

27 May 2021

Safeguarding Annual Report - 2020/21.

Executive Summary

This report covers Forestry England, Forest Services, Commissioners Office and Forest Research for the period 1st April 2020 to the end of March 2021.

A good deal of progress has been made in embedding safeguarding principles across the Forestry Commission over the last 12 months; although it is recognised there is more to do in embedding new policies, practices and heightening awareness of safeguarding reporting where appropriate. The introduction of the Airsweb system during 2020 has led to a singular organisational approach for reporting, monitoring and assurance on these issues.

We have launched various safeguarding training courses and educated managers', volunteers, and visitors on safeguarding requirements. We will continue to develop this over the coming year and will be enhancing our DBS checks and protocols in the next 12 months.

The numbers of incidents and the volumes of DBS checks will become key performance safeguarding measures in 2021 / 2022.

Introduction

The Safeguarding Policy sets out how safeguarding of children, young people and adults at risk of harm or abuse will be achieved across the Forestry Commission.

Safeguarding means protecting a person's right to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect. All staff within the Forestry Commission have a duty of care to safeguard people within their teams, volunteers, contractors, agency staff and visitors to the nation's

Safeguarding Annual Report 2020/21

forests, with extra care taken to protect those who are least able to protect themselves. Children, young people and vulnerable adults, can be at particular risk of abuse or neglect.

In order for the Forestry Commission to fulfil its legal and moral duties to protect vulnerable children and adults, the following items and policy will need to be rigorously applied in conjunction with legal requirements and associated guidance documents.

- The Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) is responsible for providing the overarching direction in safeguarding for the Forestry Commission;
- The Senior Responsible Owner for safeguarding is responsible for ensuring that the Forestry Commission complies with its statutory duties;
- The safeguarding SRO will have oversight across Forestry England, Forest Services, Forest Research and will produce an annual review of the system and whether we have met our statutory requirements;
- All employees must follow the processes identified in the escalation flow diagrams for reporting;
- Training at the appropriate level must be renewed every three years as a minimum;
- For staff, volunteers, contractors & agency workers, ensure that the appropriate pre-engagement DBS checks are completed for the role they are to undertake;
- Staff and volunteers to notify their supervisor of any convictions which they may receive which may impact on their role;
- All staff, agency staff, contractors and volunteers in roles must have an appropriate level DBS check for their role. All roles identified to need a standard or enhanced check must be renewed every three years as a minimum;
- Require that third party/permissions individuals and organisations have the appropriate safeguarding procedures in place to enable them to deliver a safe and effective programme;
- Forestry Commission supports ex-offenders to take up employment and volunteer roles across the Forestry Commission. Convictions will be reviewed against the specific role with the support of HR.
- Ensure personal details are held securely in line with GDPR.

Safeguarding Annual Report 2020/21

Taking forward the Safeguarding Policy during the year

Forestry England, Forest Services & Commissioners Office

- Safeguarding training has been developed and rolled out, via our Technical Training Team. This includes two courses, one which is an introductory online course available for all staff. The second is an accredited level 2 Safeguarding course, for all staff who are working in roles which engage with children, young people and or vulnerable adults. The online introductory training has now been confirmed as mandatory for all Forestry England, Forest Services and CO staff.
- Development of toolkits to support managers in implementing the Safeguarding PPG are in development. To date the following have been reviewed and implemented:
 - o DBS Guidance for new starters / change in roles has been developed covering employees, agency, contractors and volunteers.
 - o Review of volunteer processes and systems for young people and vulnerable adults.Further toolkits are in development for:
 - Under 18s within our workforce, such as apprenticeships, work experience and volunteers. This is scheduled to be released in Summer 2021.
 - Learning
 - Digital media
- Safeguarding reporting - The newly introduced health and safety system, Airsweb, has been updated to enable the reporting of safeguarding incidents and concerns consistently within the Forestry Commission.
- Engagement and delivery of activity with children, young people and or vulnerable adults across the nations forests has been considerably reduced over the past 12 months due to COVID-19. This means there has been less engagement in the following areas:
 - o Learning and schools liaison activities
 - o Work experience and placements
 - o Volunteering opportunities
 - o Vulnerable groups

Forest Research

There has been good progress made towards the priority areas identified in the Safeguarding policy at Forest Research (FR) despite Covid-19. Actions include communication to all staff and supporting general awareness around safeguarding. FR will deliver training on the policy at staff centre meetings on an annual basis.

Safeguarding Annual Report 2020/21

Safeguarding Data

Incident Monitoring

Forestry England, Forest Services and Commissioners Office

As Airsweb has just been introduced to record and monitor safeguarding incidents and concerns, we are not able to take data from the system for the past 12 months. The previous system was not geared for safeguarding reporting.

The National Safeguarding Leads have supported two cases over the past 12 months:

- One staff member - The colleague was dealing with a number of challenging situations within their personal life due to the actions of others. In terms of support, they refused to engage with any further assistance. Their line manager-maintained communications with the individual and we requested a welfare check by the local Police.
- One Forestry England directed volunteer - The volunteer was dealing with several challenging situations within their personal life due to the actions of others. Via the Volunteer supervisor we supported the individual and signposted them to the relevant services including the Police to gain the support they required.

Forest Research

FR have had no reported safeguarding incidents to report for this reporting period.

Training

Forestry England, Forest Services and Commissioners Office

8 people have completed the Safeguarding L2 Training (11th February 2021), another event is planned for 3rd June 2021 to be delivered virtually.

Disclosure Barring Service Checks / Completion

Data for DBS checks completed will be collected for 2021/22. New DBS check systems are currently being finalised for staff and volunteers, with procurement of the revised service ongoing at time of writing.

Forestry England, Forest Services & Commissioners Office

New processes have been put in place for the completion of the relevant DBS checks to be completed on recruitment, change of role and for renewal of checks based on the three-

Safeguarding Annual Report 2020/21

year renewal period where required. This has been put in place by HR and the National Volunteer Team for Forestry England directed volunteers. Both teams will collate the number of standard and enhanced, including barred list DBS checks processed for Forestry Commission staff and Forestry England Directed volunteers for the financial year 2021 / 2022 and metrics will be included in the next safeguarding report in May 2022.

Forest Research

DBS (England) All our vacancies are done via CS recruitment (VX System) England based candidates - all checks processed automatically via the VX system.

In Scotland we conduct Disclosure Scotland checks, which not currently done by the VX system. Candidates apply for check themselves and send us the certificates before employment commences. This process applies to Wales staff.

We do not renew the DBS or Disclosure Scotland check automatically every three years as we do not recruit roles that need an enhanced check, all new recruits are checked at “basic” level. For any roles in the future that will require the post holder to work with vulnerable groups we will as per policy renew their DBS checks every three years.

Priorities for the year ahead

Forestry England, Forest Services & Commissioners Office

- Development and initial roll-out of Senior Managers Safeguarding training
- Development of additional manager toolkits as outlined above.
- Rollout of safeguarding training accessible to volunteers (introductory training).
- Conclude and initiate DBS processing changes.

Forest Research

FR will continue to communicate the safeguarding policy via newsletters on our Internet and at staff centre meetings. We will monitor the Airsweb reporting system for any safeguarding incidences and ensure all safeguarding incidences are investigated as per policy. The delivery of safeguarding awareness remains a key priority at FR, with the requirement that all staff are provided with the appropriate level of awareness, according to their role and responsibilities. The delivery of Safeguarding awareness will ensure that every member of staff is aware of their safeguarding responsibilities, recognises abuse and knows what to do about it, as the minimum requirement.

Mike Seddon

Safeguarding Annual Report 2020/21

Chief Executive, Forestry England & FC SRO Safeguarding