National Volunteer Police Cadets
Safeguarding, Wellbeing & Security Policy



Keeping cadets, young people and adults safe

Our statement

Providing a safe and secure environment where young people can meet with others, learn about policing and policing issues, contribute to community initiatives and have fun, is at the heart of the experience provided through the volunteer police cadets. The public expect and deserve to have trust and confidence in their police, and this is even more so when this comes to protecting children and young people in our care when participating in activities organised by the police service.

Whilst being a national movement, individual police cadet units are operated by local forces and each of these own and manage their own risk in relation to the safety of their cadets and leaders. The police officers, police staff and adult volunteers who support cadet units are expected, to uphold the highest standards in child safeguarding, protection and supervision in line with their own forces safeguarding policy and procedure. And as part of this, all adult volunteers are DBS checked and vetted by their local forces prior to being able to participate and support cadet unit activities.

In collaboration with police forces in England, Wales and Scotland, and with the involvement of national youth groups like the Scouts and Girl Guides, we have created a national safeguarding framework that has been agreed by National Police Chiefs' Council and all Chief Constables have signed up to adopting. This offers a streamlined and consistent approach to the reporting and managing of safeguarding concerns, the recruitment of leaders, training, organising activities and beyond. This will ensure that everyone involved in VPC knows what is expected of them at a local and national level and that confidential reporting and investigation is done in a consistent manner.

We also have a National Safeguarding Manager who is responsible for maintaining contact with police forces about this critical responsibility and about the standards and codes of conduct expected at a national level so that we can continue to work towards providing the safest and highest level of standards of youth safeguarding available nationally.

The Safeguarding, Wellbeing and Security Policy

1 Purpose and Scope

We acknowledge our responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare and wellbeing of all children, young people, and adult volunteers/employees. We also recognise and accept our responsibility to act in loco parentis during organised events and activities and our ‘duty of care’ to volunteers and staff.

We are committed to ensuring all our activities and engagement within the wider community is held to the highest standards of safeguarding practice; is compliant with current legislation; is child and young person centred; and that we are fully accountable. These standards are set out in our mission and values as well as our policies and procedures.

We are invested in making sure our safeguarding practice places the views of children, young people and where required adults at risk at the centre of our policy planning and implementation processes. This approach ensures that their welfare remains paramount in all we do.

Establishing a culture of honesty and openness helps us to know and understand what issues children and young people consider likely to affect them and their safety. This is particularly important when working with diverse communities or those who have additional vulnerabilities.

The Safeguarding, Wellbeing and Security Policy is for all young people, staff and volunteers who receive an allegation, disclosure or are concerned about the welfare or wellbeing of any member of staff, volunteer or cadet

The purpose of the policy is to:

a) ensure you are clear about your safeguarding responsibility as a member of VPC, in terms of recognising, responding to and referring any reported allegations, disclosures or concerns, in accordance with the child/adult protection process
b) ensure you are clear about your responsibility to follow the correct procedures laid out to protect children, young people and adult volunteers/employees from harm and to create a safe space for children and young people to have fun, be challenged and develop skills for life. The policy applies to those who hold both an employed and volunteer role and who wish to raise a safeguarding concern in either capacity.

2. VPC safeguarding principles

VPC seeks to provide an environment where everyone can work safely, and children, young people and adults at risk can engage with and enjoy the activities and sessions provided. It is the policy of VPC to safeguard the welfare of children, young people and adults at risk involved in the work we do by protecting them from neglect, physical, sexual, or emotional abuse and harm.

It is also VPC policy to provide those working for or volunteering with VPC with a framework to operate within to keep everyone who is engaged in VPC activities safe. It is therefore VPC policy to:

a) Ensure that all staff and volunteers (legally responsible adults) working with children, young people, or adults at risk: are carefully selected, are checked by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS); have two appropriate references; a check is undertaken on their social presence (if appropriate) and understand and accept their responsibility for the safety of children, young people, and adults at risk in their care.

b) Ensure that children, young people, and adults at risk's, know that their welfare is of paramount importance, regardless of age, gender, ability, or race, when planning, organising, advising on, and delivering programmes.

c) Ensure that all children, young people, adults, and parents/carers have all the information they need to make an informed decision before choosing whether to take part in activities, events, trips, and overseas visits.

d) Ensure that when working with partner organisations, we place into any Service Level Agreement (SLA) a term of our agreement, the statement: "We confirm that we have read and understood VPC's Safeguarding and Wellbeing Policy and agree to abide by it."

e) Ensure that electronic communication between adults and young people follows strict guidelines so that we don't place anyone at risk of harm. (See guidance document in relation to social media best practice)

f) Ensure that we encourage volunteers and staff to discuss their concerns with their Named Person, Force Coordinator or through supervision, including emerging concerns.

g) Ensure that children and young people have access to adults that they trust or are clear on how to report their concerns and are provided with the information of relevant support services where appropriate.

h) Respond swiftly and appropriately to all suspicions or allegations of abuse, and to ensure confidential information is restricted to the appropriate external agencies.

i) Raise the awareness of relevant staff and volunteers of child and adult protection issues alongside wider wellbeing and mental health concerns through the provision of training and regular updates.

j) Monitor and review the effectiveness of this policy on a yearly basis and that leaders and coordinators regularly refresh and review their understanding of this and all associated policies.

k) Ensure that the principles of this policy are adopted by all Forces operating VPC and individuals supporting the VPC programme. This should be monitored by the DRO in partnership with the National Hub team. For example, a detailed Information Sharing Protocol (ISP) should be place around Safeguarding and Child Protection procedures.

l) The Child protection and the protection of adults at risk procedures also seek to manage effectively the risks associated with activities and events involving children, young people and adults at risk by:

m) Completing a risk assessment process which involves identifying risks and means of reducing or eliminating these; all activities should be properly risk-assessed, insured and have appropriate adult to cadet ratios.

n) Implementing the required actions identified by the risk assessment process and reviewing the effectiveness of these on an appropriate basis.

o) Ensuring that the appropriate DBS checks are conducted, depending on eligibility, for any individuals starting or moving into work which involves working or volunteering with children or adults at risk.

p) Requiring new employees and individuals involved in working or volunteering with children, young people and adults at risk to familiarise themselves with the content of this policy and the associated code of conduct and receive appropriate training.

Safeguarding practice is not just about having a Child/Adult protection process, but a way of working that is embedded in everything we do and the way that we do it.

3. Safeguarding Behaviours

As Leaders you must uphold our values and adhere to our Code of Conduct, as outlined in the Blue Card, which sets out the standards of behaviour expected of you alongside the College of Policing (code of ethics), VPC Code of Conduct and ensures a safe space for all of us. In addition, all Leaders need to follow the following Safeguarding Behaviours which help ensure a safe space for all of us:

Vigilance and Understanding: take time to understand situations and be alert so that you notice when something is wrong.

Early Help: act and provide support as soon as a problem emerges and before it gets any worse.

- **Inclusion**: We are committed to creating an inclusive environment where every individual is respected, valued and safeguarded.
- **Resilience:** Work alongside children and young people to promote positive wellbeing, confidence and safety to support them navigating life experiences.
- **Stability**: Developing safe, consistent trusted relationships with children, young people and colleagues which supports growth and open communication.
- **Respect**: Treat everyone with respect and compassion, maintaining high expectations that support responsibility, accountability and personal growth
- **Advocacy**: Promoting the voice of the child, actively involving children and young people in the scheme, acting on their wishes and feelings.
- **Accountability**: always respond if you are concerned; never assume someone else has or someone else will. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility within VPC, this means it is the responsibility of all adults to ensure that:

- You adhere to the Code of Behaviour with a high standard of professionalism and as reflected in the VPC Code of Conduct and the Police Code of Ethics. Any inappropriate behaviour will not be tolerated.
- You observe the rules established for the safety and security of young people through processes, procedures and guidance provided.
- You follow the procedures required following an allegation, disclosure or the raising of a concern.
- You recognise the position of trust in which you have been placed and do not abuse this position. If you feel that this is not happening in your unit or you have concerns about the professionalism of others then please follow the Child Protection Process in the guidance document or report confidentially to the National VPC safeguarding line. vpc.safeguarding@vpc.police.uk

4. Legal and statutory framework

The UK's four nations – England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales – each have their own framework of child protection legislation, guidance and practice to:

- identify children who are at risk of harm
- take action to protect those children
- prevent further abuse occurring.

Although the child protection systems are different in each nation, they are all based on similar principles. Each UK nation is responsible for its own policies and laws for education, health and social welfare. This covers most aspects of safeguarding and child protection.

In **England and Wales,** child safeguarding legislation is covered by three main acts:

- Children Act 1989
- Children Act 2004
- Children and Social Work Act 2017

Together, these provide the framework for child protection and safeguarding.

Key Guidance - Working together to safeguard children

The Department for Education (DfE) published the latest version of Working together to safeguard children, the key statutory guidance for anyone working with children in England, in March 2026. The guidance sets out how organisations and individuals should work together to protect children. It highlights the importance of implementing a child-centred approach while considering the needs of the whole family. The 2026 guidance strengthens or clarifies expectations around:

- child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSA and CSE)
- child on child abuse including but not limited to teenage relationship abuse, bullying, stalking harassment
- coercive and controlling behaviours
- domestic abuse
- honour/faith/belief-based abuse
- online harms
- group-based exploitation

- child criminal exploitation
- information sharing
- anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practice
- identifying disproportionality
- multi-agency working
- direct work with children
- children experiencing multiple forms of harm simultaneously.

Scotland

Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 - This act created new requirements to support children and young people in Scotland

The national approach to improving outcomes for children and young people in Scotland is Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) (Scottish Government, 2022a). This provides a framework for those working with children and their families to provide the right support at the right time.

The key guidance for anyone working with children in Scotland is the National guidance for child protection in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2023a).

The following legislation is relevant to this policy, either because it has influenced its introduction and/or its content should be considered:

- Health, Safety and Welfare at Work Act 1974
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006
- The Police Act 1997
- Equality Act 2010
- Protection of Freedoms Act 2012
- Regulations 1999
- Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 (amended in 2015)
- Online Safety Act 2025 (tbc)
- GDPR and data protection act 2018
- The Human Rights Act 1998 and the United Nations Convention the Rights of the Child
- The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014
- Sexual Offences Act 2003
- Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
- Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015
- Wales Safeguarding Procedures (Safeguarding Wales)

5. Four-nations safeguarding arrangements

Nation	Children's framework	Adult safeguarding	DBS/vetting terminology
England	Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026; Children Act framework	Care Act 2014	DBS
Wales	Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014; Wales Safeguarding Procedures	Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act	DBS
Scotland	National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021 – updated framework; Children's Hearings framework	Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007	Disclosure Scotland
Northern Ireland	Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in NI	NI adult safeguarding framework	Accessing

6. Key Definitions

Child – Has a specific legal meaning of anyone below the age of 18 years.

Young Person – Has no specific legal definition. However, 11-18 years is the standard age associated with the term. The brain is not fully developed until age 25 so many consider a young person to be aged 11-25.

NB: In Scotland, the definition of a child varies in different legal contexts, but statutory guidance which supports the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, includes all children and young people up to the age of 18.
Where a young person between the age of 16 and 18 requires support and protection, services will need to consider which legal framework best fits each persons' needs and circumstances. The National guidance for child protection in Scotland gives more detail about this and explains how professionals should act to protect young people from harm in different circumstances (Scottish Government, 2023a).

Adult – Has a specific legal meaning of anyone above the age of 18 years.

Safeguarding – For the purposes of this policy, we are using the terms 'safeguarding' and 'to safeguard' to describe the prevention and precautionary approach to planning and procedures needed to protect children, young people and adults from any potential harm.

Child Protection - Child protection is a process within the Safeguarding Policy and refers to the activity undertaken to protect children suffering from, or at risk of, significant harm (Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018)

Child and young person focused - our safeguarding practice places the views of children and young people at the centre of our policy planning and implementation processes. This approach ensures that their welfare remains paramount in all we do.

Adult Protection - Adult protection is part of safeguarding and refers to the activity undertaken to protect adults suffering from, or at risk of significant harm (No Secrets – Statutory guidance (2000), and Social Care Institute for Excellence (2011): Safeguarding Adults at Risk of Harm.

Adult at risk – An adult, who is, or may be, in need of community care services i.e. adult social services, because of mental health, disability, age or illness, and/or who is unable to care for themselves or unable to protect themselves from significant harm or exploitation

Safety - Safety is about being protected from and not causing, danger, risk, injury, loss or harm. Safety can be a feeling, a physical object or place, and an action, and sometimes refers to the laws, rules, and principles that are intended to keep people safe. Safety is not just about what happens inside the meeting place, it is also about outside it, including days out, and may be about something that is happening at home.

Wellbeing - Wellbeing refers to a person's sense of contentment and satisfaction with their conditions in life and their current circumstances. It is closely linked to emotional balance and mental health, but it also affected by an individual's attitude, values and perspective.
Grooming – is the planned and deliberate act of manoeuvring an individual into a position of isolation to ensure they become a key influencer or 'trusted person'.

LSCB - Local Safeguarding Children's Board. These have been replaced in most areas by a Safeguarding Partnership (Working Together to Safeguard Children rev 2023) or Regional Safeguarding Boards (Wales)

LADO – Local Designated Safeguarding Officer or Designated Safeguarding Person (Wales) Not all areas have them however the function must be completed. They will be involved in the management of allegations against people who work with children and have oversight. The VPC has been identified as a **Regulated Activity provider** and therefore we MUST ensure that any concerns or allegations made about any Leader or adult associated with Cadets MUST go to the LADO – Each Force will have a reporting process – please ensure YOU are clear on how this is done. This is a legal requirement – called a 'duty to refer'.

MASH – Multi Agency Support/Safeguarding Hubs are structures designed to facilitate information sharing and decision-making on a multi-agency basis, commonly through co-locating staff from the local authority, health agencies and the police in one facility.

Safeguarding Partnership/Regional Safeguarding Board (Wales)- A Safeguarding Partnership with the Local Authority, Police and Health. They hold all the money, set the strategy, and are tasked with leading safeguarding in the area. This makes them more accountable and streamlines decision making protocols.

NB: In Scotland
They have Child Protection Committees (CPCs) who are responsible for multi-agency child protection policy, procedure, guidance and practice.
Within each local authority, CPCs work with local agencies, such as children's social work, health services and the police, to protect children.
Each local authority and its relevant health board are required to jointly prepare a Children's Services Plan for each three-year period. This relates to services which have a significant effect on the wellbeing of, or are of benefit to, children and young people.
The Scottish Government has provided statutory guidance on children's services planning (Scottish Government, 2020).

Risk Assessment - Risk assessment is a term used to describe the overall process or method where you: Identify hazards and risk factors that have the potential to cause harm (hazard identification). ... Determine appropriate ways to eliminate the hazard or control the risk when the hazard cannot be eliminated (risk control) Informed decision-making is the two-way communication process between a young person (cadet) and one or more Leaders that is central to being young person centred when managing safeguarding concern. This includes the right to accept or to decline the offer of certain advice and guidance and to change that decision. This MUST never be a deciding factor if the concern raised requires referral to statutory services.

Information Sharing Protocol / Wales Accord on the Sharing of Personal Information (WASPI)- An Information Sharing Protocol (ISP) or WASPI assures safe and lawful information sharing. They are also called Data Sharing Agreements (DSA) and Information Sharing Agreements (ISA). The protocol details how and what data partners share. It also explains the legal basis for the sharing.
Data protection law does not precent necessary and proportionate safeguarding information sharing. But it does require it to be shared on a lawful basis, with a recorded decision and only the minimum necessary information shared.

Joint Controller Agreement – The sharing of information for safeguarding purposes between forces and the National VPC Safeguarding and Standards Hub is covered by the NPCC Joint Controller Agreement, which is an agreement between all forces and national portfolios.

Supervision -: A process of critical reflection in which people who work with youth people or youth workers discuss ongoing work and development issues with another Leader, or a peer in order to identify clarity about roles, and the relationship between values, ethics and in some cases child protection issues.

7. Roles and Responsibilities

7.1 National Safeguarding and Standards Manager

Our Safeguarding and Standards Manager interprets legislation and makes sure we are legally compliant and demonstrating good safeguarding practice.

The National safeguarding and Standards Manager ensures that the Safe to Operate Standards remain relevant and up to date with current legislation, risks and youth sector good practice.

The National Safeguarding and Standards Manager has a remit to provide support to all VPC leaders; engage in a supportive/guidance role in the event of a suspicion or allegation of abuse occurring at Force/Unit level.

The National Safeguarding Manager will assist Force Coordinators with implementing safeguarding changes, will engage with force coordinators in relation to lessons learned and will assist with force self-assessments and action plans in relation to the UK Youth Safe Spaces and VPC Safe to Operate Standards.

The National Safeguarding Manager has certain legal and regulatory obligations that all members of VPC must assist in meeting, as required. For example, we are required to provide information on a regular basis to the IOPC, in response to Freedom of Information requests and also to the DBS and in some instances the Charity Commission.

7.2 Local Management Committee *(if applicable).*

Are responsible for ensuring that their VPC units are being managed correctly, are complying with policy and aspiring to achieve the UK Youth Safe Space requirements. They are accountable to their DRO's (Designated Responsible Officer).

7.3 DRO's (Designated Responsible Officer)

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-year basis to review good practice; lessons learnt and support National (Safeguarding) Hub Team in defining needs in training and development.
This role also oversees or has oversight of the quality assurance of delivery of the VPC in terms of governance and enabling leaders to operate safely by ensuring their force schemes meet the VPC Safe to Operate Standards.

The role is ultimately responsible for their force VPC scheme on behalf of the Chief Constable. In cases where there is an allegation or suspicion of abuse from a member of VPC the DRO MUST immediately be informed, and it will be their responsibility to liaise with the ongoing Police investigation. This liaising role must continue and involve the management of the safeguarding concern with parents/carers; any communication with the VPC National Hub Team; and/or more specifically the National Safeguarding Manager.

7.4 Force Cadet Coordinators/Leads

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 by either Strategic Lead or National VPC Hub Team.

They are responsible for undertaking quarterly reports for all Units and Forces. They have responsibility for supporting DROs in maintaining compliance to the VPC Safe to Operate Standards and ongoing guidance.

This role MUST be satisfied that all those who become Leaders (staff and volunteers) in the VPC are correctly appointed following safer recruitment processes and are:

(a) appropriate persons to carry out the responsibilities of the appointment,
(b) maintain a current valid DBS disclosure check at the appropriate level for their role.

They must ensure that all applicants demonstrate an understanding of, and a commitment to the principles and procedures supporting the VPC's Safeguarding Policy, and such on-going continual safeguarding procedures, which have been approved by the National Safeguarding and Standards Manager or VPC Hub Team, such as additional training or CPD.

The Force Coordinator will generally oversee safeguarding concerns within their units, referring them to the National Safeguarding Manager and providing advice and oversight to unit leaders. As such they take on the role of Force Designated Safeguarding Lead and are named in the Safe to Operate Standards.

7.5 Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

As DSL, the Force Cadet Coordinator/Lead will:

- act as the principal point of contact for safeguarding matters within the Force VPC scheme and provide advice, guidance and support to Leaders and Named Persons
- ensure that safeguarding concerns, allegations and disclosures are responded to appropriately, recorded and referred to the relevant statutory or specialist agency where required
- ensure that appropriate safeguarding information is shared with the Duty Inspector, police safeguarding teams, LADO, Children's Social Care, Adult Social Care, Prevent, DBS or other relevant agencies when the circumstances require
- maintain appropriate oversight of safeguarding referrals and actions, ensuring that concerns are followed up and not allowed to remain unresolved
- ensure that safeguarding records are maintained securely, accurately and in accordance with relevant legislation, VPC policy and information-sharing requirements
- ensure that Leaders and volunteers understand their safeguarding responsibilities and have access to appropriate safeguarding training, guidance and continuing professional development
- monitor safeguarding training, DBS compliance and safer recruitment arrangements across the Force VPC scheme
- provide safeguarding advice and support to Unit Leaders and Named Persons, while recognising that the DSL does not replace the responsibilities of individual Leaders to report concerns promptly
- identify safeguarding themes, emerging risks and lessons learned and ensure that these are communicated to the DRO and, where appropriate, the National Safeguarding and Standards Manager
- contribute to safeguarding audits, self-assessments, action plans and quality assurance activity to ensure that the Force VPC scheme continues to meet the VPC Safe to Operate Standards and
- ensure that safeguarding arrangements are reviewed regularly and remain appropriate to the needs of children and young people participating in the VPC.

The DSL role is one of **coordination, oversight, advice and escalation**. It does not remove or reduce the responsibility of every VPC Leader to act immediately where a safeguarding concern, allegation or disclosure is identified.

7.6 Named Person

This role exists for every leader aged 18 years and above.

Every Leader will receive the appropriate training (National VPC Introduction to Safeguarding in the VPC and Managing a Safeguarding Concern) to be a ‘Named Person’. This person is identified in units on a rota basis for standard meetings.

If the unit attend an event or run an activity external to the usual meeting place, this person will be named on the appropriate documentation. This role can be held by both staff and volunteers and there must be a clear adherence to the process. This role is to ensure all allegations, disclosures and concerns are raised, actioned and recorded appropriately at unit level.

They also ensure that the Leader involved directly with the young person is free to support them. Whilst this is happening, the named person is free to co-ordinate an appropriate response and ensures that all other young people are not impacted upon. They are the key communication channel in the early days between the Leader directly involved with supporting the young person, and the Duty Inspector/Force co-ordinator, depending on the nature of the report.

Specific Duties of this role:

- As a Named Person if a leader leaves VPC and you believe they have done so to avoid being investigated, or if you believe they are not appropriate to be with children and young people (CYP) then you have a duty to refer to DBS via your Force referral process. Notify your Force VPC Coordinator
- As a Named Person you have a duty to refer if you believe a young person or adult is at risk of radicalisation or expounding extremist views to the Prevent team via your Force referral process. Notify your Force VPC Coordinator. This also applies to CSE and FGM. (NB: Police Officers' have a separate duty under Prevent, to refer, but volunteers do not)
- As a SG Lead, if you are aware of any allegations, disclosures or concerns about an adult (18 plus) you MUST report to the LADO through your Force referral process. Notify your Force VPC Co-ordinator.

All Leaders (Inclusive of Young Leaders 16 plus)

Safeguarding is the responsibility of all, and it is important that all understand their role and responsibility not only when they receive an allegation, disclosure or have a concern but in the whole way in which a 'Safe Space' is maintained. All Leaders (staff and volunteers) MUST attend training appropriate to their role and unit requirements, to enable them to do this and follow the Code of Conduct and Policing's' Code of Ethics.

8. DBS and Safer Recruitment

VPC is committed to ensuring that all adults who undertake a leadership or supervisory role with Volunteer Police Cadets are appropriately vetted and are suitable to work with children and young people.

This applies to police officers, police staff, special constables, police volunteers and other individuals undertaking VPC leadership roles, as applicable.

VPC approach to DBS checking

VPC has adopted a safeguarding standard that does not rely on the supervision of a leader to determine whether a DBS check is required.

Where an individual undertakes VPC activities with children at a frequency or in circumstances that meet the relevant DBS eligibility criteria, VPC will require the appropriate DBS check regardless of whether that individual is supervised by another appropriately vetted person.

For VPC purposes, supervision does not remove the requirement for an appropriately vetted leader where the role and frequency of attendance require a DBS check.

This approach reflects VPC's commitment to maintaining a consistent and precautionary safeguarding standard across all VPC units and is intended to ensure that the same safeguarding expectations apply whether the individual is a police officer, police staff member, special constable, volunteer or other adult leader.

Regulated activity with children

From 1 September 2026, changes to the definition of regulated activity with children remove the previous supervision exemption in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The changes mean that, where the relevant activity and frequency criteria are met, an individual may be undertaking regulated activity with children even where they are supervised by another person.

For activities undertaken more than three days in any 30-day period, the relevant frequency test should be considered when determining whether an individual is undertaking regulated activity. Overnight activity may also meet the definition of regulated activity where the applicable statutory criteria are met.

VPC's existing safeguarding approach has already required leaders who regularly undertake VPC activities at a frequency that meets the relevant criteria to be appropriately DBS checked, irrespective of whether they are supervised. The 2026 statutory changes therefore reinforce rather than introduce this aspect of VPC's safeguarding practice.

Determining the appropriate DBS check

The requirement for a DBS check must be considered when an individual:

- is appointed or recruited to a VPC leadership role;
- change's role or responsibilities;
- increases the frequency of their VPC attendance;
- begins undertaking activities that may constitute regulated activity;
- undertakes residential or overnight VPC activities; or
- otherwise becomes eligible for a different level or type of DBS check.

The appropriate level of DBS check must be determined by reference to the individual's actual VPC role, duties, frequency of activity and the applicable legislation and DBS guidance.

Where the statutory criteria for a Children's Barred List check are met, the appropriate Enhanced DBS check including Children's Barred List information must be obtained.

A DBS check must not be regarded as confirmation that an individual is suitable to work with children in all circumstances. DBS information forms one part of VPC's wider safer recruitment and safeguarding arrangements. VPC leaders remain subject to the VPC Code of Conduct, safeguarding requirements and local force procedures throughout their involvement with VPC.

Existing leaders and changes in role

The requirement for a DBS check must be reviewed where an existing leader's circumstances change.

In particular, a unit should consider whether a DBS check is required where an individual who previously attended occasionally begins attending regularly, where a volunteer takes on additional leadership responsibilities, or where an individual begins participating in residential or overnight activities.

The fact that an individual has previously been DBS checked for another role does not, by itself, remove the requirement to establish whether the individual is eligible for, and requires, a DBS check for their VPC role.

Where an existing DBS certificate is relied upon, the relevant force/VPC procedure must be followed to establish whether the certificate is suitable for the role, including consideration of the level and workforce for which the check was obtained and whether any applicable update or re-check arrangements are in place.

Police officers and police staff

Police officers and police staff undertaking VPC leadership roles must comply with the relevant national VPC requirements and their force's vetting and safeguarding arrangements.

Where a police officer or member of police staff is required to undertake a DBS check for their VPC role, their status as a police employee does not remove that requirement unless the applicable national VPC and force arrangements expressly provide otherwise.

Forces should ensure that their local arrangements clearly identify how police personnel who undertake VPC roles are assessed, recorded and monitored against the VPC safeguarding requirements.

Volunteers

Volunteers undertaking VPC leadership roles are subject to the same safeguarding principles as other adults working with VPC cadets.

A volunteer must not be treated as exempt from DBS requirements solely because:

- they are unpaid;
- they are working alongside a police officer or another DBS-checked leader; or
- they are supervised.

The relevant role, duties, frequency and statutory eligibility criteria must be considered.

DBS information and safeguarding concerns

A DBS check is one element of safer recruitment and does not replace ongoing safeguarding vigilance.

Any subsequent safeguarding concern, allegation, disclosure, change in circumstances or information suggesting that an individual may pose a risk to children must be dealt with in accordance with the VPC safeguarding reporting procedures and the relevant force safeguarding arrangements.

Where the statutory criteria for a referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service are met, the appropriate organisation must make the required referral in accordance with DBS guidance and applicable legislation.

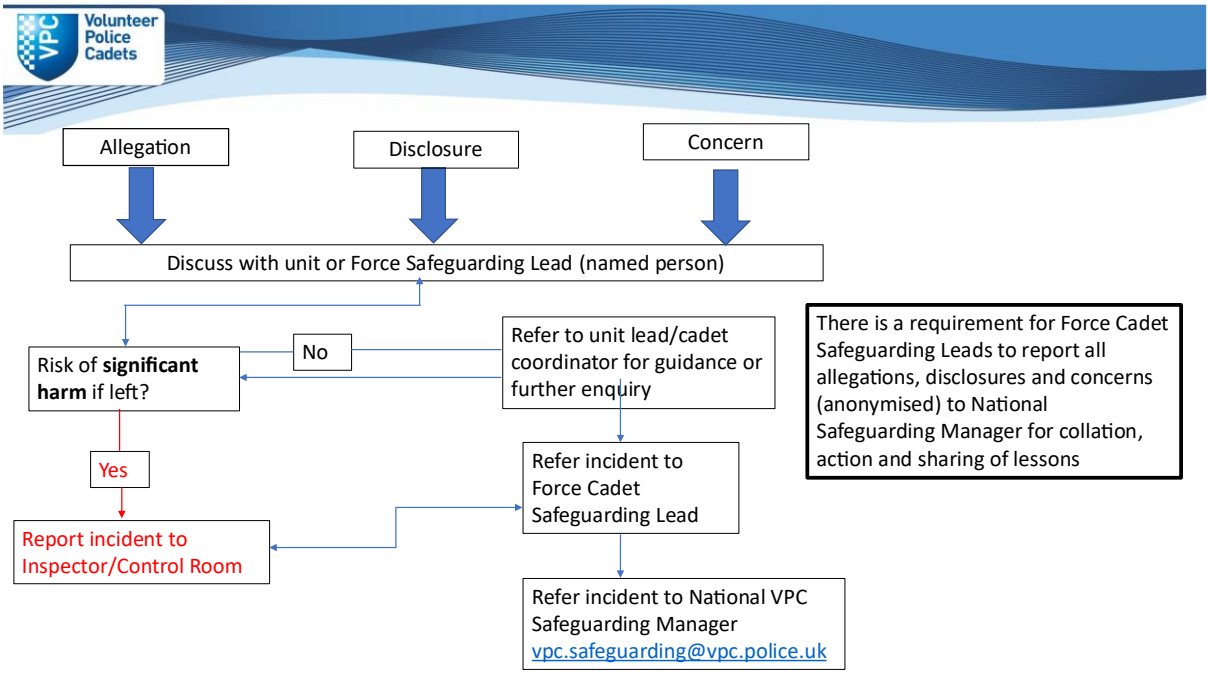
Responsibility

The relevant VPC and force safeguarding leads are responsible for ensuring that appropriate arrangements are in place to identify roles requiring DBS checks, monitor compliance and respond to changes in legislation, DBS guidance and safeguarding practice.

National VPC will review its DBS and safer recruitment requirements as part of its regular policy review process and following significant legislative or regulatory changes.

For further information see the VPC Safer Recruitment Guidance

8. Safeguarding concerns and reporting



Alternatively safeguarding concerns can be recorded on the VPC Gateway system.

9. Allegations Against Adults Who Work or Volunteer with VPC

VPC recognises that any allegation or concern about an adult who works or volunteers with VPC, including police officers, police staff, special constables, volunteers and other VPC leaders, must be taken seriously and managed promptly and fairly, with the safety and wellbeing of children remaining the primary consideration.

Where an allegation or concern is made about an adult who works or volunteers with VPC, the concern must be reported immediately to the appropriate VPC/force safeguarding lead in accordance with local procedures. The person receiving the concern must not undertake their own investigation, interview the child or alleged subject unnecessarily, or seek to determine whether the allegation is substantiated. Information should be recorded accurately, using the child's or other person's own words wherever possible, and shared only with those who need to know.

Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

In England, the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) is responsible for the management and oversight of allegations concerning adults who work or volunteer with children. In accordance with *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026*, the allegations management process applies where an adult has:

behaved in a way that has harmed, or may have harmed, a child;

possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child;

behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children; or

behaved, or may have behaved, in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children.

Where an allegation meets one or more of these criteria, the relevant LADO must be informed within one working day, in accordance with the applicable local authority procedures. The LADO provides advice, oversight and coordination of the allegations management process and may work with the police, children's social care, VPC/the relevant force and other agencies as appropriate. The LADO does not normally conduct the investigation themselves.

Where it is unclear whether the threshold for LADO involvement has been met, the VPC/force safeguarding lead should seek advice from the relevant LADO or follow the local allegations-management procedure. A referral should not be delayed where there is an immediate safeguarding concern or risk of harm.

Where an allegation may constitute a criminal offence, the matter must also be considered for referral to the police. Where a child may be suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm, the appropriate children's social care safeguarding procedures must also be followed. Allegations may therefore require consideration through more than one process, including police investigation, children's social care enquiries and the employer or organisation's disciplinary or management processes.

The fact that an adult is a police officer, police staff member, special constable or volunteer does not remove the requirement to consider the allegations-management process. Equally, a concern about an adult does not automatically constitute an allegation requiring LADO referral; the applicable threshold must be considered in accordance with local procedures.

VPC and the relevant force will take appropriate steps to manage any immediate risk to children while an allegation is being considered. Any decision concerning temporary removal from VPC duties, suspension, restricted duties or other protective measures will be made in accordance with the individual's employment, volunteering or policing status and the relevant force, employer and safeguarding procedures.

The identity and personal information of the person against whom an allegation is made must be treated confidentially and shared only where necessary, proportionate and lawful. The adult subject to an allegation should be treated fairly and supported throughout the process, while ensuring that this does not compromise the safety or welfare of any child or interfere with safeguarding or criminal investigations.

Where the criteria for a referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service or the relevant disclosure and barring authority are met, the appropriate referral must be made in accordance with the applicable legislation and procedures.

For VPC units operating outside England, the equivalent statutory safeguarding and allegations-management arrangements in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland must be followed. The national VPC policy should therefore be read alongside the relevant local safeguarding partnership, force and allegations-management procedures.

10. Child protection

VPC is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children and young people who participate in VPC. For the purposes of safeguarding, a child is anyone under the age of 18. This includes VPC cadets and Young Leaders who are under 18, regardless of their level of responsibility within VPC.

VPC recognises that children may experience abuse, neglect, exploitation or other forms of harm in a range of circumstances, including within their family or peer relationships, within the community, through online activity or as a result of child exploitation or trafficking (including but not limited to criminal or sexual exploitation). Safeguarding concerns may also arise where a child's behaviour, presentation, attendance or circumstances indicate that they may be experiencing harm or may require support and protection. VPC leaders should remain alert to changes in a child's behaviour, appearance, emotional wellbeing or circumstances and should consider the possibility that a child may be experiencing more than one form of harm.

All VPC leaders have a responsibility to recognise and respond appropriately to safeguarding concerns. A leader does not need to be certain that abuse or neglect has occurred before reporting a concern. Where a leader has a concern about the safety or welfare of a child, or a child makes a disclosure, the concern must be reported promptly through the VPC and relevant force safeguarding arrangements. Where there is an immediate risk of significant harm or an immediate threat to life or safety, the appropriate emergency response must be initiated without delay.

VPC leaders should listen to children and take what they say seriously. Where a child makes a disclosure, the leader should remain calm, allow the child to speak freely, avoid leading questions, avoid making promises of confidentiality and explain that information may need to be shared with people who can help keep them safe. Leaders should record the concern as soon as practicable, using the child's own words wherever possible, and should record the date, time, circumstances and actions taken.

VPC leaders must not undertake their own investigation into a safeguarding concern, attempt to establish whether an allegation is true, confront an alleged perpetrator or seek information from other people unless specifically directed to do so by the appropriate safeguarding or investigating authority. Responsibility for assessing risk, determining the appropriate safeguarding response and undertaking any statutory child protection investigation rests with the relevant statutory agencies.

Where a concern indicates that a child may be suffering, or may be likely to suffer, significant harm, the concern must be referred immediately through the appropriate local safeguarding arrangements. In England, this will be in accordance with the local authority and multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and the statutory framework set out in *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026*. VPC leaders should cooperate with children's social care, the police, health services and other agencies involved in safeguarding the child and provide relevant information where lawfully requested or where information sharing is necessary and proportionate to protect the child.

VPC recognises that children may be reluctant or unable to disclose abuse or may communicate concerns indirectly. Leaders should therefore avoid making assumptions about the reasons for a child's behaviour and should consider whether behaviour or other changes may indicate an underlying safeguarding concern. Particular consideration should be given to children whose circumstances may increase their exposure to harm or create additional barriers to accessing support, including children with additional needs or disabilities, children experiencing domestic abuse, exploitation or criminal activity, children who are looked after or care experienced, and children experiencing multiple or overlapping forms of harm.

Safeguarding concerns must be managed in accordance with the legislation, statutory guidance and local safeguarding procedures applicable in the nation in which the VPC unit operates. The national VPC policy should be read alongside the relevant force safeguarding procedures and local children's safeguarding arrangements. Where a VPC leader is unsure whether a concern meets the threshold for referral, they should seek advice from the appropriate safeguarding lead or statutory safeguarding service rather than delaying action or deciding that no referral is required.

The welfare and voice of the child should remain central to all safeguarding activity. VPC should seek, where appropriate and safe to do so, to understand the child's wishes and feelings and should ensure that children are treated with dignity, respect and without discrimination throughout the safeguarding process.

11. Adult Safeguarding and the Wellbeing of VPC Leaders

VPC recognises that safeguarding responsibilities extend to adults involved in VPC, including police officers, police staff, special constables, volunteers and other VPC leaders. Leaders may themselves experience abuse, neglect, exploitation, domestic abuse, coercive or controlling behaviour, discrimination, financial abuse, self-neglect or other circumstances that may affect their safety, wellbeing or ability to participate safely in VPC.

All VPC leaders should be treated with dignity, respect and without discrimination, and concerns about the welfare or safety of an adult should be taken seriously and responded to appropriately. Where a concern indicates that an adult may be at risk of abuse or neglect, the matter should be reported through the appropriate VPC, force, employer or local safeguarding arrangements, in accordance with the legislation, statutory guidance and procedures applicable in the relevant UK nation.

Where appropriate, consent should be sought before information is shared; however, information may be shared without consent where there is a lawful and proportionate safeguarding justification, including where there is a risk of serious harm or where another legal basis for sharing applies.

VPC leaders should not investigate safeguarding concerns themselves and should ensure that concerns are recorded, reported and escalated through the appropriate channels. Safeguarding support for leaders should complement, and not replace, existing occupational health, welfare, HR, professional standards and employee assistance arrangements.

12. Specific safeguarding risks

CSA/CSE - Child sexual abuse /exploitation is a type of sexual abuse. It happens when a child or young person is coerced, manipulated or deceived into sexual activity in exchange for things that they may need or want like gifts, drugs, money, status and affection. This might be intrafamilial abuse, peer on peer, adult to child, online abuse. The 2026 Working together guidance explicitly defines a child as someone under 18 and confirms that being 16, living independently or being in further education does not change their entitlement to protection. A child cannot consent to exploitation.

CCE - Criminal exploitation is when an individual or a group manipulates, deceives, coerces or controls someone under the age of 18 to take part in any activity which breaks the law (for example county lines, drug supply, robbery/theft, violence, peer recruitment, coercion, threats). This is now an offence under The Crime and Policing Act 2026. A child's offending behaviour may be an indicator of exploitation and vulnerability rather than simply a conduct issue.

County Lines - County lines is a type of criminal exploitation. Urban gangs persuade, coerce or force children and young people to store drugs and money and/or transport them to suburban areas, market towns and coastal towns.
domestic abuse

Child on Child abuse refers to abuse or harmful behaviour carried out by one child or young person towards another. It can take place in person or online and may include bullying, physical or sexual abuse, sexual harassment, sexual violence, coercive or controlling behaviour, exploitation, harmful sexual behaviour, initiation or hazing, and the sharing of intimate images without consent. Children who experience or cause harm may require safeguarding support, and behaviour should be considered in the context of the individual circumstances and needs of all children involved.

Teenage relationship abuse refers to a pattern of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading, physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, financial or online behaviour by a current or former partner towards a young person. It can occur in person or through digital and social media, and may include stalking, monitoring, isolation, sexual coercion, threats, sharing or threatening to share intimate images, and controlling access to friends, family or communication.

Stalking and Harassment involves repeated unwanted behaviour towards another person which causes them distress, fear or concern for their safety. This may include following or monitoring someone, unwanted communication or contact, repeated messages or calls, turning up at places they regularly visit, monitoring online activity, or contacting friends, family or others about them. Stalking and harassment can occur in person, online or through a combination of both.

Bullying is behaviour that is intended to hurt, intimidate, humiliate or undermine another person and may involve a real or perceived imbalance of power. It can be physical, verbal, emotional, relational or online and may include threats, intimidation, exclusion, spreading rumours, harassment or repeated unwanted contact. Bullying can have a significant impact on a child's emotional wellbeing, safety, education and relationships.

Online harms refers to harm or risk of harm experienced by children or adults through the use of the internet, social media, gaming platforms, messaging services or other digital technologies. This may include online grooming, sexual exploitation, cyberbullying, harassment, abuse, sexual extortion (sextortion), coercion, image-based abuse, exposure to harmful or illegal content, fraud, exploitation, radicalisation and the misuse of personal information or images.

Radicalisation - refers to the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and extremist ideologies associated with terrorist groups.

Extremism – In the UK this is defined as "vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs.

Modern slavery and human trafficking refers to situations where a person is exploited through means such as coercion, deception, threats, abuse of vulnerability or force, for the purpose of exploitation. This can include forced labour, domestic servitude, sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, forced or servile marriage, and other forms of exploitation. Human trafficking involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a person for the purpose of exploitation. A child may be considered a victim of trafficking even where coercion, deception or force has not been used.

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's or adult's basic physical, emotional or psychological needs, which may result in serious or lasting harm to their health, development, safety or wellbeing. For children, this may include failing to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, supervision, medical care, education, emotional support or protection from harm.

Self-harm and suicide refers to behaviours or actions where an individual deliberately causes injury or harm to themselves, or experiences thoughts, plans or acts intended to end their own life. Self-harm may occur with or without suicidal intent. Any disclosure, indication or concern that a child or adult may be self-harming or at risk of suicide must be taken seriously and responded to promptly through the appropriate safeguarding, welfare and emergency procedures.

FGM/honour-based abuse - Female Genital Mutilation is when a female's genitals are deliberately altered or removed for non-medical reasons. It's also known as 'female circumcision' or 'cutting', but has many other names.

Racism/Discriminatory Abuse refers to behaviour or treatment that causes harm, disadvantage, distress or exclusion because of a person's race, ethnicity, nationality, religion or other protected or personal characteristic. This may include verbal or physical abuse, harassment, intimidation, exclusion, discriminatory language, stereotyping, hate incidents or hate crime. Discriminatory abuse can occur in person or online and may be perpetrated by individuals or groups.

Misogyny - refers to attitudes, behaviours or actions that demonstrate hatred, contempt for, hostility towards, or prejudice against women and girls because they are women or girls. Misogyny can be expressed through language, harassment, discrimination, threats, abuse, violence, sexual harassment, controlling behaviour or online activity. It can be overt or more subtle and may contribute to an environment in which women and girls experience harm, intimidation or exclusion.

13. Online and Digital Safeguarding

VPC recognises that children and young people may be exposed to safeguarding risks through the use of social media, messaging services, gaming platforms, artificial intelligence and other digital technologies. Online harm may include grooming, sexual abuse and exploitation, sexual extortion (sextortion), cyberbullying, harassment, coercion, image-based abuse, criminal exploitation, radicalisation and exposure to harmful or illegal content. VPC leaders must remain alert to online activity or communications that may indicate a safeguarding concern and must report concerns in accordance with VPC safeguarding procedures and the relevant force and statutory safeguarding arrangements.

All communication between VPC leaders and cadets must take place through approved VPC/force communication channels and in accordance with the VPC Code of Conduct, safeguarding procedures and applicable data protection requirements. Leaders must not use personal social media accounts, private messaging or other unauthorised communication methods to communicate directly with cadets. Where VPC activities are delivered online, the requirements set out in the National VPC Virtual VPC guidance must also be followed. VPC leaders will always maintain appropriate professional boundaries and will not engage in private or inappropriate online communication with cadets.

VPC will keep its online safeguarding arrangements under review to reflect emerging technologies, platforms and forms of online harm. The National VPC Virtual VPC guidance should be read alongside this policy and provides additional operational guidance for the safe delivery of virtual VPC activities.

14. Information sharing and data protection

VPC recognises that effective and timely information sharing is essential to safeguarding children, young people and adults at risk.

VPC leaders should share relevant information where this is necessary and proportionate to identify, assess or respond to a safeguarding concern, in accordance with the UK GDPR, Data Protection Act 2018, the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025/2026 where applicable, and the safeguarding legislation and guidance relevant to the nation in which the VPC unit operates.

Data protection legislation should not be used as a reason to prevent necessary safeguarding information from being shared.

Information should be shared lawfully, fairly, securely and on a need-to-know basis, with only the information necessary for the safeguarding purpose being disclosed.

Where appropriate, the wishes and feelings of the child or adult should be considered and consent sought; however, consent is not a prerequisite for safeguarding information sharing where another lawful basis applies or where seeking consent may increase the risk of harm.

Where special category or particularly sensitive information is involved, the appropriate additional processing condition must also be identified.

VPC leaders should record significant information-sharing decisions, including where a decision is made not to share information, and should seek advice from the appropriate safeguarding or data protection lead where they are uncertain.

Information must be stored, transferred and disposed of securely and retained only for as long as necessary in accordance with VPC and force information-management requirements.

VPC should maintain appropriate information-sharing agreements and arrangements with relevant police forces, local authorities and other safeguarding partners where required.

15. Recording, Confidentiality and Information Governance

VPC will maintain accurate, timely and appropriate records of safeguarding concerns, disclosures, allegations, referrals, actions and decisions. Records must be factual, objective and proportionate, clearly distinguish between fact, information provided by others and professional opinion, and include sufficient detail to demonstrate what was reported, when it was reported, to whom it was reported and what action was taken. Where a child or adult has made a disclosure, their own words should be recorded wherever possible. Safeguarding records must not be altered or removed in a way that obscures the original information or the decisions made.

Safeguarding information is confidential and must only be accessed or shared by individuals who have a legitimate need to know. Confidentiality does not prevent information being shared where this is necessary and proportionate to safeguard a child or adult, or where there is another lawful basis for disclosure. VPC leaders must not discuss safeguarding concerns with colleagues, cadets, parents, the alleged perpetrator or other individuals unless this is necessary and authorised as part of the safeguarding response. Particular care must be taken where sharing information with a parent or carer could increase the risk of harm to a child or compromise a safeguarding or criminal investigation.

All safeguarding records and personal information must be stored, handled and transferred securely using approved VPC, force or organisational systems. VPC leaders must not retain safeguarding information on personal devices, personal email accounts, personal cloud storage or other unauthorised systems. Access to safeguarding records must be restricted appropriately, and information must be protected against unauthorised access, accidental loss, alteration, disclosure or destruction. Appropriate technical and organisational security measures must be used in accordance with applicable information-governance and data-protection requirements.

Safeguarding records must be retained in accordance with the relevant VPC, force and statutory retention requirements. Personal information must not be retained indefinitely or simply because it may be useful in the future. Retention periods should be documented and regularly reviewed, and information should be securely deleted, destroyed or anonymised when it is no longer required, subject to any legal, safeguarding, investigative or organisational requirement to retain it for longer.

Any actual or suspected loss, unauthorised disclosure, inappropriate access or other data-security incident involving safeguarding information must be reported promptly through the appropriate force, VPC or organisational information-governance and safeguarding procedures. VPC leaders should not attempt to conceal, delete or rectify information following an information-security incident without appropriate advice.

The handling of children's personal information must take account of their particular vulnerability and the enhanced protections applicable to children's information. VPC will apply data protection and information-governance principles from the point information is collected through to its secure disposal, including data minimisation, accuracy, purpose limitation, storage limitation, confidentiality and security.

16 Safeguarding Training and Awareness

VPC recognises that effective safeguarding requires everyone involved in the organisation to understand their role in keeping children and young people safe. Safeguarding training and awareness will therefore be appropriate to the individual's role, age and level of responsibility.

Adult VPC Leaders

All VPC Leaders aged 18 years and over must complete the mandatory National VPC safeguarding courses: **Introduction to Safeguarding in the VPC** the second course, **Managing a Safeguarding Concern** is mandatory for the Safeguarding Lead for the unit and DSL but optional for other leaders, however all are welcome to attend. These courses provide the core knowledge required to recognise safeguarding concerns, respond appropriately to disclosures, report and record concerns, and understand the responsibilities of a VPC Leader. Completion of the required national safeguarding training is a requirement for VPC Leaders and supports their role as a Named Person within the VPC safeguarding framework. Forces may require additional safeguarding or role-specific training according to local arrangements, risk or statutory requirements.

Young Leaders

VPC recognises that Young Leaders aged 18 to 25 may have additional responsibilities for supporting and leading cadets. Young Leaders undertaking leadership responsibilities should complete the **VPC Young Leaders Safeguarding Training**, in addition to any other safeguarding training required for their role. The training is designed to ensure that Young Leaders understand their safeguarding responsibilities, professional boundaries, how to recognise concerns and how to report a concern appropriately. Young Leaders must not be expected to investigate safeguarding concerns or manage safeguarding matters beyond their level of training and responsibility and should promptly refer concerns to an appropriate adult VPC Leader or Named Person.

Cadets and Parents/Carers

VPC will provide safeguarding awareness for cadets and their parents/carers to ensure that young people understand their right to be safe, how to recognise inappropriate behaviour and where they can go for help or raise a concern. A **VPC Cadet Safeguarding Session** should be delivered at the start of each cadet year and should be refreshed where appropriate during the year. Forces and units are encouraged to involve parents/carers in this session and to provide them with information about VPC safeguarding arrangements, expected standards of behaviour and how concerns can be raised. This approach supports the recommendations arising from the Sheldon review and reflects the VPC Safe to Operate Standards, which recognise that cadets, parents/carers and leaders should understand their rights to protection from abuse, exploitation and mistreatment and be empowered to report concerns.

Safeguarding training and awareness should be recorded and monitored by the relevant VPC/force arrangements. National VPC will keep the content and frequency of national safeguarding training under review to ensure that it reflects changes in legislation, statutory guidance, safeguarding practice and emerging risks.

17. Whistleblowing

VPC is committed to creating an open and transparent safeguarding culture in which everyone involved in VPC feels able to raise concerns about the safety and wellbeing of children, young people and adults, or about the conduct, behaviour or practice of anyone involved in the organisation. Concerns should be raised at the earliest opportunity and should not be dismissed because they may appear minor, because the person involved is a colleague, police officer, senior leader or volunteer, or because the individual raising the concern is unsure whether the concern meets a safeguarding threshold.

Where possible, concerns should be raised through the VPC safeguarding reporting arrangements, including with the relevant Named Person, Force VPC Safeguarding Lead or Force Coordinator. Where an individual does not feel able to raise a concern through their normal line-management or VPC arrangements, believes that a concern has not been appropriately addressed, or has a concern about the conduct of someone responsible for safeguarding, they may use the National VPC safeguarding and whistleblowing arrangements. VPC's national safeguarding contact provides an alternative route for reporting concerns and seeking advice. vpc.safeguarding@vpc.police.uk

No person should be disadvantaged, victimised or subjected to detrimental treatment for raising a genuine safeguarding concern in good faith. VPC will take reasonable steps to protect individuals who raise concerns and will treat information sensitively and confidentially, sharing it only where necessary, proportionate and lawful. Concerns should be reported even where the person raising them is uncertain whether the information can be substantiated; individuals should not be expected to investigate or establish the validity of a concern themselves.

Where a concern is not appropriately addressed through local arrangements, the individual should escalate the matter through the relevant force safeguarding, professional standards, complaints or other appropriate process. Where the concern relates to a police officer or police staff member, relevant force Professional Standards procedures may also apply. Where a concern indicates an immediate risk of harm, the appropriate emergency or statutory safeguarding response must be initiated without delay.

VPC will monitor and review safeguarding and whistleblowing concerns to identify themes, learning and opportunities for improvement, while maintaining appropriate confidentiality and information-governance arrangements. The existence of a whistleblowing process does not prevent or replace statutory reporting duties, safeguarding referrals, police investigations, DBS referrals or other legal or organisational processes where these are required.

18. Governance, monitoring and annual review

VPC recognises that effective safeguarding requires strong governance, clear accountability, regular monitoring and continuous improvement.

National VPC will maintain oversight of the National VPC Safeguarding and Wellbeing Policy and associated safeguarding arrangements, monitoring changes in legislation and statutory guidance, emerging safeguarding risks, learning from safeguarding incidents, complaints, whistleblowing, safeguarding reviews and other relevant sources to ensure that the national framework remains current and effective.

Each police force operating a VPC scheme is responsible for implementing this policy as a minimum national standard and for ensuring that appropriate local safeguarding governance, leadership, reporting, escalation, training, safer recruitment and quality-assurance arrangements are in place.

The National VPC Safe to Operate Standards provide the national assurance framework against which forces should assess compliance and effectiveness, ensuring that safeguarding policies and procedures are not only in place but are understood, implemented and embedded in day-to-day practice. Forces should routinely monitor safeguarding activity, including training and DBS compliance, safeguarding concerns and referrals, incidents and themes, complaints, whistleblowing, low-level concerns, safeguarding audits, Safe to Operate assessments and feedback from cadets, parents/carers and leaders, with identified areas for improvement recorded, allocated to an appropriate owner and monitored through to completion.

National VPC will maintain oversight of this assurance information and use it, together with learning from national and local safeguarding reviews, to identify trends, risks and opportunities for improvement. This policy will be formally reviewed at least annually, and sooner where there is a significant change in legislation, statutory guidance, national VPC arrangements, safeguarding practice or identified risk.

The annual review will consider, as a minimum, legislative and statutory guidance changes across the UK, DBS and vetting requirements, safeguarding incidents and learning, emerging risks, training requirements, information governance, the National VPC Safe to Operate Standards and feedback from children and young people, parents/carers, leaders and forces. The outcome of each review will be documented, including any amendments, actions, responsible owners and timescales, and where no substantive changes are required the decision and evidence considered will be recorded.

Significant changes will be communicated to forces and VPC leaders through established national channels. Safeguarding governance will promote a culture of continuous improvement, with compliance regarded as a minimum standard rather than an end in itself, and VPC will continually seek to strengthen safeguarding practice and provide the safest possible environment for all children, young people and adults involved in VPC.