedly and ensured the review team was well-informed about key developments and practice in the VPC.
11. Conversations were held remotely with key individuals and the team, and the reviewers were able to observe the NVPC Safeguarding and Standards meeting. The team was also able to meet with a leadership group from one police force who were able to evidence how the standards had been embedded in practice. The conversations were very useful as they enabled the review team to understand the breadth of the VPC's work from both a strategic and operational perspective.
12. The review team was given access to all documentation available to local VPC groups via the VPC website and the Marshall system and this provided information on the guidance available to leaders and volunteers.

13. The review team undertook a number of actions to:

- Understand the Structure of the Volunteer Police Cadets in the wider Police structure
- Understand the role of the National VPC Team
- Review the safeguarding arrangements in the National VPC Team
- Review the plans for the roll out of quality assurance and auditing of the safe to operate/ safeguarding standards.

Understanding the Structure of the Volunteer Police Cadets in the wider context

14. The VPC Programme is part of the wider Citizens in Policing Programme ('CiP') which has a vision to connect communities with policing and policing with communities. The CiP programme also includes the Special Constabulary, Police Support Volunteers and other community volunteers who are supporters of the police.

15. The VPC element of the wider CiP Programme is designed to build bridges between young people, the community, and the police. The VPC scheme aims to support a range of young people and helps them make a difference for themselves and their community. The scheme actively encourages young people from all parts of the community regardless of educational needs, challenging behaviour, or disability. Cadets learn about the law, police procedures, and specialist units developing skills that police officers need such as communication, team working and understanding of community issues. They take part in family community events, police events, letter drops and, in some areas, test purchasing for alcohol and cigarettes as well as Social Action projects.

16. The aims of the VPC are to:

- Promote a practical understanding of policing amongst all young people.
- Encourage the spirit of adventure and good citizenship.
- Support local policing priorities through volunteering and give young people a chance to be heard.
- Inspire young people to participate positively in their communities.

17. The VPC is designed to provide a safe environment in which young people can learn as individuals, develop positive relationships with the police and actively support their community through volunteering. To keep young people engaged with the scheme the weekly sessions include a wide range of activities such as:

- Team building exercises.
- Physical exercise/ activity.
- Classroom based sessions.
- Education sessions such as visiting speakers, practical scenarios, and sessions delivered by leaders.

18. Safeguarding in the VPC is led by the NVPC Team which reports to the National Safeguarding and Standards group (formerly a Gold Group) which has been established for four years. The group is chaired by an Assistant Chief Constable ('**ACC**') and reports to the CiP Board.
19. The group oversees arrangements for safeguarding and standards across all VPC schemes (currently forty-four in England and Wales). The group considers thematic issues arising across the schemes and the review of policies and procedures as well as items of national interest. The group should be attended by senior level representatives from each area who brief the meeting on areas of progress. The group is an opportunity to share lessons learned and to understand the activities of the NVPC Team.
20. Whilst each of the forty-four schemes can have varying arrangements, the National Police Chief's Council has agreed that every Force should have a Designated Responsible Officer ('**DRO**') who is ultimately responsible for everything including safeguarding within the Force. This may be an ACC, Chief Superintendent, or another rank with additional authority. This role is the main communication link between the Regional CiP/VPC Lead and the Force Cadet Coordinators. They should meet on a tri-yearly basis to review good practice, consider lessons learnt and to support the NVPC Team in defining needs in training and development. This role also oversees or has oversight of the quality assurance of delivery of the NVPC in terms of governance and enabling leaders to operate safely. The DRO should be immediately informed should there be an allegation or suspicion of abuse from a member of VPC.
21. The DRO can then delegate responsibility to a Chief Inspector or Superintendent who takes responsibility for safeguarding, with a designated safeguarding lead ('**DSL**')/ Cadet Coordinator under this. This role is to be the main conduit for communication from Unit level to DROs. They have overall responsibility for ensuring any request for guidance and support is met either locally or via the national VPC Team. They are responsible for undertaking quarterly reports for all Units and Forces and have the have responsibility for supporting DROs in maintaining compliance to the UK Youth Safe Spaces Standards and ongoing guidance. The DRO must be satisfied that all those who become Leaders (staff and volunteers) in the VPC are correctly appointed and that safer recruitment practices are adhered to.

Key areas of progress/achievements

The role of the NVPC Team

22. The review team was able to meet with the NSSM and her core team which consists of the Standards and Operational Delivery Manager ('**SODM**'), the Cadet Journey Lead and Trainer ('**CJLT**'), and the Partnership Lead and Trainer ('**PLT**'). The team is the central team responsible for the VPC (but is not responsible for safeguarding for the mini police who are the younger group of children aged 8-11 who may be involved in schools' programmes).
23. The NSSM takes overall responsibility for leadership in the team but is supported by the SODM who deputises for her as required.
24. Prior to the formation of the NVPC team there was no standardisation across VPC programmes in forces. Since 2016, the team has been working to achieve national standards.
25. The UK National Team provides training and resources for forces, including exemplars of policies and procedures. Whilst the Team provides a large number of resources, it is not mandatory for Forces to adopt all the procedures, rather, they are offered to support the Forces and cadet units.

Managing concerns

26. The NSSM takes the lead for managing concerns as they arise (either notified via the Marshall system or via direct contact on email or phone), with the SODM managing concerns should they arise at other times. It has adopted the Marshall platform which includes a system for recording concerns, training, and consent forms. The platform has not yet been adopted by all Forces. Whilst some Forces use the Marshall system to record concerns, other Forces have not adopted this and may contact the NSSM directly. The NSSM reviews information and may then contact the referrer to offer advice and support. This may include support regarding next actions, outward referrals (to Children's Services, the Local Authority Designated Officer ('**LADO**'), the Professional Standards department and to the Disclosure and Barring Service) or supporting with signposting.
27. Advice is given to the referrer who is reminded of the necessity to escalate as recommended in the procedures. The NSSM quality assures referrals and takes action where appropriate – instances of this include escalating issues to the DRO when this has not been done despite advice.
28. Where individual Forces are not using the Marshalls portal, they use a tracker and incident reporting form introduced two years ago. Previously the Team was not told about incidents. It was acknowledged that in the main, most Forces are reporting child protection incidents and the Team is encouraging the reporting of all safeguarding concerns.

Single Point of Contact

29. The SODM acts as the single point of contact (**'SPOC'**) for Forces and teams nationally. In effect, this means that the SODM offers advice and support for teams who may wish to use the consent forms and other functionality that Marshall offers. In addition, good relationships have been developed with teams who may have queries about systems for managing the smooth running of the cadets.

Training

30. The SODM oversees the training function of the team including managing the mandatory induction programme. He also maintains a number of spreadsheets to ensure that there is a central list of key personnel and training and supports the management of the programme of mandatory foundation level training and training for those with additional responsibilities. Reminders are sent out for refresher training every three years.
31. The Team has an overview of themes arising from concerns and referrals as well as national developments so can adjust training to ensure that it meets the needs of cadet leaders (staff and volunteers). The Team manages the trauma informed practice training which runs fortnightly. Training for trainers has been delivered and two areas are currently delivering their own training based on the training developed by the Team.
32. Training for senior leaders is planned following liaison with the Head of Safeguarding at the English Football League and is at a developmental stage. In addition, there are plans for rolling out training on working with young people and mental health first aid.

Cadet Journey

33. The CJLT has produced an excellent and broad range of session plans on topics in a diverse curriculum ranging from 'Introduction to Policing' through to 'Pathways' and including areas such as 'youth voice' and specialist safeguarding topics such as 'child sexual exploitation' and 'consent'. Presentations are young people-friendly and include trainer notes and other resources allowing topics to be presented to individual groups. Support can be given to each unit to create their own programme using the standard presentations; particular sessions have been created when themes from reporting are noted, for example, after lockdown a theme regarding male sexual harassment of female cadets was noted.

Census

34. The Team manages the census of all activity across the NVPC and the mini-police programmes. This has demonstrated an increase in children and young people involved. The 2019 figures showed 17,756 children and young people aged 8-18 engaging with the programmes, this included mini police aged 8-11. In December 2022, 11,158 12–18-year-olds were engaged with the cadets and 14,885 mini police aged 8-11.

Implementation of Standards

35. This has been the task of the Team since its inception in 2016. In order to do this, the NSSM has liaised with national organisations including the English Football League to see how their structures might align with that of the VPC. The best ‘fit’ was found with the UK Youth Safe Spaces framework and this was introduced. The NVPC Safe to Operate Standards were signed off at national level in 2022 with an agreement that individual Forces would adopt the standards.

Quality Assurance of Force arrangements

36. In this first year following the roll out of the Standards, it was agreed that all Forces would undertake a self-assessment of whether their cadet arrangements met the Standards. This would be relayed back to the National Team who would report back to the National Safeguarding and Standards Meeting. In the March meeting, it was noted that there had been 76% compliance with the return and the Team was chasing late responders. The results will then be collated. This will inform support and training going forward.

37. The Team aspires to be able to then support the assessment of individual Forces. It is acknowledged that this will need to be gradually implemented to ensure that Forces are on board and the Team would prefer to work together with leaders to ensure it is a joint inspection, so that people feel supported rather than ‘done to’.

Partnership Working

38. The PLT takes the lead with partnerships externally and internally. Where large companies (for instance, opportunities for film premiers) are available, there is encouragement that this is national rather than just London based. In addition, there are grassroots partnerships. The PLT also forms partnerships with Forces where there are requests for support with risk assessments and has attended events to support groups where there have been requests.

39. The NSSM is on the committee of the National Youth Safeguarding Forum and has links with the EFL. She also has links and has regular peer support meetings with the Royal Air Force safeguarding lead.

Overall Findings

40. The review found that the NVPC Team evidenced a high number of strengths. The current team has a good understanding of safeguarding and high aspirations. There is a good mix of experience, expertise, and knowledge. The review team was impressed by the commitment demonstrated by all those involved in the review process and their drive to deliver a safe and high-quality experience to all the children and young people involved in the volunteer cadet's scheme.
41. To support continuous improvement of safeguarding across Force cadet activities, it will be important to ensure that there is ongoing support of the Team's functions. The Team's forward planning was also difficult as leadership changes were ongoing and there was some uncertainty about how this would impact on future priorities.
42. The Team aims to work with all Forces where cadet groups are in place. It is acknowledged that it is not mandatory for Forces to adopt the policies and procedures, nor the Marshall system for reporting, nor that Forces are obliged to report any concerns to the central Team. The Team is therefore dependent on forming strong trusting relationships with individuals in Forces so that it can understand national concerns, trends, and requirements. The team noted that, *'it's all about buy in.'*
43. The reviewers found a culture of relationship-based work, both within the Team and externally. Partnership working is central to the Team's model of working. This is evidenced in the consultation already undertaken with other national organisations and in the ongoing work to support the sector.
44. Our findings suggest that safeguarding arrangements in the VPC in general would benefit from being further strengthened by establishing a robust strategy to ensure sustainability and stability of leadership, having more robust terms of reference and membership of the National Safeguarding and Standards group and stronger governance structures around the management and quality assurance of the safe to operate standards. More detailed findings which identify strengths and areas for development with recommendations to address these are presented under the following headings:
 - Leadership, Management and Culture
 - Policies, Procedures and Practice
 - Quality Assurance

Leadership, management, and culture

What we were looking for:

Demonstrable organisational culture and leadership at every level, that sets the context and expectations of all behaviour in the organisation, and a positive culture where concerns can be identified and spoken about openly.¹

Why this is important

Prioritising appropriate leadership and accountability ensures safeguarding is given a high level of importance. Leaders role model behaviours and promote appropriate representation and discussion about safeguarding at a senior level. The organisation's culture defines the expectations of acceptable behaviour. This is often underpinned by a set of values, vision and mission. This culture is established and modelled by leaders and communicated and embodied through the work of the organisation.²

What we found

45. There is demonstrable top-level appropriate and proportionate commitment to ensure the safety and well-being of children and adults at risk is a priority for the organisation and there is evidence of a culture of accountability which drives continuous improvement in safeguarding arrangements.
46. The reviewers found that the leadership of the National Team is robust. The NSSM has the required skills, expertise, and experience to support the work of the Team. The Team's culture models the expectations for behaviours in the organisation, so concerns can be identified and spoken about openly. The Team demonstrates a learning culture and transmits this via communications to all Forces – whilst expectations are appropriately high, there is a commitment to a 'step by step' approach to improving practice.

¹ National Volunteer Police Cadets: A guide to the implementation of the UK Youth Safer Spaces Standards for Police Forces operating a Volunteer Police Cadet Scheme

² <https://www.nya.org.uk/safeguarding-asset/safeguarding-governance-guidance/>

47. The reviewers found strong evidence of a commitment to relationship-based work. The Team described how relationships with individual Forces have been built up over the last two years – whilst two years ago there were no referrals or requests for support, there has been a steady increase in discussions and support. The Team described how they had worked hard at getting balance right in understanding local expertise whilst offering support and advice, referencing that they were *'not going to tell you how to suck eggs'* and that this approach had been valued.
48. The Team uses a consultative approach where they develop policy and then ask Forces for feedback via the National Safeguarding and Standards meeting. Feedback is then used to adapt the policy.
49. It is acknowledged that whilst some Forces are fully engaged with the National Team, the Team has had to slowly build relationships with other Forces. The team works hard to role model a culture of learning, for instance in approaching other organisations such as the EFL where safeguarding was more embedded and have shared that approach with Forces when they have requested advice and support.
50. It is noted that the National Team is a small core team of three people. Whilst the Team appears to be highly valued by the ACC to offer support, advice and expertise and to ensure that the safe to operate standards are embedded in Forces, the sustainability of the National Team will be difficult to achieve without investment.

Recommendation 1

It is recommended that senior leadership of the Police consider increasing the core funding available to the National VPC Team to ensure that safeguarding priorities are achievable. This should be considered by the NPCC. An absence of further core funding to be considered as a risk and reviewed by the CiP Board. The funding of the NPCC VPC Safeguarding Team should be made permanent to become an embedded function and resource.

51. The support of the National Safeguarding and Standards group has been vital to engage individual Forces and to disseminate good safeguarding practice and to agree next steps in embedding the safe to operate standards. The ACC who chairs the group was clear that the group has matured over the last four years and has a robust reporting line to the CiP Board. This was important to ensure that overarching standards were signed off by the NPCC.
52. The reviewers observed a meeting of the group which considered the action log and shared examples of activity across Forces. However, it was noted that not all Forces were represented and where represented, this was not always by a senior member of staff. To ensure that safeguarding is a high priority for Forces, it would be useful to ensure that representation at the group is at an appropriate level.

Recommendation 2

The Terms of Reference for the National Safeguarding and Standards group to be reviewed and the expectation of senior representation at the group by all Forces to be prioritised.

53. The reviewers also noted that the group would benefit from a thematic report from the National VPC Team. This report should present themes about the nature and number of safeguarding incidents across all the Forces. This would allow the group to review overall safeguarding data so there can be confidence that safeguarding systems are effective and to understand areas where there may be under-reporting as well as themes requiring further support.

Recommendation 3

The National VPC Team should collate and analyse all data from safeguarding concerns and incidents for presentation and reporting to the National Safeguarding and Standards group. The group should consider and critically analyse this information.

54. The reviewers found evidence of strong leadership of the NVPC Team. The recommendations should assist to support the embedding of safeguarding across all Forces.
55. In discussion with one particular Force, it was noted that there had been a considerable investment in its VPC scheme, and this Force demonstrated the impact of strong safeguarding focused leadership and management.

Policies, Procedures and Practice

What we were looking for:

A clear description of what the VPC does to keep children and vulnerable adults safe and well and robust procedures and guidance to ensure that all concerns are handled in line with best practice and in ways which support everyone involved.

Why this is important:

Best practice dictates and highlights the importance of a clear safe organisational framework that includes clear policies and procedures for safeguarding in relation to both children and vulnerable adults.³ Such policies and procedures demonstrate an organisational culture that is concerned with

³ [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/684442/Working-Together-to-Safeguard-Children-2018.pdf) Chapter 2

promoting best practice in accordance with guidance and legislation and provide a framework in which all staff operate so they can be confident about their roles and responsibilities in safeguarding.

What we found:

56. The review team was able to review all policy, procedures and guidance which is available to all Forces on the website. This is supplemented with additional materials available on the Marshall portal. In addition, a Pocket Guide to Safeguarding is available.
57. A robust Safeguarding, Wellbeing and Online Safety policy is available, and this guides the work of the Team. This policy has been recently reviewed (March 2023) and is compliant with Working Together 2018. The policy is owned by the NVPC and has been quality assured by the NPCC. This overarching policy includes a clear safeguarding statement and has links to procedures and guidance.
58. All Forces are able to access policies, procedures, and guidance and to adapt these to suit their own organisation. In general, the resource available is excellent, however, not all the resources appear to be fully signed off and version control is not on all documentation.
59. It would be useful for the resources on the website to be grouped by area so that Forces are able to easily find policies and procedures relating to particular issues.

Recommendation 4

A robust process should be in place to ensure that all policies and procedures are version controlled and signed off and periodically updated. The website should be organised to ensure that people are able to access resources according to their area of concern.

60. Members of the VPC Team demonstrated a strong awareness and commitment to their safeguarding responsibilities and there is evidence of a strong commitment to developing their own practice.
61. All staff and volunteers for the VPC are required to undertake mandatory training and a database is maintained of new starters and their completion of training. Where this has not occurred, a reminder is sent. Refresher training is also available. Named persons also complete further training to support them should they have to deal with a concern.
62. Whilst the National Team's website includes a strong safeguarding statement and good links to policy, procedure, and practice, this is not the case for individual Force websites. It would strengthen staff (and participant) awareness if all websites for the VPC included a safeguarding statement and access to the policy as well as a route to reporting concerns.

Recommendation 5

The National Safeguarding and Standards group should consider whether all Forces should have a safeguarding statement and links to policy, procedure, and ways to report on their websites.

Recording and recording systems

What we were looking for:

A clear record of matters reported and recorded and clarity regarding actions taken and the appropriateness of these. Evidence of management oversight of decisions taken.

Why this is important:

Good recording evidences good practice and allows accountability for actions taken and professional judgments made. Good recording helps to identify themes both for individuals and organisations. Recording can be used as evidence for court, complaints and investigations.⁴

What we found:

63. The NVPC uses the Marshall system to record concerns, allegations and complaints about safeguarding, equality, diversity and inclusion and health and safety. The system is electronic and if used by all Forces, could be a tool to collect valuable data which could be collated and analysed, to provide information regarding safeguarding trends and to understand what training and support should be available.
64. The reviewers were informed that although the Marshall system is available to all Forces, it is not mandatory for them to use it. There is a broad variability in how concerns are recorded and not all concerns are reported to the Team, although there is guidance which demonstrates how these should be escalated. The Team reported that although there is confidence that some child protection concerns and high-level issues (such as staff allegations) are reported, lower-level concerns and issues regarding welfare and wellbeing are not always reported either on Marshall or via the incident forms; this is an area of risk.

⁴ <https://www.scie.org.uk/care-providers/recording>

65. The Team acknowledged that some Forces are reluctant to use the system because of concern regarding information sharing. However, Forces have signed a joint controller agreement, so issues are managed.
66. The electronic recording system is currently being reviewed and investment is available to renew/ re-commission a recording/ data management system.

Recommendation 6

The National Safeguarding and Standards group should consider whether recording on one central system is possible for all Forces as a joint controller agreement is in place. If this is not considered viable, then the group should consider whether it should be mandatory that all concerns and allegations are reported via another means with the VPC Team.

Quality Assurance and implementation of Standards

What we were looking for

The means by which the VPC ensures that schemes are safe, and that the workforce is enabled to carry out their safeguarding responsibilities for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of cadets. Whether the Team's plans to support self-assessment and audit of the safe to operate standards are viable.

Why this is important

The safe to operate standards are key to ensuring that all Forces have minimum requirements to operate schemes. The first self-assessments will be key to planning audits, assessments, and joint assessments of individual Forces.

Quality assurance allows managers and leaders to:

- identify gaps in services
- benchmark compliance
- measure quality improvement after implementing change.
- set key performance indicators
- monitor performance
- evidence good and outstanding practice.

What we found

67. There is a strong strand of quality assurance in the Team. Team members described a number of scenarios where team members would scrutinise other team members' work and offer constructive sessions – examples of this include developing new training packages for staff and cadets.
68. In addition, there is evidence that the National Safeguarding and Standards group was used to scrutinise policies and procedures including the updated safeguarding policy.
69. The Standards have been adopted across all Forces and all Forces were, at the time of this report, reporting the results of the first self-assessment across the standards. In the March 2023 meeting of the National Safeguarding and Standards Group, it was reported that there was 76% compliance with the self- assessment and the Team has sent reminders out to the remainder of the Forces to return completed self-assessments; this is good progress.
70. The Team demonstrated an excellent understanding of relationship-based work to implement standards and have reiterated to Forces that there is no expectation for Forces to immediately fully meet the standards – what is required is a good understanding of where individual schemes are in relation to the standards. Support can then be offered in particular areas where a need has been identified.
71. The plan over the next months is for the results of the audit to be collated – firstly to understand areas of need. At this early stage, it has already been identified that 'youth voice' will be an area requiring support and plans are in place to support this function. Secondly, the results of the self-assessment are likely to identify forces who are not yet able to provide evidence for their self-assessments.
72. The aspiration is to develop a joint assessment with Forces to enable staff to travel to Forces to support them to undertake a fuller assessment of their safeguarding arrangements – how this will be managed is yet to be fully determined, but it is likely that the auditors will consist of the core team, supported by the managers, and supplemented with the new team members. The team will encourage individual Forces to invest in external audits where possible.
73. However, although current quality assurance activity, aspirations and plans are discussed as part of the National Safeguarding and Standards group, they are not incorporated into a Quality Assurance Framework.

Recommendation 7

A quality assurance strategy and implementation plan to be developed, costed, and agreed by the National Safeguarding and Standards group and the CiP Board. This should include a clear plan for the following two years and a longer-term strategy.

74. The NSSM has already been in touch with His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) as there has been some interest in inspections of cadets as part of the wider inspections. It is also noted that cadets may form part of a broader inspection of local authority children’s services joint inspection (ILAC) by Ofsted.
75. Whilst the PEEL assessment framework does not explicitly include cadets, it is noted that two of the questions relating to community engagement and support as well as safeguarding could broadly relate to cadet schemes.⁵ At this stage, there is a tentative welcome of broader external inspection which would allow the VPC Team to focus on improvement and support including supporting DROs to undertake robust assessments of services.

Recommendation 8

Formal discussions should take place with HMIC to consider whether they plan to include the cadets in their inspections of police forces.

76. It is noted that the VPC scheme and its safeguarding processes, policies, and procedures only cover the formal cadet Forces operating and that it does not include the mini-police, nor apprentices and that there are approximately 14,000 children involved in the ‘mini-police’ or in less formal afterschool clubs run by police staff which should be governed by individual school safeguarding procedures.

Recommendation 9

The potential risks to other groups of children involved in schemes linked to the cadets should be considered by the National Safeguarding and Standards group and the CiP Board.

Conclusion

77. This review has identified a high number of strengths in the NVPC Team in relation to leadership, management and the support offered by its team under the lead of the NSSM. Indeed, the NVPC team has made considerable progress. However, there are a number of important areas where safeguarding arrangements in the broader VPC will need to be developed or strengthened to sustain

⁵ [PEEL Assessment Framework \(PAF\) 2023–2025 - His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/peel/)

and build on the progress made to date; Barnardo's review team have made recommendations accordingly.

78. Whilst the NVPC Team has focused on developing the now nationally adopted safe to operate standards, support will be required to ensure that the standards are implemented fully. Due to the nature of the police forces across England and Wales, every Force is able to implement schemes differently and quality assurance is required to ensure that standards are similarly adopted across all areas. There is evidence of an excellent safeguarding culture in the National Team and in some individual Forces; however, not all Forces are as actively engaged, or as focused on safeguarding.
79. The Sheldon⁶ and Whyte⁷ reviews explored the issues of abuse of position in diverse organisations and noted that those in a position of power were able to use their roles and association with respected organisations to abuse children. Themes from those reviews include the poor resourcing of safeguarding, fragmented communication, and the absence of monitoring of compliance against Standards which did not consistently challenge poor safeguarding practice.
80. The VPC provides regulated youth activity and works with young people who come from a range of backgrounds, including those who may be vulnerable, have additional needs or who may be disenfranchised. The organisation relies on cadet leaders' good safeguarding practice to ensure that young people are supported and that any concerns are recognised and dealt with appropriately.
81. The NVPC Team provides a central, neutral team with expertise in safeguarding. However, whilst the review team found that whilst the NVPC Team aims to provide support, advice and training in addition to a quality assurance function, the team relies on year-on-year funding – this does not allow for long term strategic planning.
82. The review team found that the greatest risk to the VPC is the ongoing funding of the team at an appropriate level. Without a centralised function, the VPC would not be compliant with youth sector best practice and the agreed Standards may not be met or maintained across Forces. Lessons learned and patterns of risk would not be shared as quality assurance measures would not be systemic. Neglecting quality assurance and audit may result in areas where there are unknown risks to individuals and to the reputation of the VPC. This could lead to avoidable risks and reputational harm to DROs and Chief Constables, impacting on public confidence.

⁶ [Sheldon Review - About The FA | The Football Association](#)

⁷ [Whyte Review | Sport England](#)

Appendix 1 – Documents Reviewed

1. Behaviour plan template
2. COVID 19 Action Plan template
3. Getting your cadet units back together safely after COVID
4. Managing Cadet behaviour
5. Peer on peer abuse
6. Pregnancy risk assessments
7. Returning safely from COVID
8. Safeguarding Incident report form
9. Safeguarding report tracker
10. Safeguarding observation form for leaders
11. Safeguarding observation template
12. VPC Child Protection Referral Process Flowchart
13. VPC COVID 19 Risk Assessment Guidance
14. VPC Pocket Guide to Safeguarding
15. VPC Positional Statements
16. VPC Safeguarding and Wellbeing Policy
17. VPC Safer Recruitment Policy
18. VPC Safer Recruitment Procedures
19. Whistle blowing process
20. Cadet interview final
21. Guidance on positions of trust
22. Confidentiality
23. One to one situations
24. Transporting cadets
25. First Aid and Medication
26. On boarding young people
27. Cadets going home unescorted
28. Health, safety, and welfare
29. Disabilities and Special Educational Needs
30. Cadets attending court
31. Transgender
32. What are reasonable adjustments
33. Young people and health and safety
34. Duty of care
35. Cadets with autism
36. Managing volunteers
37. Contextual safeguarding
38. Managing concerns from volunteers
39. Recognition and rewards
40. Working with parents
41. Cuckooing
42. Health and permission forms
43. Insurance
44. County lines

45. What activities can cadets be used for
46. Running activities safely
47. Ratios
48. Cadets with specific religious needs
49. Arrangements for overnights
50. General dos and don'ts
51. Cadets who become leaders
52. Maintaining boundaries

Appendix 2

Information about Barnardo's Consultancy Services

Barnardo's is a leading UK children's charity with over 150 years of history and experience in supporting the most vulnerable children, young people, and families across the country. In 2020/2021, Barnardo's supported work with over 382,000 children, young people, parents, and carers across 790 services and partnerships throughout the UK. From day one, Barnardo's ambition has remained the same: to achieve better outcomes for more children and young people and ensure no child is left behind, regardless of their circumstances.

Barnardo's Consultancy

Within Barnardo's, our consultancy division is a well-established and experienced provider of consultancy activities. Informed by our extensive expertise and in line with Barnardo's core mission and corporate strategy, our objective is to provide independent consultancy advice and support to other organisations to promote improvements and encourage best practice in safeguarding children, young people, and adults at risk. On a daily basis we are concerned with supporting other agencies to continuously improve.

Our team undertakes independent time-limited reviews and audits to help other organisations understand what is working well and what needs to change or improve; we are skilled in not just identifying areas of improvements but also in helping others understand why changes might be needed and making suggestions as to how best to achieve the change needed. Our focus is on ascertaining whether safeguarding arrangements are sufficiently robust or not, and in identifying what changes are necessary to enable progress and achievement of good practice.

We also undertake reviews of policy, procedures, and practice, historic and current, as well as independent investigations; this work helps us understand what can go wrong and ensures our delivery and audits of arrangements today is informed by lessons learnt. Ultimately, the focus of our activities is on ensuring organisations can continuously improve their practice and embed a safeguarding culture to achieve better outcomes for any children and young people. Our team are highly experienced and have backgrounds in managing and advising on child protection. Each

review and consultancy project we undertake is unique but what remains the same is our commitment to listen to the voices of those affected.

The Review Team

Following initial discussions, it was confirmed that Pat LeRoy, Safeguarding Consultant and Christine Emmott, Safeguarding Consultant would undertake the independent review under the direction of Julie Dugdale, Head of Business and liaise with the National Safeguarding and Standards Manager, in relation to the delivery of the contract. Both individuals have extensive experience in undertaking safeguarding reviews/audits for various organisations.

Pat LeRoy – Safeguarding Consultant

Pat is a qualified social worker, with a Masters qualification in social work and management (MSW) and a Diploma in Social Work (DipSW). She has over 30 years' experience working with children and families in Local Authorities and in other sectors. With over 20 years of senior management experience, she has significant strategic and operational experience and has led on the management of serious incidents and allegations and has managed serious case and learning together reviews. She has supported the implementation of systemic work and solution focused social work. Working for Barnardos since 2020, Pat has been involved in audits in the sporting sector, development and improvement planning for organisations and reviews of safeguarding systems in large organisations. She has also been involved in reviews of non-recent abuse and supporting organisations to reshape services following incidents of concern. Pat has a keen interest in co-production and is committed to amplifying the voices of service users, both children and adults at risk.

Christine Emmott - Safeguarding Consultant

Christine has worked in the Education Sector for over 20 years. She is a qualified teacher, with a Bachelors Degree in Education (BEd) and a Masters qualification in Deaf Education (MA). She has extensive experience of teaching across the Primary and Secondary ages (Foundation Stage to Keystage 4) as well as working in both mainstream and Special Schools. Prior to commencing with Barnardo's Christine was the Head teacher of a large Primary School. Christine has also worked for West Yorkshire Police in a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub. Work with Barnardo's has included developing and delivering bespoke safeguarding training, particularly for education settings, review

of organisational safeguarding arrangements and safeguarding audits undertaken on behalf of the Premier and English Football Leagues.

Julie Dugdale – Head of Business

Julie Dugdale heads up our business and has a background in social work and has led numerous audits and reviews across a wide range of sectors. Julie has also completed numerous reviews regarding historic practice and investigations into allegations. Julie is passionate about driving up standards in safeguarding and has over thirty years' experience as a leader in this field.