

Supporting Vulnerable Clients Policy

Introduction

This policy sets out how Bexhill Foodbank Advice Service supports our vulnerable clients, and the principles of how our staff and volunteers should deal with situations relating to vulnerable clients.

The aim of this policy is to improve the experience and the outcome for vulnerable clients regardless of the route they use to access our service.

What is vulnerability?

Vulnerability is a term that is difficult to describe as there is not a one-size fits all statement. What makes one client vulnerable will not necessarily be the same for another. It will not always be clear at the outset if a client is vulnerable. It is important as an organisation that we remain aware that the majority of our clients could be classed as vulnerable. Considerations for vulnerability can include -

- Individual circumstances (for instance health, age, being in receipt of benefits, being socially isolated, relying on others for care).
- The wider circumstances (for instance their housing situation).
- Creditor or adviser actions or inaction in the way we interact with the person.

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) define a vulnerable person as “someone who due to their personal circumstances, is especially susceptible to detriment, particularly when a firm is not acting with appropriate levels of care.”

Our approach to identifying and supporting vulnerable clients

As an organisation we will:

- Ensure that we remain aware of the potential for our clients to be vulnerable.
- Encourage clients to feel comfortable disclosing any vulnerabilities to us.
- Understanding we may need to make adjustments to our standard processes to allow vulnerable clients to access our service.
- Take vulnerability factors into consideration in how we plan and provide our services to vulnerable clients.

Main areas of Concern

1. Mental capacity

Mental capacity is defined as “the ability to understand information and make decisions about your life.” According to the Mental Capacity Act 2005.

Mental capacity is not the same as mental health. Some people with mental health difficulties may have mental capacity limitations and others may not. It is important not to presume that clients that have mental health issues also have mental capacity limitations.

In supporting our clients with mental capacity limitations, we will:

- Encourage our clients to feel confident and comfortable enough with us in order to be able to disclose these mental capacity limitations.
- Look for indicators that a client may lack mental capacity and not just rely on being informed of this by the client.
- Record the mental capacity limitations where identified, and help our clients to make an informed decision.

Clients in vulnerable situations will often disclose sensitive personal data. We work in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). We will ensure that all staff and volunteers are aware of the importance of following our GDPR data protection policy.

2. Suicidal clients

There may be occasions where staff or volunteers suspect or have been informed by a vulnerable client that they are having thoughts about taking their own life. Although these situations may be rare, it is vital that staff and volunteers are aware of what to do in these situations.

We will ensure that staff and volunteers are aware of the importance of the following:

- Listening to the client, acknowledging they are aware of the client's thoughts and feelings, and taking the matter seriously.
- Understand our safeguarding and confidentiality policies and seek help from a line manager as necessary.
- Where there is no apparent and immediate risk to life, we will encourage the client to speak with an organisation like the Samaritans (we can help the client make that call if necessary).
- If we believe there to be an immediate danger to life we will breach client confidentiality by calling 999.

We will ensure that staff and volunteers are able to seek pastoral support following these challenging situations.

Confidentiality

In some situations we may receive information from a carer or family member about a vulnerable client. Our staff and volunteers are aware they should not discuss a client's case with anyone who does not hold the appropriate authority. However, this doesn't mean we will not listen to the information being provided by a third party, as we recognise that disclosures from carers can be valuable. We are committed to engaging with carers and taking appropriate actions, whilst ensuring that we maintain client confidentiality.

Our confidentiality policy should be read in conjunction with this policy. We will ensure that staff and volunteers are aware of the policy.

Supporting and Training Staff and Volunteers

We ensure that all staff and volunteers receive appropriate training, to support them in effectively identifying and supporting vulnerable clients. We recognise that staff and volunteers may require extra advice, support and guidance when working with vulnerable clients. This support is available from their line manager in the first instance.

Review of policy

This policy will be reviewed every year. If the law changes before the policy is due for review, we will update the policy as necessary.

Policy Action	Date
Policy Introduced	April 2024
Policy Agreed by CTiB Trustees	June 2024
Reviews	June 2025, April 2026
Next Review	April 2027



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