

PORLOCK PARISH COUNCIL

POLICY: PORLOCK EMERGENCY RESPONSE

SAFEGUARDING POLICY



1. Purpose

Porlock Parish Council is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and vulnerable adults who may come into contact with the Council's emergency response activities. This policy establishes the safeguarding principles, responsibilities and procedures that apply to members of the Porlock Emergency Response Team (PERT), authorised volunteers and any persons acting on behalf of the Council during emergency preparedness, response and recovery activities.

This policy supports the aims of the Porlock Emergency Response Framework (PERF) and recognises that emergency situations can increase vulnerability and place additional safeguarding responsibilities on those providing community support. The PERF identifies safeguarding as a key requirement and notes that provisions must be made for safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults involved in, or affected by, emergency response activities.

2. Policy Statement

Porlock Parish Council will:

1. Place the welfare and safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults at the centre of emergency response activities.
2. Take reasonable and proportionate measures to protect individuals from abuse, neglect, exploitation and avoidable harm.
3. Ensure volunteers understand their safeguarding responsibilities.
4. Ensure safeguarding concerns are recognised, reported and appropriately escalated.
5. Operate emergency response activities within clearly defined limits and never undertake activities requiring specialist safeguarding, care or emergency service intervention.
6. Promote safe working practices for volunteers and members of the public.
7. Work cooperatively with statutory agencies, emergency services and safeguarding authorities where concerns arise.

3. Scope

This policy applies to:

1. Members of the Porlock Emergency Response Committee (PERC).
2. Members of PERT.
3. Registered Authorised Volunteers.
4. Councillors and officers involved in emergency response activities.
5. Any temporary volunteers acting under the direction of PERT.

This policy applies during:

6. Emergency preparedness activities.
7. Training exercises.
8. Emergency response activations.
9. Recovery and welfare support activities.

4. Definitions

Child - Any person under the age of 18 years.

Vulnerable Adult - An adult who may be unable to protect themselves from abuse, neglect or exploitation because of age, disability, illness, mental health issues, frailty, dependency or circumstances arising during an emergency.

5. Safeguarding Principles

All emergency response activities shall be guided by the following principles:

1. Prevention of harm.
2. Respect for dignity and independence.
3. Proportionate intervention.
4. Accountability and transparency.
5. Appropriate information sharing.
6. Safety of volunteers and beneficiaries.
7. Partnership working with statutory agencies.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

1. Porlock Parish Council

The Council shall:

1. Adopt and maintain this policy.
2. Ensure appropriate insurance arrangements remain in place.
3. Ensure safeguarding concerns are taken seriously and acted upon.
4. Review safeguarding arrangements annually.

2. Porlock Emergency Response Committee

The Committee shall:

1. Ensure safeguarding arrangements remain effective.
2. Determine which roles require DBS checks.
3. Monitor compliance with safeguarding requirements.
4. Review any safeguarding incidents arising from emergency activities.

The PERC Terms of Reference require safeguarding arrangements for vulnerable adults and children to be established and require consideration of DBS checks where appropriate.

3. Porlock Emergency Response Team

PERT members shall:

1. Complete safeguarding awareness training.
2. Promote safe working practices.
3. Report concerns promptly.
4. Ensure volunteers receive suitable briefing, supervision and task allocation.

4. Registered Authorised Volunteers (RAV)

Authorised Volunteers shall:

1. Follow safeguarding instructions.
2. Work within their competence and assigned role.
3. Report concerns immediately.
4. Never place themselves or others at unreasonable risk.

Volunteers must operate under the direction of PERT and only undertake duties for which they feel physically capable.

7. Appropriate RAV Activities

Examples of activities that may be undertaken by PERT members and authorised volunteers include:

1. Staffing Places of Refuge.
2. Welfare checks by telephone.
3. Delivering information, food, water or supplies.
4. Assisting with community communications.
5. Providing practical support to isolated residents.
6. Supporting registration and administration at Places of Refuge.
7. Assisting in the distribution of emergency equipment.
8. Signposting residents to statutory services.

8. Activities That Must Not Be Undertaken

RAV and PERT members must not:

1. Undertake social care functions.
2. Provide unsupervised personal care.
3. Accept responsibility for medication.
4. Provide medical treatment beyond their competence or training.
5. Remove children or vulnerable adults from their homes without lawful authority.
6. Enter private property without permission.
7. Conduct criminal investigations.
8. Transport children without prior approval and appropriate safeguards.
9. Place themselves in hazardous situations.

The PERC Terms of Reference specifically prohibit volunteers from entering floodwater, unsafe buildings, undertaking rescue activities or performing functions reserved to emergency services.

9. Lone Working and Home Visits

As a general principle:

1. Volunteers should avoid entering private homes.
2. Welfare support should where possible be delivered by telephone, from the doorway, or through organised community support arrangements.
3. Home visits should only occur where necessary and safe.
4. Volunteers should work in pairs where practicable when undertaking welfare visits.
5. PERT should maintain awareness of volunteer locations during activations.

Volunteers must never remain alone in a private residence with a child unless a parent or responsible adult is present.

10. DBS Checks

The Council recognises that not all emergency response activities require DBS checks.

The Committee shall determine which roles require DBS clearance based upon:

- Frequency of contact with children.
- Frequency of contact with vulnerable adults.
- Nature of activities undertaken.
- Guidance issued by the Disclosure and Barring Service.

Enhanced DBS checks should normally be considered for PERT members who may regularly supervise Places of Refuge or have substantial and recurring contact with vulnerable individuals during emergency situations. The PERC already proposes enhanced DBS checks for PERT members where appropriate.

11. Training

PERT members should complete safeguarding awareness training before undertaking safeguarding-related responsibilities.

The PERC proposes introductory or Level 1 safeguarding training for relevant personnel.

Training should cover:

1. Identifying safeguarding concerns.
2. Professional boundaries.
3. Reporting procedures.
4. Confidentiality.
5. Behaviour expectations.
6. Working with vulnerable people during emergencies.

12. Confidentiality and Information Sharing

Information obtained during emergency response activities shall:

1. Be treated as confidential.
2. Only be shared on a need-to-know basis.
3. Be handled in accordance with data protection legislation.
4. Be disclosed to safeguarding authorities where necessary to protect individuals from harm.

Personal information collected through volunteer registration shall be processed in accordance with the Council's privacy arrangements.

13. Recognising Safeguarding Concerns

Examples may include:

1. Physical abuse.
2. Emotional abuse.
3. Neglect.
4. Financial exploitation.
5. Coercion or control.
6. Self-neglect.
7. Signs of distress, fear or isolation.
8. Concerns relating to children left without appropriate supervision.

RAVs are not expected to investigate concerns. Their role is to observe, record and report.

14. Reporting Concerns

Where there is an immediate threat to life or serious harm:

Call 999 immediately.

For non-emergency safeguarding concerns:

1. Record the facts as soon as possible.
2. Report the concern immediately to the PERT Lead, Deputy Lead or Clerk.
3. Do not promise confidentiality.
4. Do not investigate.
5. Maintain an accurate written record.

The PERT Lead, Deputy Lead or Clerk shall determine whether referral to Police, Adult Social Care, Children's Services or another appropriate authority is required.

15. Safeguarding Incidents Involving Volunteers

Any allegation, complaint or safeguarding concern involving a volunteer or PERT member shall:

1. Be reported immediately to the Clerk.
2. Be referred to the Council Chair where appropriate.
3. Result in temporary suspension from emergency duties where necessary to protect individuals or the Council.
4. Be managed in consultation with relevant authorities.

16. Volunteer Welfare

The Emergency Response Committee recognises that prolonged emergencies can place volunteers under significant physical and emotional pressure.

The Committee's Terms of Reference require volunteer welfare, wellbeing, rest periods and post-incident support to be considered.

Accordingly:

1. Volunteers shall not be pressured to undertake duties.
2. Adequate rest breaks should be provided.

3. Refreshments and welfare facilities should be available where practicable.
4. Volunteers should be encouraged to withdraw from duties if fatigued or unwell.
5. Debriefing opportunities should be provided following significant incidents.

17. Risk Assessments

Safeguarding forms part of the wider risk management arrangements for emergency response activities. The PERF requires risk assessments to be completed to ensure the safety of PERT members and RAVs.

Safeguarding considerations shall therefore be included within risk assessments for:

1. Places of Refuge.
2. Volunteer deployments.
3. Welfare checks.
4. Community support activities.
5. Training exercises.
6. Emergency communications.

18. Review

This policy shall be reviewed annually, following any safeguarding incident, activation of the Emergency Plan or significant legislative or regulatory changes. Lessons learned from emergency activations, post-incident reviews and safeguarding concerns shall be incorporated into future revisions of this policy.