

ASHBOURNE & DISTRICT u3a

SAFEGUARDING POLICY

Introduction

This document sets out the policy of Ashbourne & District u3a ('our u3a') in relation to the safeguarding of its members.

It is important that our u3a's members are kept safe (i.e. 'safeguarded' in this context) and to have procedures in place for managing safeguarding concerns. In developing this safeguarding policy and related procedures, the Committee¹ of our u3a has carefully considered (i) the nature of our membership and activities and (ii) the safeguarding measures which are appropriate and practical for the organisation to undertake.

Our u3a's activities and membership

Although there are no formal age limitations, the u3a movement is directed towards 'older people and those who have retired from full-time work'². As part of this movement, our u3a provides learning and related recreational activities for this body of people in the Ashbourne district.

Our u3a does this by acting as an umbrella organisation for groups of its members who have common interests or wish to engage in recreational activities together - 'interest groups' - to meet socially in order to pursue those interests and activities, driven and led by the actions and inputs of its own members. At the date of this policy, our u3a has over fifty such interest groups³, ranging in size generally between ten and forty members (with the most popular groups attracting even higher numbers), and meeting weekly, fortnightly or monthly, usually for a few hours each time. The groups meet in hired locations (e.g. village halls or leisure centres) or, where group-numbers are small, in members' homes. In addition, our u3a holds monthly all-member meetings where larger numbers of members attend and some groups organise trips and visits to locations relevant to their interests. The meetings and events are 'public' in that attendance is open to all members⁴ (except where from time to time two or three members may get together to plan some event or activity).

In practice therefore, our u3a's membership comprises older people who meet in social contexts. Old age is often associated with vulnerability. However, although the potential vulnerability of members, whether to physical or mental abuse or harm, has to be considered⁵, our members are not - i.e. merely by virtue of being in their 'third age' - *vulnerable* or *at risk* in the sense of requiring present and on-going measures for their special care or protection and they would not consider themselves to be so.

Our u3a therefore tries to be caring but it is not a *care organisation*. In other words, although the welfare of its members is important, the purposes of our u3a do not include the provision of care or guardianship for its members and, if a member were in need of such care provision or assistance with personal affairs, our u3a does not have the facilities or expertise to provide it.

Children and young adults do not participate in our u3a's activities⁶.

¹ The Committee comprises the trustees of our u3a.

² This is the wording of our u3a's objects clause.

³ For more detail see our u3a's website at <https://ashbourne.u3asite.uk/groups>.

⁴ Subject to any venue-related constraints.

⁵ See below.

⁶ On very rare occasions, a child may be present at (but not take part in) a group's meeting but in such a case, the child's parent - or more likely grandparent - will also be there, responsible for the child.

Members who are or might become vulnerable or at risk

Notwithstanding the above general assessment of our u3a's members, consideration has to be given to safeguarding members who might be, or become, vulnerable or at risk in the sense described above. For example, a member's health may be, or may deteriorate, such that he or she is or becomes vulnerable (e.g. through developing dementia).

Also, our u3a aims to be an inclusive organisation and would not, for instance, refuse membership to a person with special needs or who might be considered vulnerable or at risk as referred to above, provided that person's needs could reasonably and practicably be accommodated within the scope of our u3a and its activities.

How might safeguarding concerns arise?

Against this background, safeguarding concerns might arise in the following ways:

- (1) interactions between members and the welfare of any vulnerable members in the context of our u3a's activities;
- (2) concerns for a member's welfare outside our u3a's activities; and
- (3) the health and safety of members through or during our u3a's activities.

Interactions between members in our u3a's activities

Our u3a has a Code of Conduct to which it expects its members to adhere. The essence of this Code is that members should treat fellow members with courtesy and respect at all times and not act or speak in any prejudicial way (e.g. in relation to race or religion), either within or outside the context of our u3a's activities. The Code also sets out how our u3a will deal with cases where it is not followed and a complaint is made. Our u3a's members however generally behave with good manners and in cooperative and comradely ways and breaches of this Code rarely occur.

If a breach of the Code of Conduct nonetheless does occur, it does not *in itself* give rise to a safeguarding concern and the Committee considers it important to make the distinction between a breach of the Code of Conduct giving rise to some affront, insult or upset (but with no ongoing risk or harm) and one where a safeguarding concern arises. A safeguarding concern would arise for example if such behaviour were persistently directed towards another member or group of members and/or gave rise to concerns for the *ongoing* welfare, safety or well-being of a member (even arising from an isolated occasion), whether raised by the member his or herself or by another person. Examples of such situations include where the behaviour in question:

- involves physical assault, or the threat or fear of physical assault, or inappropriate physical contact;
- involves harassment or intimidation of a member;
- is persistent or repeated (or, even if occurring on an isolated occasion, is sufficiently serious) so as to cause concern for continuing welfare or well-being of a member;
- involves persistent, unwelcome personal advances towards a member;
- seeks to control the activities or personal affairs of a member.

The welfare of vulnerable or at risk members during our u3a's activities

In relation to a member who is, or who becomes, vulnerable or at risk as referred to above, consideration will be given as to what appropriate and reasonably practicable measures might be taken in order to provide suitable safeguarding protection for him or her in the context of our u3a's activities. This is referred to in more detail in the procedures set out below.

Interpersonal relationships outside our u3a

The consideration of interpersonal relationships outside the context of our u3a's activities is especially difficult. Our u3a members are mature adults and it is not the role of our u3a to seek to prevent or discourage members from developing relationships between them outside the scope of its activities or police such relationships.

However, our u3a will consider whether a *u3a safeguarding concern* has arisen (i.e. one where it may be appropriate for our u3a to take or suggest some action or make recommendations) if a member raises with our u3a a safeguarding concern as referred to above arising from relationships between members outside the ambit of our u3a's activities themselves.

Welfare concerns outside our u3a

The potential vulnerability of older people to abuse or their need for care provision, either physical or mental (including in respect of their personal affairs), has been referred to above. Examples of how wider concerns for a member might arise in relation to his or her position outside our u3a's activities include the following:

- a member's unexplained and continuing absence from a group's meeting or activities;
- a significant deterioration in a member's appearance or apparent self-care (including medical care) or mental capacity which indicates there might be a cause for concern or indications of that a member might have been a victim of physical abuse;
- indications that another member or outsider is improperly controlling or manipulating the personal or financial affairs of a member.

If a member has concerns about the welfare of another member outside of our u3a's activities but wishes to raise it in order for our u3a to consider, he or she should raise and discuss it with the relevant group leader or the Committee's Group Co-ordinator in accordance with the procedure set out below. If the matter is raised by a member with a group leader in the first instance, the leader should in turn report the matter to the Group Co-ordinator in accordance with the procedure.

Procedure for raising safeguarding concerns

A member should raise with our u3a any situation or occurrence where the member feels that a safeguarding concern has arisen in respect of his/herself or a fellow member.

This should be done by informing our u3a's Group Co-ordinator (or, if the matter concerns the Group Co-ordinator, our Chair). As soon as practicable, the Group Co-ordinator⁷ (acting in conjunction with another member or members of the Committee) will then consider the matter and, if it is considered appropriate for our u3a to do so, initiate an investigation.

Investigating a safeguarding concern arising from our u3a's activities

Where a safeguarding concern arises from the activities of our u3a, the Group Co-ordinator⁷ (acting in conjunction with another member or members of the Committee) will seek to understand the concern; investigate the matter by discussion with the person concerned (i.e. the person at risk/harmed), the person(s) against whom the complaint is made and relevant witnesses; endeavour to decide whether in their opinion there has been a safeguarding incident or risk; and make recommendations to the Committee as to how to respond and/or whether or what further action should be taken. Such actions might include invoking a disciplinary procedure leading to the potential expulsion of a member from our u3a in accordance with our u3a's constitution and rules and/or reporting the concern to the relevant local authority.

⁷ Or the Chair as the case may be.

Safeguarding for vulnerable or at risk members

Where a member (or potential member) is or becomes vulnerable or at risk such that it is appropriate to consider whether any safeguarding steps can and should be taken in relation to his or her participation in our u3a's activities, this should be raised with our Group Coordinator. For example, a group leader might wish to raise this with the Group Coordinator if he or she has concerns arising out of his or her group's meetings, or a friend or relative (whether or not a member of our u3a) of the vulnerable or at risk person might do so. Also, the Group Coordinator may proceed in this way at his or her own initiative or indeed the vulnerable or at risk person may do so him or herself.

The Group Coordinator will then seek to discuss the matter with the person raising the concern (and where appropriate taking into account the views of the vulnerable or at risk member) with a view to determining what reasonably practicable steps might be taken to provide safeguarding measures for the vulnerable or at risk person while participating in our u3a's activities.

Dealing with a safeguarding concern outside the scope of our u3a's activities

Where a safeguarding concern arises outside the ambit of our u3a's activities, the Group Co-ordinator⁷ (acting in conjunction with another member or members of the Committee) will first discuss with the person raising the matter whether the concern is something which is appropriate for our u3a to consider or what role (if any) it might play in relation thereto and how that might be done.

Where, for instance, the concern arises out of a member's absence from meetings, or his or her appearance or behaviour at meetings, this may result initially in discrete enquiries directly with the member or friend or relative to ascertain whether there might be a safeguarding or general care concern.

However it should be noted that our u3a (through its Committee members) is not in a position and does not have the facility or skills to fully investigate, report on and judge wider concerns for a member's welfare (i.e. in relation to the personal health and private affairs of members) and it is not thought appropriate for it to seek to do so. If after discussion with the Group Co-ordinator⁷ therefore, there remains a concern about a member, the most appropriate action may be to report the concern to the relevant local authority as this is the recommended way for the public to report such concerns.

Both Derbyshire County Council and Staffordshire County Council provide guidance and contact numbers for reporting safeguarding concerns at any time. More information can be found on their respective websites.

The contact numbers for doing this are as follows:

Derbyshire CC	01629 533 190 (24/7)
Staffordshire CC	0345 604 2719 (office hours) or 0345 604 2882 (out of office hours)

N.B. Nothing in this policy prohibits or seeks to prevent or delay a member from reporting safeguarding concerns directly to the relevant authorities (including in cases of emergency to the police).

Health & Safety

Our u3a has adopted a health & safety policy aiming to avoid or reduce the risk of harm to its members through its activities. This includes the carrying out of regular risk assessments and the reporting of incidents or 'near miss' incidents. This policy and its procedures should be followed in relation to such matters.

Policy approved by our u3a Committee on 22nd April 2026	Chair S E Hall
--	----------------