



Policy Title
RNLI Safeguarding Policy

Policy Owner
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Owning Dept
Legal, Compliance and Company Secretarial Services

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November 2025

Next Review Date
October 2026

Reason for Policy
Safeguarding policy for all RNLI personnel.

Objective of Policy

- To protect all people in the charity, or those it comes into contact with, from harm, abuse, neglect or maltreatment of any kind.
- To clearly define safeguarding responsibilities and expectations to prevent harm, abuse, neglect or maltreatment of any kind.
- To ensure the RNLI meets all legal and moral safeguarding requirements.
- To clearly define the requirements of internal and external safeguarding reporting, responsibility and confidentiality.

Applicability

This policy is **applicable to all** volunteers, permanent and temporary employees, all associated persons such as contractors, consultants and others employed under a contract for services.

In addition, this policy will apply to any persons involved with work for or on behalf of the organisation in any setting including RNLI international work, partner agencies, students, agency workers and any other associated stakeholders.

Policy Introduction

The RNLI is the charity that saves lives at sea. We are a charity founded upon and driven by our values of selflessness, courage, dependability, and trustworthiness.

Many RNLI people are volunteers; ordinary people doing extraordinary things; supported by expert staff, all working together as one crew to help communities at home and abroad save lives.

As a lifesaving charity and a community-based organisation, we believe in prioritising the safety and welfare of our people. We have a duty of care to our people, our supporters and those who we rescue to protect them from harm.

Our people and the communities we exist to serve must be able to trust and depend on the RNLI to keep them and their families safe whenever they come into contact with our charity.

(1.0) **Safeguarding at the RNLI**

Safeguarding is about protecting all people; protecting a person's health, wellbeing, and human rights; and enabling them to live free from harm, abuse, and neglect.

Safeguarding is about duty of care – the moral or legal responsibility not to allow someone to be harmed. Therefore, safeguarding is defined in the RNLI as:

The range of measures in place to protect people in a charity, or those it comes into contact with, from abuse and maltreatment of any kind.

Everyone is responsible for safeguarding. It is our collective responsibility across all departments, locations and services. If you are part of the RNLI, you are responsible for safeguarding.

We must all have an understanding of the types of harm that fall under safeguarding legalisation and guidance, champion ethical behaviours, know how and when to report concerns, and take every reasonable precaution to minimise risks.

We must do all we can to prevent harm in all its forms from occurring and address concerns with integrity, impartiality and proportionately.

We must be clear about what is acceptable or what is not acceptable, ensuring all employees, volunteers, communities, and those we work with are encouraged to speak out and challenge inappropriate behaviours or language, wherever they occur.

Managers and leaders have a position of trust and authority. They play an important role in creating environments where people feel able to speak up and report concerns, and in supporting their teams to follow the safeguarding procedures in place.

(1.1) **Safeguarding in an International Context**

This Safeguarding Policy is applied throughout the RNLI including our work internationally. Local legislation may vary between countries therefore this Policy identifies the standards expected, which may exceed local legislation requirements.

The RNLI will endeavour to work in ways which are culturally sensitive and respect the diverse nature of the people we engage with. We also recognise the challenges Safeguarding internationally can bring therefore we endorse the principles as set out in the:

- The United Nations Convention on the rights of a child
- The United Nations Convention on the rights of person with disabilities

(2.0) **Responsibility**

- We are all responsible for ensuring we are aware of and fully understand the contents of this policy.
- All managers are responsible for ensuring this policy and guidance material is applied within their respective area and is shared with all personnel.
- Any queries on the application or interpretation of the policy and/or associated material must be discussed with the Safeguarding Team prior to any action being taken.
- The Safeguarding Team is responsible for ensuring the maintenance, regular review and updating of this policy.

(3.0) Scope

This policy addresses all forms of safeguarding including (although not limited to):

- Verbal, physical, sexual, psychological, emotional and financial abuse
- Sexual harassment and child exploitation
- Criminal exploitation
- A culture which may allow poor behaviour and poor accountability
- People abusing a position of trust they hold
- Negligent treatment,
- Bullying (repetitive and consistent to cause harm)
- Harassment
- Stalking
- Intimidation
- Cyber abuse
- Prejudice / Discrimination / Hate Incidents¹
- Domestic abuse
- Coercion and control
- Self-neglect
- Extremism and radicalisation
- Forced marriage
- Modern slavery
- Human trafficking and female genital mutilation
- Substance misuse.

In some circumstances safeguarding matters identified may also be applicable to health and safety and data protection. Where these situations are identified communication will be made with the respective teams.

Safeguarding applies to all; however, there are specific regulations relating to child safeguarding and adult safeguarding practices.

(4.0) Our commitment

The RNLI will:

- Ensure the welfare and wellbeing of all is paramount, promoting a respectful, enabling, inclusive safe culture.
- Prevent, stop, and reduce the risk of harm, abuse, maltreatment, exploitation, and neglect wherever possible.
- Take all safeguarding concerns and allegations seriously; follow up on reports of safeguarding promptly and appropriately.
- Address concerns raised with integrity, impartiality and proportionately.
- Take appropriate action to prevent harm or abuse; we have a zero-tolerance approach. Meaning we will do all we can to prevent harm in all its forms from occurring and we will address concerns with integrity, impartiality and proportionately.
- Ensure those that raise concerns are supported and protected.
- Hold people and partners accountable for their actions or lack of action.

¹ On any of the grounds in The Equality Act 2010, which include age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion or beliefs.

- Ensure all (regardless of age, disability, gender, racial heritage, religious or other belief, sexual orientation or identity) have the right to protection from all types of harm, abuse and neglect.

(5.0) Prevention and protection

The RNLI will:

- Support all employees, volunteers and associated stakeholders to have access to, are familiar with, and know their responsibilities within this policy.
- Provide safeguarding training and support for RNLI people; with an emphasis for those who may be in contact with young people and vulnerable adults during the course of their duties.
- Work in partnership with an individual at risk of harm, parents, carers and agencies to protect and promote their welfare and wellbeing.
- Design and undertake all its services and activities in a way that protects people from any risk of harm, including the way in which information is gathered, stored, and communicated.
- Work with partners, contractors, service providers and stakeholders through our contractual and partnership arrangements to embed a positive safeguarding culture across all RNLI associated services and activity.
- Implement robust safeguarding procedures in the recruitment, management, and the deployment of all personnel.
- Ensure the compliance of all safeguarding legislation across the RNLI jurisdictions inclusive of the UK, Ireland and internationally where applicable.

(6.0) The 6 Rs of safeguarding

(6.1) Recognise:

- Recognise a safeguarding concern, including the different signs and symptoms of all safeguarding matters and what abuse, harm and neglect might be and look like.

(6.2) Respond:

- Respond appropriately to what you are being told.
- Listen carefully, do not judge, do not ignore, dismiss, minimise, or unduly influence the person reporting.

(6.3) Report

- Every safeguarding concern, allegation or incident **must** be reported at the point of receiving or witnessing the matter in accordance with the safeguarding reporting guidelines.
- You must act quickly, ensuring we stop or minimise any further harm or damage. Confidentiality is paramount and you should only share information with those involved in the safeguarding process.
- Where concerns are identified out of hours, contact the Duty Room. If there is an immediate threat of harm, the on call tactical/strategic/executive lead will be contacted to provide out of hours support. If there is no immediate threat of harm, the Duty Room will take a record and report the matter to the Safeguarding Team. Confidentiality is paramount; no personal details or the content of concerns to be included in Watchkeeper briefings or logs.
- If the safeguarding risk is significantly serious and there is a suspicion that somebody is in immediate risk of harm or severe threat, you should contact the relevant statutory agency (such as the police/Garda).
- Please see section 7.0 for further information about statutory reporting and external agencies.

(6.4) Record

- You must record as many details as possible (who, what, why, when and where).
- You must ensure that you handle and record the matter in a secure and responsible way.

(6.5) Resolve

- Resolutions will be sought for all concerns and, in some cases, investigations and hearings will determine the appropriate outcome.
- All concerns raised should be followed up in a timely manner.
- Where a formal process is required, the Safeguarding Team will work with the relevant people (HR) or volunteer lead, Head of Region or identified department lead.
- Further proportionate action will be considered if an inadequate response has been provided and/or safeguarding advice has not been justly followed by the decision maker.
- You should take the advice and recommendations as provided by the Safeguarding Team.
- If you decide to take alternative measures not in line with safeguarding advice or recommendations, you must detail your rationale in writing along with your defensible decision to the Safeguarding Team.

(6.6) Review

- The Safeguarding Team will regularly review safeguarding reports and resolutions, enabling best practice and identifying lessons learnt to improve safeguarding practice.

(7.0) Safer Recruitment

The RNLI is committed to safer recruitment practices to help make sure our staff and volunteers are suitable to work or volunteer in roles where there is contact with children or vulnerable adults.

Where disclosures are raised or identified the Safeguarding Team will work with the relevant stakeholders to assess suitability.

(8.0) Statutory reporting and external agencies

The Safeguarding Team will be the point of contact for external agencies on behalf of the RNLI on all safeguarding matters (unless otherwise directed).

The Safeguarding Team **must** report all safeguarding matters which involve a child or young person to the relevant authorities, including the Local Authority Designated Officer or relevant children's social service, within 24-hours of the concern being raised. A similar approach will be taken with matters involving adults at risk.

Where matters reported are criminal in nature, the Safeguarding Team will report to all relevant external agencies in a timely manner.

The Safeguarding Team will consult with statutory agencies before beginning any internal investigations. In some cases, a statutory agency (such as the police/Garda) may initiate enquiries before putting the concerns or allegations to the individual. It is vital that the RNLI does not instigate any process which may inadvertently impede a police or statutory investigation.

Should the RNLI decide to cease the employment or volunteer contract of an individual on safeguarding grounds, referrals into the jurisdictional vetting bureaus (e.g., Disclosure Barring Service) and any other relevant professional bodies will be made.

(9.0) Confidentiality

Confidentiality is paramount in dealing with safeguarding concerns, therefore limiting the number of people who are aware of the concern.

- If it is decided that someone needs to know about a safeguarding concern, then considerations will be given to the level of information disclosed.
- Where it is applicable and proportionate to do so, information sharing is essential for the effective safeguarding of adults and children in order to make decisions to protect individuals.

Sharing information is an important part of safeguarding. If the information is confidential, but there is a safeguarding concern, sharing information is allowed both within and between organisations.

The law recognises that sharing information is an essential part of safeguarding and this is covered in a range of laws including:

- The Common Law Duty of Confidentiality
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Crime and Disorder Act 1998
- Care Act 2014
- Working together to keep children safe statutory guidance.

During safeguarding investigations some information such as statements and the contents within the statements may be classified as legally privileged and will therefore only be disclosed to the RNLI Safeguarding Team, Legal Counsel, and (where applicable) statutory external agencies and investigation and hearing managers.

(10.0) Designated Responsible Roles

Charity trustees:

- Safeguarding is a key governance priority for trustees. It is part of their duty of care. As trustees of the RNLI, they are responsible for ensuring those benefiting from or working with the RNLI are not harmed in any way through any contact with it.
- RNLI trustees are ultimately accountable for ensuring the organisation and its representatives uphold our safeguarding requirements and commitments and create and embed a robust safeguarding culture across all departments, and that safeguarding is considered in all strategic decision making.
- RNLI trustees play an essential role in setting the safeguarding aims and objectives, devising strategy and holding senior leaders to account for their effective implementations.

Designated Safeguarding Trustee:

- RNLI trustees will appoint a Designated Safeguarding Trustee with relevant experience and training in safeguarding to support the charity in embedding safeguarding practice and ensure regulatory compliance.

Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL):

- The DSL has a direct role in ensuring the organisation appropriately exercises its safeguarding duties across all safeguarding matters; with specific reference to matters where there are children and vulnerable adults ensuring its functions follow statutory arrangements and guidance.
- Where the DSL identifies a significant risk because of non-adherence to the policy, the matter will be escalated to the relevant senior leader or executive lead and if substantial to the RNLI Chief Executive, the Designated Safeguarding Trustee and Trustee Chair.

- The DSL role will act as the main source of support, advice, and expertise for safeguarding. It has a responsibility for dealing with safeguarding concerns and allegations; responsible for the oversight and management of all safeguarding concerns, allegations or incidents reported as well as managing referrals to external safeguarding agencies.
- The DSL is responsible for updating policies and procedures to reflect changes in statutory requirements, good practice, lessons learnt and current issues.

Executive Team and senior leaders:

- Play a critical role in ensuring safeguarding is embedded across departments and is considered in all decision making.
- They will promote a fair, open and positive culture and ensure that all involved feel able to report concerns, confident that they will be heard and responded to.
- They must ensure RNLI works within all relevant statutory guidance, keeps accurate records, stays aware of current affairs, trends and themes and how policies and practices can be influenced complies with its policies and procedures.

All RNLI personnel:

- All personnel have a responsibility to report any safeguarding concern and act accordingly in line with safeguarding advice.

If you see it, hear it, have been told it, or something doesn't feel right; report it!

#SeeSomethingSaySomething

Definitions

- The term **child/young person** has the specific legal meaning of anyone below the age of 18 years.
- A **vulnerable adult** is someone who has care and support needs, and/or is experiencing or is at risk of harm, abuse or neglect and is unable to protect themselves.

Resources

- Safeguarding Reporting Guidance
- Safeguarding: Balance of Probability and Reasonable Belief Guidance
- Safeguarding Under 18's
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults
- Safeguarding: International Guidance
- Safeguarding Managers Handbook

Reference Documents

- The Equality Act 2010
- The Common Law Duty of Confidentiality
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Crime and Disorder Act 1998
- Care Act 2014
- Working together to keep children safe statutory guidance
- Human Rights Act 19
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- Safeguarding and Protecting People for Charities and Trustees
- Making barring referrals to the Disclosure Barring Service (equivalent Protecting Vulnerable Groups, Access NI, Garda National Vetting Bureau)

Related Policies, Procedures & Guidance

- Employee Code of Conduct
- Employee Grievance and Disciplinary Policies and Procedures
- Volunteer Code of Conduct
- Social Media Policy
- Media Policy
- Safety, Health and Environment policies (including Personal Safety and Lone Working and Risk Assessments)
- Vulnerable Circumstances Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Dignity at Work policy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Trans Policy
- Fraud Policy
- Responsible Use of Computers Policy
- Volunteer Guidelines

Related Forms & Instructions

- RNLI Guide to Risk Assessments

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