

**23 September 2025**

# Safeguarding Annual Report 2024 - 2025

## Executive Summary

This report covers Forestry England, Forest Services, Commissioners Office and Forest Research for the period 1st July 2024 to 30th June 2025.

The Technical Safeguarding Advisor continues to work on raising the profile and understanding of safeguarding across the organisation. Together with the National Safeguarding Working Group and National Safeguarding Network there have been several successes.

The Government Internal Audit Agency (GIAA) completed an audit of safeguarding for the Forestry Commission with the final report being made available March 2024 (moderate assurance). The six Audit actions have now been completed and signed off. This is an excellent position in which to move forward in the coming year as we strive for excellence in our safeguarding practices.

There have been 30 safeguarding incidents logged and identified within this reporting period. This has increased from the previous report of 17, which also reflected an 18-month rather than 12-month reporting period. This increase in reporting is positive as safeguarding concerns have not always been identified and reported so, it is not necessarily that more incidents are occurring but our strategy to train and support staff and volunteers within the organisation is encouraging positive safeguarding behaviours. None of the incidents were highly significant or revealing fundamental failings within the Forestry Commission and any learning actions are complete / in-train. Building on reports and other learning, we have further strengthened procedures with specific teams to ensure we can meet our moral and statutory duties and better support colleagues dealing with challenging situations. As part of this the PPG 16, along with supporting guidance, is undergoing a full review and will be updated this year to fully reflect learning and feedback that has been received.

The mandatory e-learning and level 2 child and adult safeguarding training courses have had a good uptake across the organisation, by both staff and volunteers. Regular reports are now sent to safeguarding technical advisor so that completion rates of the e-learning are now available, providing an ability to monitor compliance rates more effectively for the mandatory course.

Although it was challenging identifying a provider who can offer suitable senior manager training to cover the subject of both children and adults, one was procured. A pilot session was run with members from across the Forestry Commission including members of the executive boards and senior leadership teams. Further sessions were held on 11th and 19th March 2025, and a phase 2 programme will be delivered in late 2025 / early 2026. The provision of existing training continues to be reviewed to maintain its relevance and effectiveness to a variety of staff groups, such as volunteers and teams outreaching with community groups.

## Safeguarding improvements through the year

The Forestry Commission's safeguarding journey has taken significant and successful steps in the last year. Ultimately it is our goal for all staff and volunteers to feel confident in acting on any safeguarding worries or concerns they may have.

The main priority during this reporting period has been working towards the completion of the GIAA actions. These have now been completed and signed off.

The Forestry Commission Safeguarding Working group, with representation from FC/FR/Forestry England, is now well established and has met 4 times. This coupled with the Safeguarding Network, attended by Safeguarding Leads and Champions from each business area, means that we have a way to plan the strategic direction, and bring safeguarding to the forefront of people's minds, disseminate important and relevant information, and enhance understanding. Additionally, we have been able to run three sessions of safeguarding training for senior leaders. We want our managers and leaders to be a positive driving force behind safeguarding, and these platforms are allowing us to do this. We are also gaining valuable feedback in how to integrate safeguarding in our daily work practices so that our staff, volunteers and collaborators feel empowered and confident to act when worried. Going forward we will ensure all senior leaders attend the training and that there is a rolling programme to include new and promoted leaders alongside refresher training.

A communications plan has supported awareness raising. With increased reports of safeguarding concerns, people are seemingly more readily recognising and logging incidents. There are also reports and enquiries from Forest Services, whereas previously, there has been a misconception that safeguarding is a Forestry England issue. We do believe, however, that it continues to be under reported across the Forestry Commission so continued comms are planned. Safeguarding Technical Advisor also regularly attends meetings for other groups, such as, The Women's Network, Feel Good in the Forest and Mental Health First Aiders alongside team and health and safety meetings. A visit to the Forest Research site at Alice Holt is also planned for September with the aim of enhancing the understanding of its relevance across all departments and importantly increasing uptake of senior manager training.

An analysis of job roles for Forestry England, Forest Services and Commissioners Office has been completed, identifying those requiring Enhanced DBS checks. HR Services Officer has been able to utilise this in creating a programme to ensure compliance with the DBS checks. This is a significant piece of work, requires engagement of managers across the business, with target completion by end of December 2025. Completion will allow us to have a list of all those holding with enhanced DBS and when their renewal is required or freshly required if a subject role becomes vacant.

An analysis of job roles has allowed us to consider what training is most appropriate for each role. It remains that anyone with an Enhanced DBS check should complete the Level 2 training. We will evolve the training offer to create a tiered approach to training. The basic awareness training, often referred to as mandatory training, will be updated so that it reflects The Forestry Commission, its policies and procedures and feels more relevant to our staff and volunteers. A level one training programme will also be created for those who need enhanced understanding and knowledge. A renewal for the level two to elevate resources is also planned. This alongside the senior leaders training will offer a robust approach.

## Safeguarding Incidents - Incident's, concerns or near misses.

### **Forestry England, Forest Services, Forest Research and Commissioners Office**

The monitoring of Safeguarding incidents, concerns or near misses continues to be completed via EcoOnline (Airsweb). Comms have been released to encourage correct reporting of safeguarding incidents and while this appears to be improving there is a continued need to raise awareness and support staff around this.

### **Forestry England**

Over this reporting period there have been 30 safeguarding concerns or near misses reported. Each case has been supported by the national safeguarding leads and/or the Safeguarding Technical Advisor, to review and where appropriate report to the relevant authorities and/or record and cascade lessons learned.

### **Forest Research, Forest Services and Commissioners Office**

During this reporting period there have been no safeguarding concerns logged, however, Forest Services have made several enquiries and have retrospectively logged an incident from January 2024. [information redacted]

A review of personal safety and security logs shows that there are continued overlaps between the two categories. While not necessarily logged incorrectly some clarification may be needed to ensure that records are as accurate as possible, for example, incidents involving harassment, lost or missing children and adults, suicide or self-harm, mental illness or emotional distress, rough sleeping, discrimination and physical harm.

The information highlights a need for all areas of the business to recognise, understand and be empowered to act on safeguarding. The rise in reports reflects a positive impact from comms and training input, however, we still know this is an area where things are under reported. Collaborative working between HR and the National Safeguarding Team will also look at ways to support and record safeguarding concerns relating to our workforce, as many of these reports are not captured in a way they can be reported on. Added to this is a common misconception that safeguarding relates to children and/or a certain subsection of society. This is the reason why the tag line for the safeguarding campaign has been "what is it and why is it for everyone".

## Performance Measures

### Training

The following section outlines the number of employees of the Forestry Commission and volunteers within Forestry England who have completed training in Safeguarding.

#### Safeguarding Training Completions\*

Department	Completed	Not Completed	Compliance %
Forestry England	1182	118	91%
Forest Services	575	17	97%
Commissioners Office	24	5	82%
Forest Research	35	316	Not mandatory for all - role related.
Volunteers	183	300	Not mandatory for all - role related.

\*Those who have completed level two training are marked as having completed Basic/Mandatory Safeguarding Training

#### Level 2 Safeguarding Training Completions Only

Department	Completed	Number of Enhanced Checks	Compliance
Staff	246	258	95%*
Volunteers	77	186	41%**

\*These numbers are based on the current estimate of checks required based on the analysis completed. There is a possibility the number could fluctuate. Once the full list of those with enhanced DBS checks is available, (currently predicated September/October), this will be compared against those with the level 2 training to identify anyone yet to undertake the training. Further to this the analysis undertaken of appropriate training levels has identified some individuals who may require higher levels of training but not an enhanced DBS, for example, HR colleagues. This has yet to be enacted, with plans to have the tiered approach to training in place early 2026.

\*\*Volunteers' job roles are individually assessed to determine the appropriate level of DBS check.

#### Senior Managers Training

Completed	Not Completed	Compliance
39*	35**	53%

\*2 attendees from Forest Research deducted as not included in training analysis. The total number of attendees was 41.

\*\*Total number of senior leaders identified from training analysis conducted.

## Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) Training

To support the apprenticeship programme, and as recommended by Ofsted, DSL training was sourced and completed in November 2024. This was attended by safeguarding technical advisor and head of health and safety and technical training. Volunteer manager is in the process of sourcing training to complete.

## Enhanced DBS Disclosures completed

As part of the GIAA safeguarding audit, it was identified that the Forestry Commission needed to ensure compliance of its enhanced disclosures; this piece of work required collaboration with HR. Safeguarding technical advisor and Volunteer Manager were provided with a list of all job roles and employees for Forestry England, Forest Services and Commissioners Office. An analysis was conducted of these job roles identifying where an enhanced disclosure is or could be needed depending on a risk assessment. HR took this information and contacted the relevant districts and departments working with them to ensure they have the right DBS check for staff. They provided the following update:

Completed	Not Completed	Compliance
176	82	68%

*All points of contact have been added and there has been positive employee feedback and prompt action on checks. Some challenges which have caused delays and cancellations have included the summer holiday and Forest Live. There are ongoing checks in Central and West regions, which are the densest districts, therefore aiming to finish by the end of September/October, depending on employees' responsiveness and capacity.*

## Taking forward the Safeguarding Policy during the year ahead

National Safeguarding Leads working with the National Working Group maintain a rolling view of actions to continue improvement of organisational safeguarding effectiveness including legal compliance.

Some of the key themes for work in the year ahead include:

- Development of tiered training, and expansion of training offer to all teams and individual requirements, through further communication and awareness raising.
- Ongoing monitoring of KPIs, such as the enhanced DBS and training engagement.
- To develop work around safer recruitment, as recommended by statutory guidance, considering our programmes with children, young people and adults.

- Enhanced and continued communication that reflects all areas of the business, engaging all teams and departments.
- Developing consistent approaches across overlapping teams, that is, Human Resources, Wellbeing and Safeguarding working together to ensure we are caring for and meeting the needs of our workforce and volunteers.

## Conclusion

Good progress continues to be made to strengthen and embed safeguarding policy and practice in Forestry Commission. Growing awareness of safeguarding across staff and volunteers is leading to increased reporting, with further communications required to ensure everyone is aware of how safeguarding is relevant to their role. Now we have a suitable provider for senior manager safeguarding training, increasing the percentage of senior managers completing this training is a key focus to help drive safeguarding outcomes overall.

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