

The Sunshine Centre

MANAGING ALLEGATIONS AGAINST MEMBERS OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Procedures for Managing Allegations of Abuse against Staff and Volunteers Working with Children

1. Introduction

THE SUNSHINE CENTRE is committed to ensuring that it provides a safe learning environment for all children.

We recognise that the majority of people who work with children and young people do so from a position of care and concern, but evidence indicates that there are situations where this is not the case, and procedures are therefore needed to ensure that children and young people in our schools have as much protection as possible.

When an allegation has been made concerning any employee within THE SUNSHINE CENTRE, they should have the case against them dealt with quickly, professionally and impartially. The procedures that follow recognise the responsibility and vulnerability of employees and provides guidance to THE SUNSHINE CENTRE on how to deal with any allegations or complaints made against a member of staff or volunteer.

These procedures are those devised by the Oxfordshire County Council Local Authority Designated Officer and Safeguarding team (LADO)

General Principles

Definitions

- Where the term “relevant body” has been used within this procedure, this means the Board of Trustees of THE SUNSHINE CENTRE.
- Unless indicated otherwise, all references to “practitioner” include the Hub Manager.
- Unless indicated otherwise, all references to “staff” include both Early Years Practitioners and staff.

Consistency of Treatment and Fairness

The relevant body is committed to ensuring consistency of treatment and fairness and will abide by all relevant employment and equality legislation.

Delegation

The relevant body has chosen to delegate some of its functions to local governing bodies as set out in this procedure.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Any feedback or concerns regarding the procedure should be reported back in the first instance to THE SUNSHINE CENTRE HR and Safeguarding Committee.

Executive Summary

In Oxfordshire the Designated Officer and Safeguarding Team comprises of:

Jo Lloyd

Donna Crozier

Sandra Barratt

Lorna Todd

Sophie Kendall

Becky Langstone (ESAT)

LADO team 01865 810603 or Lado.safeguardingchildren@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Initial contact regarding any possible allegation must be made directly with the team relevant to the local authority area as soon as possible in line with Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023

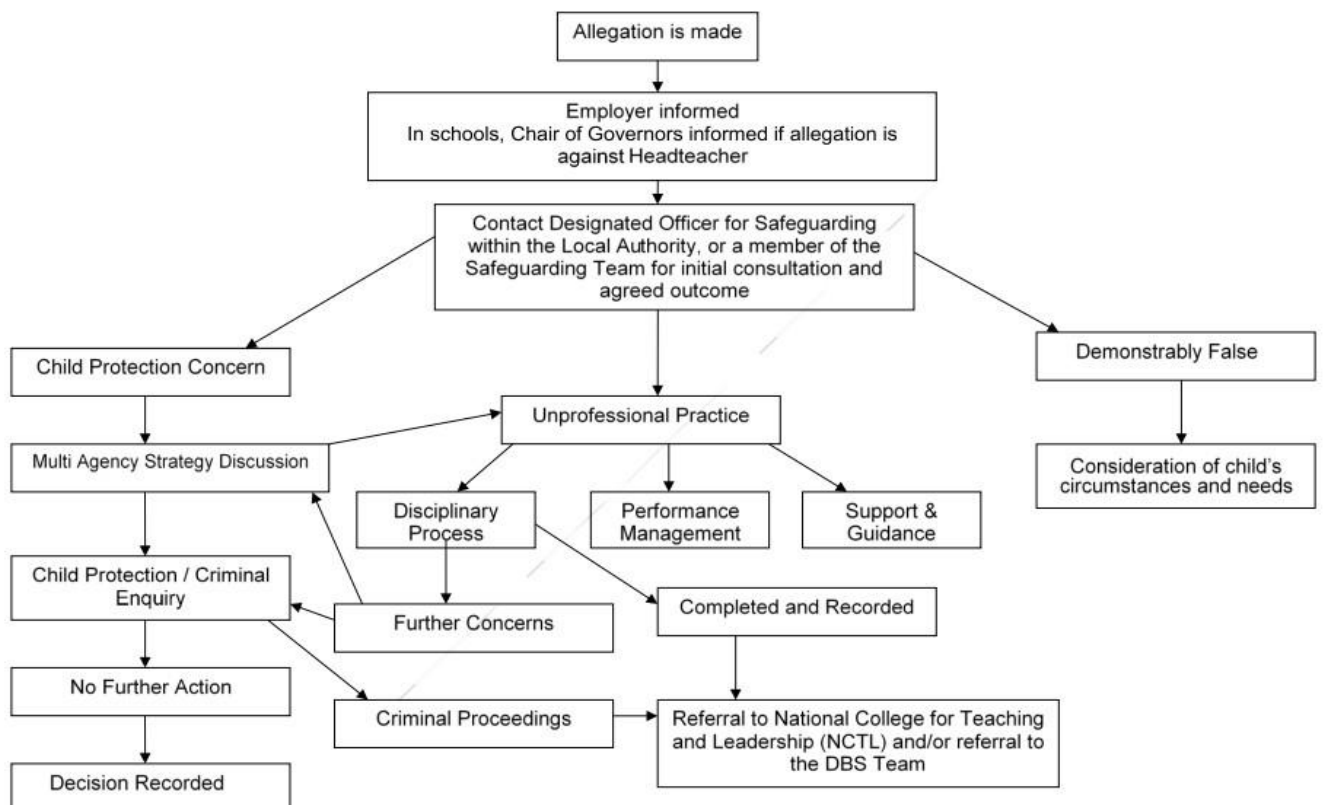
THE SUNSHINE CENTRE HR Trustee and THE SUNSHINE CENTRE Safeguarding Trustee should also be kept informed of any allegations made against an individual working or volunteering at the centre.

Summary of key issues/initial actions to be taken

1. Suspension should never be an automatic response. Appropriate criteria should be applied in all cases.
2. Ensure appropriate safeguarding measures are in place during the referral/investigation process.
3. Do not seek to investigate the allegation yourself or interview the child.
4. You must consult with the Designated Officer for the Local Authority or a Safeguarding Coordinator within 24 hours of receiving the allegation.
5. Ideally obtain details of the “allegation” in writing, ideally signed and dated by the person receiving the allegation, and counter signed and dated by the lead for child protection. Record all actions taken with time/date and who took the action.

6. An investigating officer will be appointed, in consultation with police, head and local authority if a joint decision is made that a formal investigation is appropriate.
7. Consider the need for disciplinary action in respect of the employee where it is clear that a reportable offence has not been committed.
8. However, any disciplinary action must be kept separate from child protection investigations except when there is agreement otherwise between the Designated officer for the local authority/Safeguarding Coordinator and those in charge of investigations.
9. Investigations by the police or early years and family's assessment team will take priority over an internal investigation by the establishment.
10. When issues are resolved, the designated officer will write to all relevant parties with findings.

Summary of key issues/initial actions to be taken



In diagram for Chair of Governors use Chair of Trustees and Hub Manager not Head Teacher

What's the difference between an allegation and a complaint?

Allegations

An allegation, in the context of the statutory obligations for schools, relates to any individual who works or volunteers in any capacity with children and where there is a concern that this person has or may have:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child or may have hurt 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.

In all cases where the concern about an individual falls into one of the categories above this will be considered to be an allegation, if it relates to a child. i.e. an individual who has not yet attained the age of 18.

In all such cases the allegation must be reported to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) within 24 hours. Under no circumstances should the school/THE SUNSHINE CENTRE carry out any investigation or take any action until the matter has been referred to the LADO.

Complaints

Complaints are generally expressions of dissatisfaction or concern that may relate to the delivery of a service by a team or individual.

A complaint may also be an expression of dissatisfaction about procedures or policy, or the way procedures and policies are implemented by any team, team member or school. All THE SUNSHINE CENTRE schools will have their own complaints policy and all such complaints should be addressed following that policy.

Where there is no indication that the complaint relates to harm or potential harm to a child there is no need to refer to the LADO.

Allegations of abuse made against staff and volunteers working with children

Duties as an employer and an employee

1. This part of the guidance is about managing cases of allegations that might indicate a person will pose a risk of harm if they continue to work in regular or close contact with children in their present position, or in any capacity. It should be used in respect of all cases in which it is alleged that a member of staff (including volunteers) that provides a service for children under 18 years of age has:

- i. Behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child.
- ii. Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child; or

iii. Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates he or she would pose a risk of harm to children.

2. This part of the guidance relates to members of staff who are currently working in THE SUNSHINE CENTRE regardless of whether the centre is where the alleged abuse took place. Allegations against a staff member who is no longer working or volunteering should be referred to the police. Historical allegations of abuse should also be referred to the police.

3. Employers have a duty of care to their employees. They should ensure they provide effective support for anyone facing an allegation and provide the employee with a named contact if they are suspended. It is essential that any allegation of abuse made against a member of staff or volunteer in the workplace is dealt with very quickly, in a fair and consistent way that provides effective protection for the child and at the same time supports the person who is the subject of the allegation.

Initial considerations

4. The procedures for dealing with allegations need to be applied with common sense and judgement. Many cases may well either not meet the criteria set out above or may do so without warranting consideration of either a police investigation or enquiries by local authority children's social care services. In these cases, local arrangements should be followed to resolve cases without delay.

5. Some rare allegations will be so serious they require immediate intervention by children's social care services and/or police. The designated officer(s) should be informed of all allegations that come to a school's attention and appear to meet the criteria so they can consult police and children's social care services as appropriate.

6. The following definitions should be used when determining the outcome of allegation investigations:

- i. **Substantiated:** there is sufficient evidence to prove the allegation.
- ii. **Malicious:** there is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation and there has been a deliberate act to deceive.
- iii. **False:** there is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation.
- iv. **Unsubstantiated:** there is insufficient evidence to either prove or disprove the allegation. The term, therefore, does not imply guilt or innocence.

7. In the first instance, the Hub Manager in the centre or where the Hub Manager is the subject of an allegation, the Chair of Trustees or Safeguarding Trustee; should immediately discuss the allegation with the LADO. The purpose of an initial discussion is for the LADO and Hub Manager to consider the nature, content and context of the allegation and agree a course of action. The LADO may ask the case manager to provide or obtain

relevant additional information, such as previous history, whether the child or their family have made similar allegations previously and the individual's current contact with children. There may be situations when the case manager will want to involve the police immediately, for example if the person is deemed to be an immediate risk to children or there is evidence of a possible criminal offence. Where there is no such evidence, the case manager should discuss the allegations with the LADO to help determine whether police involvement is necessary.

8. The initial sharing of information and evaluation may lead to a decision that no further action is to be taken in regard to the individual facing the allegation or concern; in which case this decision and a justification for it should be recorded by both the case manager and the LADO, and agreement reached on what information should be put in writing to the individual concerned and by whom. The case manager should then consider with the LADO what action should follow both in respect of the individual and those who made the initial allegation.

9. The case manager should inform the accused person about the allegation as soon as possible after consulting the LADO. It is extremely important that the case manager provides them with as much information as possible at that time. However, where a strategy discussion is needed, or police or children's social care services need to be involved, the case manager should not do that until those agencies have been consulted and have agreed what information can be disclosed to the accused. As THE SUNSHINE CENTRE must consider carefully whether the circumstances of a case warrant a person being suspended from contact with children at the centre or whether alternative arrangements can be put in place until the allegation or concern is resolved. All options to avoid suspension should be considered prior to taking that step (see further information on suspension which follows).

10. If there is cause to suspect a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, a strategy discussion should be convened in accordance with the statutory guidance *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023*. If the allegation is about physical contact, the strategy discussion or initial evaluation with the police should consider that the member of staff in a school or certain other situations is entitled to use reasonable force to control or restrain children in certain circumstances, including dealing with disruptive behaviour.

11. Where an investigation by the police or children's social care services is unnecessary, or the strategy discussion or initial evaluation decides that is the case, the LADO should discuss the next steps with the case manager. In those circumstances, the options open to THE SUNSHINE CENTRE depend on the nature and circumstances of the allegation and the evidence and information available. This will range from taking no further action to dismissal or a decision not to use the person's services in future. Suspension should not be the default position: an individual should be suspended only if there is no reasonable alternative.

12. In some cases, further enquiries will be needed to enable a decision about how to proceed. If so, the LADO should discuss with the case manager how and by whom the investigation will be undertaken. In straightforward cases, the investigation should normally be undertaken by a senior member of staff or Trustee on behalf of THE SUNSHINE CENTRE.

13. However, in other circumstances, such as lack of appropriate resource, or the nature or complexity of the allegation will require an independent investigator.

Supporting those involved

14. Employers have a duty of care to their employees. They should act to manage and minimise the stress inherent in the allegations process. Support for the individual is vital to fulfilling this duty. Individuals should be informed of concerns or allegations as soon as possible and explained the likely course of action, unless there is an objection by the children's social care services or the police. The individual should be advised to contact their trade union representative, if they have one, or a colleague for support. They should also be given access to welfare counselling or medical advice if this is provided by THE SUNSHINE CENTRE within its staff welfare provisions.

15. The case manager should appoint a named representative to keep the person who is the subject of the allegation informed of the progress of the case and consider what other support is appropriate for the individual. Care needs to be taken when employees are suspended to ensure that they are kept informed of both the progress of their case and current work-related issues. Social contact with colleagues and friends should not be prevented unless there is evidence to suggest that such contact is likely to be prejudicial to the gathering and presentation of evidence.

16. Parents or carers of a child or children involved should be told about the allegation as soon as possible if they do not already know of it. However, where a strategy discussion is required, or police or children's social care services need to be involved, the case manager should not do so until those agencies have been consulted and have agreed what information can be disclosed to the parents or carers. Parents or carers should also be kept informed about the progress of the case and told the outcome where there is not a criminal prosecution, including the outcome of any disciplinary process. The deliberations of a disciplinary hearing, and the information considered in reaching a decision, cannot normally be disclosed, but the parents or carers of the child should be told the outcome in confidence.

17. Parents and carers should also be made aware of the requirement to maintain confidentiality about any allegations made against practitioners whilst investigations are ongoing as set out in section 141F of the Education Act 2002 (see paragraph 20). If parents or carers wish to apply to the court to have reporting restrictions removed, they should be told to seek legal advice.

18. In cases where a child may have suffered significant harm, or there may be a criminal prosecution, children’s social care services, or the police as appropriate, should consider what support the child or children involved may need.

19. In deciding what information to disclose, careful consideration should be given to the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018, the law of confidence and, where relevant, the Human Rights Act 1998.

Confidentiality

20. It is extremely important that when an allegation is made, THE SUNSHINE CENTRE makes every effort to maintain confidentiality and guard against unwanted publicity while an allegation is being investigated or considered. For practitioners, The Education Act 2002 introduced reporting restrictions preventing the publication of any material that may lead to the identification of a practitioner who has been accused by, or on behalf of, a child from the same establishment (where that identification would identify the practitioner as the subject of the allegation). The reporting restrictions apply until the point that the accused person is charged with an offence, or until the Secretary of State or the General Teaching Council for Wales publishes information about an investigation or decision in a disciplinary case arising from the allegation. The reporting restrictions also cease to apply if the individual to whom the restrictions apply effectively waives their right to anonymity by going public themselves or by giving their written consent for another to do so or if a judge lifts restrictions in response to a request to do so. The provisions commenced on 1 October 2012.

21. The legislation imposing restrictions makes clear that “publication” of material that may lead to the identification of the practitioner who is the subject of the allegation is prohibited. “Publication” includes “any speech, writing, relevant programme or other communication in whatever form, which is addressed to the public at large or any section of the public”. This means that a parent who, for example, published details of the allegation on a social networking site would be in breach of the reporting restrictions (if what was published could lead to the identification of the practitioner by members of the public).

22. In accordance with the Association of Chief Police Officers’ (ACPO) guidance the police will not normally provide any information to the press or media that might identify an individual who is under investigation, unless and until the person is charged with a criminal offence. (In exceptional cases where the police would like to depart from that rule, for example an appeal to trace a suspect, they must apply to a magistrates’ court to request that reporting restrictions be lifted).

23. The case manager should take advice from the LADO, police and children’s social care services to agree the following:

- i. Who needs to know and, importantly, exactly what information can be shared.

- ii. How to manage speculation, leaks and gossip.
- iii. What, if any information can be reasonably given to the wider community to reduce speculation; and
- iv. How to manage press interest if it should arise.

Managing the situation and exit arrangements

Resignations and 'settlement agreements'

24. If the accused person resigns, or ceases to provide their services, this should not prevent an allegation being followed up in accordance with this guidance. A referral to the DBS must be made, if the criteria are met. If the accused person resigns or their services cease to be used and the criteria are met it will not be appropriate to reach a settlement/compromise agreement. A settlement/compromise agreement which prevents the employer from making a DBS referral when the criteria are met would likely result in a criminal offence being committed as the employer would not be complying with their legal duty to make the referral.

25. It is important that every effort is made to reach a conclusion in all cases of allegations bearing on the safety or welfare of children, including any in which the person concerned refuses to cooperate with the process. Wherever possible the accused should be given a full opportunity to answer the allegation and make representations about it. But the process of recording the allegation and any supporting evidence and reaching a judgement about whether it can be substantiated on the basis of all the information available, should continue even if that cannot be done or the accused does not cooperate. It may be difficult to reach a conclusion in those circumstances, and it may not be possible to apply any disciplinary sanctions if a person's period of notice expires before the process is complete, but it is important to reach and record a conclusion wherever possible.

26. 'Settlement agreements' (sometimes referred to as compromise agreements), by which a person agrees to resign if the employer agrees not to pursue disciplinary action, and both parties agree a form of words to be used in any future reference, should not be used in cases of refusal to cooperate or resignation before the person's notice period expires. Such an agreement will not prevent a thorough police investigation where that is appropriate.

Record keeping

27. Details of allegations that are found to have been malicious should be removed from personnel records. However, for all other allegations, it is important that a clear and comprehensive summary of the allegation, details of how the allegation was followed up and resolved, and a note of any action taken, and decisions reached, is kept on the confidential personnel file of the accused, and a copy provided to the person concerned.

28. The purpose of the record is to enable accurate information to be given in response to any future request for a reference, where appropriate. It will provide clarification in cases where future DBS checks reveal information from the police about an allegation that did not result in a criminal conviction and it will help to prevent unnecessary reinvestigation if, as sometimes happens, an allegation re-surfaces after a period. The record should be retained at least until the accused has reached normal pension age or for a period of 10 years from the date of the allegation if that is longer.

29. The Information Commissioner has published guidance on employment records in its Employment Practices Code and supplementary guidance, which provides some practical advice on record retention.

References

30. Cases in which an allegation was proven to be false, unsubstantiated or malicious should not be included in employer references. A history of repeated concerns or allegations which have all been found to be false, unsubstantiated or malicious should also not be included in any reference.

Timescales

31. It is in everyone's interest to resolve cases as quickly as possible consistent with a fair and thorough investigation. All allegations should be investigated as a priority to avoid any delay. Target timescales are shown below: the time taken to investigate and resolve individual cases depends on a variety of factors including the nature, seriousness and complexity of the allegation, but these targets should be achieved in all but truly exceptional cases. It is expected that 80 per cent of cases should be resolved within one month, 90 per cent within three months, and all but the most exceptional cases should be completed within 12 months.

32. For those cases where it is clear immediately that the allegation is unsubstantiated or malicious, they should be resolved within one week. Where the initial consideration decides that the allegation does not involve a possible criminal offence it will be for the employer to deal with it, although if there are concerns about child protection, the employer should discuss them with the designated officer(s). In such cases, if the nature of the allegation does not require formal disciplinary action, the employer should institute appropriate action within three working days. If a disciplinary hearing is required and can be held without further investigation, the hearing should be held within 15 working days.

Oversight and monitoring

33. The LADO has overall responsibility for oversight of the procedures for dealing with allegations; for resolving any inter-agency issues; and for liaison with the Local Safeguarding Children Board (OSCB) on the subject. The LADO will provide advice and guidance to the

case manager, in addition to liaising with the police and other agencies and monitoring the progress of cases to ensure that they are dealt with as quickly as possible consistent with a thorough and fair process. Reviews should be conducted at fortnightly or monthly intervals, depending on the complexity of the case. Police forces should also identify officers who will be responsible for:

- a. Liaising with the designated officer(s).
- b. Taking part in the strategy discussion or initial evaluation.
- c. Subsequently reviewing the progress of those cases in which there is a police investigation; and
- d. Sharing information on completion of the investigation or any prosecution.

34. If the strategy discussion or initial assessment decides that a police investigation is required, the police should also set a target date for reviewing the progress of the investigation and consulting the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) about whether to: charge the individual; continue to investigate; or close the investigation. Wherever possible, that review should take place no later than four weeks after the initial evaluation. Dates for subsequent reviews, ideally at fortnightly intervals, should be set at the meeting if the investigation continues.

Suspension

35. The possible risk of harm to children posed by an accused person should be evaluated and managed in respect of the child(ren) involved in the allegations. In some rare cases that will require the case manager to consider suspending the accused until the case is resolved. Suspension should not be an automatic response when an allegation is reported; all options to avoid suspension should be considered prior to taking that step. If the case manager is concerned about the welfare of other children in the community of the employee's family, those concerns should be reported to the designated officer(s) or police. But suspension is highly unlikely to be justified on the basis of such concerns alone.

36. Suspension should be considered only in a case where there is cause to suspect a child or other children at the centre is/are at risk of harm or the case is so serious that it might be grounds for dismissal. However, a person should not be suspended automatically: the case manager must consider carefully whether the circumstances warrant suspension from contact with children at the employee's place of employment or until the allegation is resolved and must seek advice from the LADO and THE SUNSHINE CENTRE HR manager beforehand.

37. Where THE SUNSHINE CENTRE is made aware that the Secretary of State has made an interim prohibition order in respect of an individual at the school it will be necessary to immediately suspend that person from teaching pending the findings of the NCTL's investigation.

38. The case manager should also consider whether the result that would be achieved by immediate suspension could be obtained by alternative arrangements. In many cases an

investigation can be resolved quickly and without the need for suspension. If the LADO, police and children's social care services have no objections to the member of staff continuing to work during the investigation, the case manager should be as inventive as possible to avoid suspension. Based on assessment of risk, the following alternatives should be considered by the case manager before suspending a member of staff:

- a. Providing an assistant to be present when the individual has contact with children.
- b. Possibly moving the child or children to classes where they will not encounter the member of staff, making it clear that this is not a punishment and parents have been consulted; or
- c. Temporarily redeploying the member of staff to another role in a different location, for example to an alternative site.

39. These alternatives allow time for an informed decision regarding the suspension and possibly reduce the initial impact of the allegation. This will, however, depend upon the nature of the allegation. The case manager should consider the potential permanent professional reputational damage to employees that can result from suspension where an allegation is later found to be unsubstantiated or maliciously intended.

40. If immediate suspension is considered necessary, the rationale and justification for such a course of action should be agreed and recorded by both the case manager and the designated officer(s). This should also include what alternatives to suspension have been considered and why they were rejected.

41. Where it has been deemed appropriate to suspend the person, written confirmation should be dispatched within one working day, giving as much detail as appropriate for the reasons for the suspension. It is not acceptable for an employer to leave a person who has been suspended without any support. The person should be informed at the point of their suspension who their named contact is within the organisation and provided with their contact details.

42. Children's social care services or the police cannot require the case manager to suspend a member of staff or a volunteer, although they should give appropriate weight to their advice. The power to suspend is vested in THE SUNSHINE CENTRE as the employer body/ or Hub Manager who has delegated power to act on behalf of THE SUNSHINE CENTRE. However, where a strategy discussion or initial evaluation concludes that there should be enquiries by the children's social care services and/or an investigation by the police, the LADO should canvass police and children's social care services for views about whether the accused member of staff needs to be suspended from contact with children in order to inform the employer of consideration of suspension. Police involvement does not make it mandatory to suspend a member of staff; this decision should be taken on a case-by-case basis having undertaken a risk assessment.

Information sharing

43. In a strategy discussion or the initial evaluation of the case, the agencies involved should share all relevant information they have about the person who is the subject of the allegation, and about the alleged victim.
44. Where the police are involved, wherever possible THE SUNSHINE CENTRE should ask the police to obtain consent from the individuals involved to share their statements and evidence for use in the employer disciplinary process. This should be done as their investigation proceeds and will enable the police to share relevant information without delay at the conclusion of their investigation or any court case.
45. Children's social care services should adopt a similar procedure when making enquiries to determine whether the child or children named in the allegation are in need of protection or services, so that any information obtained in the course of those enquiries which is relevant to a disciplinary case can be passed to the employer without delay.

Specific actions

Following a criminal investigation or a prosecution

46. The police should inform THE SUNSHINE CENTRE and designated LADO immediately when a criminal investigation and any subsequent trial is complete, or if it is decided to close an investigation without charge, or not to continue to prosecute the case after person has been charged. In those circumstances the designated officer(s) should discuss with the case manager whether any further action, including disciplinary action, is appropriate and, if so, how to proceed. The information provided by the police and/or children's social care services should inform that decision. The options will depend on the circumstances of the case and the consideration will need to consider the result of the police investigation or the trial, as well as the different standard of proof required in disciplinary and criminal proceedings.

On conclusion of a case

47. If the allegation is substantiated and the person is dismissed or THE SUNSHINE CENTRE cease to use the person's services, or the person resigns or otherwise ceases to provide his or her services, the LADO should discuss with the case manager and THE SUNSHINE CENTRE HR Manager whether THE SUNSHINE CENTRE will make a referral to the DBS for consideration of inclusion on the barred lists is required.
48. There is a legal requirement for THE SUNSHINE CENTRE to make a referral to the DBS where they think that an individual has engaged in conduct that harmed (or is likely to harm) a child; or if a person otherwise poses a risk of harm to a child.
49. Where it is decided on the conclusion of a case that a person who has been suspended can return to work, the case manager should consider how best to facilitate that. Most people will benefit from some help and support to return to work after a

stressful experience. Depending on the individual's circumstances, a phased return and/or the provision of a mentor to aid and support in the short term may be appropriate. The case manager should also consider how the person's contact with those who made the allegation can best be managed if they are still in contact with the individual. Any such considerations should be made in liaison with THE SUNSHINE CENTRE HR Manager and THE SUNSHINE CENTRE Safeguarding Manager.

In respect of malicious or unsubstantiated allegations

50. If an allegation is determined to be unsubstantiated or malicious, the LADO should refer the matter to the children's social care services to determine whether the child concerned needs services or may have been abused by someone else. If an allegation is shown to be deliberately invented or malicious, the employer should consider whether any disciplinary action is appropriate against the child or person who made it; or whether the police should be asked to consider if action might be appropriate against the person responsible.

Learning lessons

51. At the conclusion of a case in which an allegation is substantiated, the designated officer(s) should review the circumstances of the case with the case manager to determine whether there are any improvements to be made to THE SUNSHINE CENTRE'S procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future. This should include issues arising from the decision to suspend the member of staff, the duration of the suspension and whether suspension was justified. Lessons should also be learnt from the use of suspension when the individual is subsequently reinstated. The LADO and case manager should consider how future investigations of a similar nature could be carried out without suspending the individual.

Further information

52. See the Crown Prosecution Service published guidance for the police under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997.

Ratified on:

Signed:

Review Date: June 2025