



## ADVICE ON SAFEGUARDING FOR RING MEMBER SIDES.

### INTRODUCTION

#### What is safeguarding?

Ensuring that children and older but vulnerable people (collectively VPs in what follows) are 'safe'. 'Safe' has a number of dimensions, primarily protection against physical and emotional harm but it can extend to promoting happiness, positive development and all the best things one might wish for.

#### Who has a safeguarding 'duty of care'?

In general, everybody has a duty of care towards VPs. It's part of common 'decent' behaviour to pay specific attention to the welfare of children and vulnerable adults. How this translates into legal obligations, when 'ought' becomes 'must', is less straightforward. The law is detailed and specific when it comes to organisations which focus on looking after VPs: schools, care homes etc, but requirements shade into uncertainties when it comes to organisations which just happen to include VPs, as is the case with some morris clubs.

#### Do morris clubs need to consider safeguarding?

The short answer is 'yes'. There are good reasons why a morris club should consider and write down how it approaches any safeguarding issues it may encounter:

- if a safeguarding problem arises, individuals suffer harm which might have been avoided if the club had had reasonable safeguarding measures in place;
- safeguarding issues, whether proven or just alleged, are likely to attract media interest which is bad for the club concerned and bad for morris as a whole;
- individuals in the club may be held liable for a safeguarding problem, especially if they knew about it and did nothing.

While one might argue that morris people are decent folk and would never harm VPs, safeguarding risks include inaction and false allegation as well as purposeful abuse.

#### Issues of vocabulary

Safeguarding professionals, which tends to include people who draw up guidelines and rules, use terminology which may clash with how the 'person in the street' interprets it. It can be unclear which of several meanings is intended or how the listener understands a term. For example:

- **Abuse** is often used as a shorthand for anything which is not 'safe', rather than solely sexual abuse, swearing or major mal-usage.
- **Harassment** does not have to be a deliberate act, but nor is it as wide as 'anything I don't like'. There's a criterion of 'is my feeling reasonable?' as well
- **Duty of care** is a term which can be used rather generally, in that we all have a duty of care towards others, or very specifically and with more stringent requirements, in the context of education, social services etc, where individuals (teachers for example) are deemed to be 'in a position of trust'. While belonging to, or being an officer of a morris club is hardly a formal 'position of trust', the general duty of care remains.
- **Vulnerable** the Department of Health defines a vulnerable adult as a person aged 18 or over who may need community care services because of a disability (mental or other), age, or illness. A person is also considered vulnerable if they are unable to look after themselves, protect themselves from harm or exploitation or are unable to report abuse.



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- **Child** children are defined in law as people under the age of 18. Someone aged 18, ‘the age of majority’, or older, is deemed to be an adult. 16 and 17 year olds, though they can ‘consent’ to many things, are legally still defined as children and have some specific legal protections. Just to add to the mix, the term ‘young people’ is often used to refer to older or more experienced children who are more likely to be able to make these decisions for themselves.
- **Victim** nowadays is often used to mean someone who says they have suffered harm rather than a person proved to have been harmed. The term is also bound up with the complexities of ensuring that a ‘victim’ is taken seriously which can sometimes shade into unconditional belief.

### How to go about drawing up a safeguarding policy?

First it will be necessary to decide what level of ‘safe’ the club wants to ensure. Is it mainly concerned with protection from harm or does it also want to take specific steps along the happiness / positive development route? For most clubs the primary focus is likely to protection from harm, though a club ‘specialising’ in VPs may well have a more ambitious agenda.

If avoiding harm is the priority, then approach it as you would a risk assessment: what might go wrong, what would prevent the ‘damage’ occurring, or reduce the risk of it to an acceptable level, balancing the ‘costs’ of mitigation against harm avoided.

### Can’t we just adopt the Ring’s safeguarding policy?

The Morris Ring’s safeguarding policy is a good place to start, not least because it includes helpful background information on, for example, what can constitute abuse. However, we would caution that the provisions which are appropriate for the Ring itself may not be right for individual sides, which vary considerably in their own make-up and activities. By all means adopt Ring policies, but only after you are satisfied that they are appropriate and that you can implement them. This document was written to help you decide what your club needs.

## A RISK-BASED APPROACH TO SAFEGUARDING

Most sides already have a risk-assessment in place, which deals on reducing potential harm to members, audiences, by-standers etc. If you take a similar approach to safeguarding you won’t go far wrong – indeed, you’ve already done some of the work by dealing with physical harms.

Focus on what your club actually does, who belongs to your club and who your club interacts with, and concentrate on things which might possibly happen rather than trying to cover vanishingly improbable ‘earthquake hits high street’ events.

Similarly, when considering what to do about identified risks, focus on practical things which can be implemented. Common-sense and a good feeling for what decent behaviour consists of are your best yard-stick, and of course highly consistent with how we morris people like to seen.

The potential harms you consider do not need to be special to VPs, indeed they may well apply to others. They include things which might come under other ‘headings’ too, such as Equality legislation, which has things to say about issues such as harassment.



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### AREAS TO CONSIDER IN RELATION TO YOUR CLUB

There are six main dimensions to think about. The first two may well overlap considerably.

1. Harm that might come to someone as a result of actions by the club or the actions of individual club members.
2. Harm arising from misunderstanding, or from false accusation.
3. Reasonable steps to minimise risk of harm.
4. Who in the club has responsibility for safeguarding matters?
5. What to do if a safeguarding problem arises?
6. What to do if somebody confides in you.

#### 1. Harm from actions

Although VPs may be particularly susceptible to harm from inappropriate things that may happen to them associated with morris activity, many of those same things can cause distress to anyone, and by thinking about them a club is more likely to make membership a happy experience for everyone.

For example:

- Teasing / banter easily spills over from harmless fun between equals, to upset and exclusion or even bullying;
- Helping someone learn to dance necessarily involves correcting faults as well as praising progress, but harsh comments can be hurtful, especially if they move from correcting mistakes into comments about the learner's personality: 'try getting your knee higher' is fine, 'you need to try harder' may well cause upset or resentment (even if it's true);
- Physical contact can upset people, or be misinterpreted, and is best avoided unless you are sure it is necessary and will not be misunderstood. This is doubly so if you are alone with a person. It's generally considered to be risky to be alone with a VP unless that is unavoidable.
- Pubs and morris are very inter-twined but people who don't drink alcohol can feel left out, and of course there are legal aspects to consider with under 18s. People seeking approval may find it easy to drink too much or to end up paying for others' drinks too often.
- VPs may easily slip into inappropriate attachment to people who are friendly towards them.

#### 2. Harm from misunderstandings and accusations

Accusations arising out of misunderstanding or malice can create as much stress and reputational damage to an individual or club as proven 'abuse'. Adopting suitable strategies to deal with 'harm from actions' will generally help avoid mistaken accusations too.

#### 3. Reasonable safeguarding steps to take

The keyword here is 'reasonable'. Having thought about the points above, a club should take steps it to reduce the risks it has identified, but it is not expected to do things which clearly are not practicable.

If the necessary steps are not practicable, yet the risk is significant, the club should consider whether to admit VPs at all. **However**, that is a last resort. Unless you can show that you have thought through the reasons for such exclusion you could be deemed discriminatory if you simply use exclusion to avoid a little inconvenience.

If you do feel you should exclude someone because you feel you can't provide an experience which is safe for them within the resources you have available, you should explore the matter with them. To simply say 'no' is contrary to the ethos of inclusion which the Morris Ring fosters, and may leave you open to legal challenge.



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On the other hand, it would be foolish for a club to take on any VP without considering how it can safeguard them.

In coming up with suitable measures, the key starting point is to work with the parents / carers (P/C in what follows) of the VP, so that they understand what the club can and cannot do, and so that the club knows what the P/Cs hope for and expect. P/Cs should be aware that clubs cannot take on the same 'in loco parentis' responsibility that, for instance, a school takes on. Morris club members are not required to undergo DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks.

Many clubs expect the P/C of a VP member to be present during club activities. Not only is this justifiable via the reduction of risk but it may add a second useful person to the club.

If a P/C cannot be there, the club should think through how it will deal with situations such as 'P/C doesn't turn up to provide a lift home', 'VP becomes distressed', 'VP needs medical help' etc. You may want to consider getting the P/C to sign a written statement accepting what the club will and will not do. This is vital if the VP is going away with the club, or spending overnight without their P/C.

In any case, leaving a VP alone with someone else is to be avoided unless it is to prevent a greater risk (eg it's better to give someone a lift home than it is to abandon them outside the practice hall when the P/C doesn't turn up).

Although it is common practice in some sides to buy beer for younger members on occasion, it is best avoided, even if you think the P/C won't mind. However, if the P/C decides to buy beer for the VP that is surely their look out. Beer at a private event such as an ale is a moot point...

What about written policies? It is prudent for a club to record its thinking when dealing with VP members or applicants, but the amount of detail is hard to specify. Demonstrating that the thinking has taken place is the key thing.

Should a club provide training for its members? It is important that members understand the club's approach to any VP members, and that they are expected to 'buy into' that approach, but how this is achieved is up to the club: discussion during 'bagging' is the traditional way.

### 4. Responsibility for safeguarding within the club

As mentioned above, all members need to know the club's policy. Unless that happens, members may not know what to do (or what not to do) – the policy on buying beer for instance. Morris sides tend to be very democratic organisations, and the best 'policing' is provided by the general 'buy in' of all its members. However there also needs to be leadership and someone to go to with concerns – but don't appoint a 'safeguarding officer': that's a defined role with substantial responsibilities within schools etc.

The natural person to do this is the side's leader, the Squire, who has top authority within the club. The Squire should be willing to 'have a word' as necessary if it seems that anyone (VP or not) is being upset by, for example, banter, or criticism, or that risky behaviour is taking place. That's consistent with the generally understood role of a club's Squire. It is also the Squire (possibly Bagman - depends on the club) who should be tasked with dealing with serious safeguarding concerns – ones where a breach of the law may be involved, harm suffered, reputational damage likely etc, and which are 'Reportable'. Point 5 deals with this.

### 5. What to do if a safeguarding problem arises?

Within a club, anyone with a safeguarding concern should first discuss the matter with the Squire, who then takes on responsibility for deciding what to do. If it's not possible (urgency, or because the Squire is involved) contact the Ring Bagman for advice.



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The action to take depends on what the problem is, and whether it seems serious enough to cross the line from inappropriate behaviour into 'Abuse' (with a capital A), which needs to be Reported. The Morris Ring policy contains a helpful section exploring the forms Abuse may take, and may help in cases where a club (in the person of its Squire) is not sure where that borderline lies. Reportable Abuse generally has dimensions of severity and persistence. Reportable Abuse does not have to be related to the club: if the club discovers that a member is suffering Abuse at home for instance, the duty to report remains.

Most of the points described under 'Harm from Actions' are unlikely to cross the threshold so the club is free to take whatever action it feels is appropriate: a quiet word from the Squire to an individual, a group discussion during bagging etc.

If the threshold has been crossed or may have been crossed, then the Squire has a duty to involve the authorities and the Morris Ring and to work with them on whatever happens thereafter.

Whether the incident gets reported or not, it is prudent for the Squire to write an account of the matter as soon as practical. The Morris Ring policy on safeguarding gives further guidance, and Appendix 1 gives more information on Reporting Abuse.

### **6. What to do if somebody confides in you?**

In general, to be a good listener involves a calm, reassuring manner, and avoiding too many leading questions or giving too many opinions.

Dealing with confidences is rarely easy, especially if there's an expectation that you will sort something out without revealing who told you about it.

If it turns out that the confidence may involve a safeguarding issue, those same good listening qualities become even more important, and you must, as soon as it becomes apparent, warn that you may not be able to respect all confidences – your duty to pass on 'Reportable Abuse' over-rides everything else. Otherwise, you should not reveal a confidence unless you have permission to do so.

If the concern clearly does not reach the Reportable Abuse threshold, ask what, if anything, the complainant wants you to do, and discuss with them what you think is the right way to resolve the matter.

As soon as possible write down what you have been told and take whatever action is necessary.



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### **APPENDIX 1 REPORTING ABUSE**

**Safeguarding concerns which may constitute Reportable Abuse must be reported to the authorities and to the Morris Ring. If in doubt ring the NSPCC helpline for advice – 0800 800 500. If still in doubt, report it: the incident concerned may be just one of a series of other incidents which together move into Reportable Abuse territory.**

#### **Reporting to the authorities**

Notify either Social Services or the Police (they work together on safeguarding issues). Once allegations of Abuse have been notified the authorities will decide what needs to be done in the short term to protect the VP from possible further harm, notify his or her P/C, and will take matters on from there, involving appropriate agencies and professionals.

#### **Reporting to the Morris Ring**

While the officers of the Morris Ring are not safeguarding experts and it is not their responsibility to determine whether or not Reportable Abuse has taken place, they need to know what is happening.

1. The club Squire may need support and advice in dealing with repercussions, including media enquiries,
2. Media may contact the Morris Ring officers, who need forewarning.
3. Club and Ring may need to make quick decisions about whether to suspend from the club the person subject to allegations, institute disciplinary proceedings if the club is at fault etc.

#### **Protecting privacy**

While you may have told the authorities and the Ring about your concern, it is really important that you do not tell others. The VP and others involved in the complaint are likely to be in the midst of enough upsetting events and enquiries as it is without the extra stress of losing their privacy.

#### **And finally...**

Allegations of Abuse are sometimes made sometime after the event. Where such allegations are made, the same procedures should be followed and the matter reported. This is because other VPs may be at risk from the alleged abuser. Anyone who has a previous conviction for offences related to abuse against VPs is automatically excluded from working with VPs.

Paul Redhead  
Devil's Dyke MM

Our representative on the JMO's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion sub-committee.