

Policy:	Child Protection Policy
Department:	Community Services
Approved by:	Council
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1. Purpose

The purpose of this Child Protection Policy is to meet the requirements of the Vulnerable Children Act (2014). Stratford District Council's Child Protection policy provides guidelines so that employees and volunteers can create a safe environment for children.

This policy applies to all employees of Council including contractors, temporary employees and volunteers of the Council.

2. Definitions

A **Child** is anyone under the age of 18 years and who is not married or in a civil union.

Staff are those who are employed directly by or volunteer for Stratford District Council, as well as staff and volunteers of partner organisations whilst they are working with children and young people.

Core children's workers are those who work alone with, or have primary responsibility or authority over, children.

Non-core children's workers are those who have regular, but limited, child contact.

Screening means an internal process for identifying suitable candidates – in this case, those who can be relied on to keep children in Council's care safe. **Safety Checking** means the formal process of obtaining checks from another agency, e.g. the Police vetting service, criminal record checks.

Child Abuse the harming (whether physically, emotionally, sexually), ill-treatment, abuse, neglect, or deprivation of any child or young person.

Physical Abuse is defined as any non-accidental action that may result in physical harm of a child.

Emotional Abuse is the persistent emotional ill treatment of a child causing severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional, psychological, social and intellectual functioning or development.

Sexual Abuse Involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities penetrative and non-penetrative, for example, rape, kissing, touching, masturbation) as well as non-contact acts such as involving children in the looking at or production of sexual images, sexual activities and sexual behaviours.

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical or psychological needs, causing long term serious harm to the child's health or development. It may also include neglect of a child's basic or emotional needs.

Grooming is when someone builds an emotional connection with a child to gain their trust for the purposes of sexual abuse or sexual exploitation. Grooming happens both online and in person.

3. Background

The Vulnerable Children Act (2014) was introduced as part of a series of comprehensive measures to protect and improve the wellbeing of children in New Zealand. As part of providing better protection for vulnerable children, Organisations that interact with children are required to adopt a Child Protection Policy and safety checks are to be undertaken on employees who work with children. Council's Library, Aquatic Services and Community Development teams undertake some functions that require its employees to interact with children.

4. Application

4.1 Safe Recruitment

Stratford District Council will take all reasonably practical steps to ensure that employees who will be working with children as part of their employment are appropriately vetted and screened during the recruitment process. In addition to Council's standard recruitment checks, safety checks will be conducted in accordance with the Vulnerable Children's Act 2014.

Employees will not commence work for the Stratford District Council until the safety checks are complete.

Standard recruitment checks include:

- Reference checks – to obtain information about the applicant's recent work experience.
- Confirmation of qualifications and any professional memberships (as appropriate)
- Identity verification – valid confirmation of the applicant's identity.
- Standard police vet.

Additional safety checks will include:

- Police vet – using the Vulnerable Children Act Vetting request form located on the NZ Police website
- Risk assessment – using all information gathered, assessment of the risk the applicant would pose to the safety of children will be made.

Refusal to Offer Employment

If after undertaking the risk assessment it is concluded that an applicant may pose any risk to a child or where the applicant holds a relevant conviction as outlined in Schedule 2 of the Vulnerable Children's Act 2014, that applicant will not be employed.

4.2 Safety Checks for Existing Employees

Safety checks will be undertaken on existing employees whose role involves interaction with children every three years. These checks will include:

- Confirmation of any changes of name
- A fresh Police vet
- A risk assessment based on the information gathered

If it is concluded after the checks that the employee may pose a risk to children their ongoing employment with the Stratford District Council will be reviewed.

4.3 Training

Training, resources and support will be available to ensure that all employees who have interaction with children as part of their employment can carry out their roles in terms of this policy, particularly:

- Understanding child abuse and the indicators of potential child abuse or neglect
- Understanding how to report child abuse.

Stratford District Council will provide training in the following ways:

- Induction – to raise awareness around vulnerable children and child protection, all new employees will be required to read this Child Protection policy as part of their induction.
- Targeted workshops – within the first year of commencing employment, subject to course availability, employees who interact with children as part of their role will be required to participate in the Child Protection Training.

The Designated Person for Child Protection (Director Community Services) will participate in Child Protection Training on an ongoing basis.

The Activity Manager/Team Leader is responsible for ensuring all employees who work with children receive training in line with this policy.

5. Reporting and Investigation of Concerns of Child Abuse

Where concerns, suspicions or allegations of child abuse exist these must be reported following the incident reporting process in appendix 2.

The Department Director is responsible for an effective and timely procedure for reporting child abuse so that children identified as vulnerable have access to services and support.

For critical incidents, the Department Director must ensure the immediate safety of the child and contact the Police or Oranga Tamariki. The procedure for reporting and responding to child abuse can be found in appendix 2.

Where an employee is the subject of an allegation, the same processes for reporting and responding to reports of child abuse or neglect will apply. If there is a need to pursue an allegation as an employer, Oranga Tamariki or the Police must be consulted before advising the person concerned. The employee must be told that they have a right to seek legal advice. They should also be informed of their right to seek support from the relevant union/representative body. It is vital to follow ordinary investigation and disciplinary policies, guided by the employment contract/collective employment contract and relevant statutory obligations. Stratford District Council will not use 'settlement agreements', where these are contrary to a culture of child protection.

6. Confidentiality and Information Sharing

Keeping children safe requires the appropriate sharing of information subject to legal restrictions and the best interests of the child. Under the Privacy Act 1993 and the Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1989 information is allowed to be shared to keep children safe when abuse or suspected abuse is reported or investigated.

All concerns and allegations of suspected child abuse or neglect must be handled in absolute confidentiality and comply with all relevant provisions of the Privacy Act 1993 the Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1989 and other relevant statutes.

7. Relevant Legislation

- Vulnerable Children's Act 2014
- Privacy Act 1993
- Organa Tamariki Act 1989

8. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Resources

Appendix 2 – Incident Reporting Process

Appendix 1

Agency	Phone Number	Information
New Zealand Police	111	If you believe a child is in immediate danger call NZ Police on 111
Oranga Tamariki	0508 326 459	If you are worried about a child and want to make a referral or report a concern, call Oranga Tamariki
Shine Helpline	0508 74 46 33	Shine can provide advice or support for anyone seeking information about family harm.
Crimestoppers	0800 55 51 11	Support to help you report a potential case of family harm anonymously.

Appendix 2

