

BLYTH TOWN COUNCIL

Governance Committee

Decision Report

Thursday 10 July 2025

1. DBS checks for Members

Recommendation

That the Governance Committee recommends to Council:

- the development and implementation of a local policy for voluntary Basic DBS checks and mandatory in certain cases, including a supporting policy framework outlining process, data protection compliance, and financial implications. And
- the adoption of the draft children and vulnerable adult safeguarding policy.

Ward

Not ward specific.

Risk Management

The cost of a Basic DBS check is currently £21.50 per person, Enhanced Check is £49.50 and Enhanced with Barred List is £49.50 (as per the Disclosure and Barring Service official fee structure, 2025). Should the Town Council adopt a policy the total potential budget requirement would be £600 approx.

There is no budget available for this but there are savings within the salaries budget that can accommodate this.

While a DBS check cannot eliminate risk, adopting and implementing this policy approach would reduce reputational risk and provide a proactive response to public expectations on safeguarding transparency.

Crime Prevention

By encouraging voluntary DBS checks, the Council demonstrates its commitment to risk management. This approach helps deter individuals with relevant convictions from seeking positions of influence and reinforces public confidence in the integrity of elected members and officers.

Although not a statutory requirement, such a measure aligns with best practice in public service and supports the Council's broader responsibility to protect vulnerable groups and maintain public trust.

Objective

To promote social wellbeing of the town and its community by demonstrating our responsibility and commitment to risk management.

Background

A request has been received from a member to consider implementing a policy that requires all Town Councillors to undergo DBS checks.

The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) is responsible for issuing criminal record certificates and maintaining the children's and adults' barred lists, which prevent unsuitable individuals from working with vulnerable groups. DBS checks help assess the suitability of individuals for specific roles, particularly those involving children and vulnerable adults.

There are three types of DBS checks:

Basic Check – Shows any unspent criminal convictions.

Enhanced Check – Available only for roles listed in relevant legislation; includes spent and unspent convictions, cautions, and other relevant police information.

Enhanced Check with Barred List(s) – Includes a check against the children's and/or adults' barred lists; only permitted for specific regulated activities.

Currently, there is no statutory requirement for Town or Parish Councillors to undergo DBS checks, as they do not routinely engage in regulated activity with children or vulnerable adults. Any such checks would therefore be voluntary and based on a local policy.

Current Practice

Blyth Town Council has previously resolved that the Mayor and Deputy Mayor must undertake DBS checks in connection with the Mayoral Cadet role. This decision was made in line with safeguarding responsibilities outlined in the Armed Forces Covenant, which the Council signed in April 2025. No checks are made on other councillors. The Events Co-ordinator has an enhanced DBS check. It is recommended that all staff undergo DBS checks due to our duty to maintain play areas.

Northumberland County Council require DBS checks of all County Councillors; however, it is part of their remit to deal with case work which could include children and vulnerable adults. Cramlington Town Council have implemented mandatory checks on all Councillors and Staff.

Considerations for Local Policy

If the Council chooses to adopt a voluntary DBS check policy, it should ensure compliance with:

- The DBS Code of Practice regarding the handling, use, storage, retention, and disposal of certificate information.
- The Data Protection Act 2018, UK GDPR, and other relevant data protection legislation.
- A written policy outlining these procedures, available upon request.

Safeguarding Commitment

The Council is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and vulnerable adults in the community. We follow Northumberland County Council's safeguarding protocols and attach a draft Safeguarding Policy for adoption as Appendix 1. This reflects our commitment to protecting those at risk when engaging with our services, activities, or representatives.

Elaine Brown
Deputy Town Clerk

20 June 2025



BLYTH TOWN COUNCIL

Child Protection and Vulnerable Adult Safeguarding Policy

1. Introduction

This policy outlines Blyth Town Council's commitment to safeguarding children, young people, and vulnerable adults. It provides guidance to all Councillors, staff, and volunteers to ensure a safe and supportive environment and defines clear processes for responding to concerns of harm or abuse.

2. Policy Coverage

This policy applies to all Blyth Town Council Councillors, employees, volunteers, and contractors. While the Council is not a statutory safeguarding authority, it works in partnership with Northumberland County Council, the Principal Authority, which has lead responsibility for safeguarding under the Children Act 2004 and Care Act 2014. The policy should be read alongside the Council's Risk Management, Equality, Disciplinary, Grievance, Complaints, and Whistleblowing policies. For this policy, "children" refers to individuals under 18. "Vulnerable adults" refers to anyone aged 18 or over who, by reason of disability, illness, age, or mental health, is unable to protect themselves from significant harm or exploitation.

3. Policy Principles

Blyth Town Council believes that every child and vulnerable adult, regardless of background or circumstance, has the right to protection from abuse and exploitation. The Council is committed to safeguarding all vulnerable groups during its services, events, and activities and ensuring that all staff and volunteers understand and act on their safeguarding responsibilities. The Council supports a no-blame culture that encourages the reporting of concerns and will not tolerate harassment of anyone who raises a safeguarding concern in good faith.

4. Policy Statement

Blyth Town Council will take all reasonable steps to safeguard the welfare of children and vulnerable adults using its services. The Council will:

- Promote a safeguarding culture in all its activities;

- Respond promptly to concerns or allegations of abuse;
- Act in the best interests of children and vulnerable adults at all times;
- Ensure that unsuitable individuals are not permitted to work with vulnerable groups;
- Take concerns raised seriously and with sensitivity;
- Proactively support the well-being and safety of vulnerable people in the community.

5. Procedures and Systems

5.1 Definitions of Abuse: Abuse may be physical, sexual, emotional, financial, neglectful, discriminatory, or institutional. It includes bullying, exploitation, self-neglect, and modern slavery. Indicators include unexplained injuries, fear of certain individuals, withdrawal, aggression, inappropriate sexual knowledge, neglect in appearance, or unusual behaviour.

5.2 Use of Photography and Video: Consent must be obtained from parents or guardians before capturing images of children or vulnerable adults during Council activities. Use of images must be appropriate, respectful, and securely stored.

5.3 Responding to Allegations: On receiving a disclosure:

- Remain calm and listen;
- Avoid asking leading questions or making judgments;
- Explain that you cannot promise confidentiality and must share the information with the appropriate authority;
- Report immediately to the Town Clerk or designated safeguarding lead;
- If urgent, contact Northumberland County Council's OneCall or the police;
- Record all details accurately, including date, time, and those present.

5.4 Concerns Without Disclosure: Where there is concern but no direct allegation, it should still be reported to the Town Clerk. Signs might include behaviour changes, poor hygiene, reluctance to be left with someone, or inappropriate dress or language.

5.5 Key Contacts:

- Northumberland OneCall: 01670 536400 (24/7)
- Police (emergency): 999
- NSPCC Helpline: 0808 800 5000

5.6 Confidentiality: Information must only be shared with relevant authorities. All records will be stored securely in compliance with data protection regulations.

6. Prevention

6.1 Recruitment: Staff and volunteers working in regulated activities will undergo enhanced DBS checks. All appointments require references and a probationary period. Contractors working with vulnerable people must also meet these standards. The Mayor and Deputy Mayor will be required to undergo enhanced DBS checks. Members and staff agree to undergo voluntary Basic DBS checks.

6.2 Training: All Councillors, employees, and volunteers must familiarise themselves with this policy and undertake any necessary safeguarding training appropriate to their roles. Training needs will be assessed through appraisals.

6.3 Reporting: Concerns should be reported through internal procedures or the Whistleblowing Policy. The Council supports a culture of openness where concerns can be raised without fear.

7. Codes of Practice and Behaviour

All members and officers working with children or vulnerable adults must:

- Treat all individuals with dignity and respect;
- Avoid lone working or ensure visibility if it cannot be avoided;
- Maintain appropriate physical and emotional boundaries;
- Report all concerns, however minor, to the safeguarding lead.

They must not:

- Engage in inappropriate physical or verbal behaviour;
- Trivialise abuse;
- Permit bullying, initiation, or discriminatory practices;
- Ignore or fail to act on concerns;
- Show favouritism or form inappropriate relationships.

Breaches of this policy may result in disciplinary action or referral to relevant authorities.

8. Procedures in Relation to Specific Services

8.1 Contractors: Contractors expected to work with or near children or vulnerable adults must demonstrate safeguarding compliance. Where a safeguarding breach occurs, it will be treated as a breach of contract.

8.2 First Aid: First aid should only be administered when necessary and, wherever possible, in the presence of another adult. Parents or carers must be informed afterward.

8.3 Photography at Events: Photographs at public events must follow safeguarding best practice. Photographers must be approved and supervised. Consent must be obtained in advance where images of children or vulnerable adults are taken for promotional use.

9. Misuse of Procedure

Malicious or false allegations or misuse of this policy may result in disciplinary action and/or legal referral. This policy is to protect vulnerable individuals—not to be used for personal or political grievance.

10. Policy Monitoring and Review

All safeguarding concerns will be recorded, monitored, and securely stored. This policy will be reviewed every four years or earlier in response to changes in legislation, best practice, or following a safeguarding incident.