

Safeguarding: From Small to Senior.

This report is based on the workshop at the FMES AGM held on 14 March 2026. The workshop comprised powerpoint slides with comments from the audience: the following is a readable summary of the workshop capturing all of the comments made, for attendees and those interested but unable to attend.

Note that this does not replace the full articles presented in late 2025 (these can be found at <https://fmes.org.uk/safeguarding>) and is intended to complement them with some real-life scenarios for consideration. The slides, scenarios and discussion were authored by Peter Kenington and presented by Paul Naylor and him via online links.



1. Introduction

The title of the report and presentation conveys the inclusive nature of safeguarding, it is not 'just' about children, as will be discussed.

The report is in four parts (sections 2 to 5):

- What is Safeguarding?
- Real life scenarios and discussion points.
- Comments noted from discussion.
- Next steps for FMES Safeguarding support.
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2. What is Safeguarding?



What is Safeguarding?

- **Definition:** Safeguarding is the proactive process of protecting an individual's health, wellbeing, and human rights, enabling them to live free from harm, abuse, and neglect.
- **Responsibility:** "Safeguarding is everybody's business," meaning organizations, staff, and volunteers have a duty to recognize risks and report concerns.
- **Be Proactive:** This includes creating safe environments, conducting staff checks where needed, providing training, and having clear reporting procedures.



People will only go to places where they feel 'safe'

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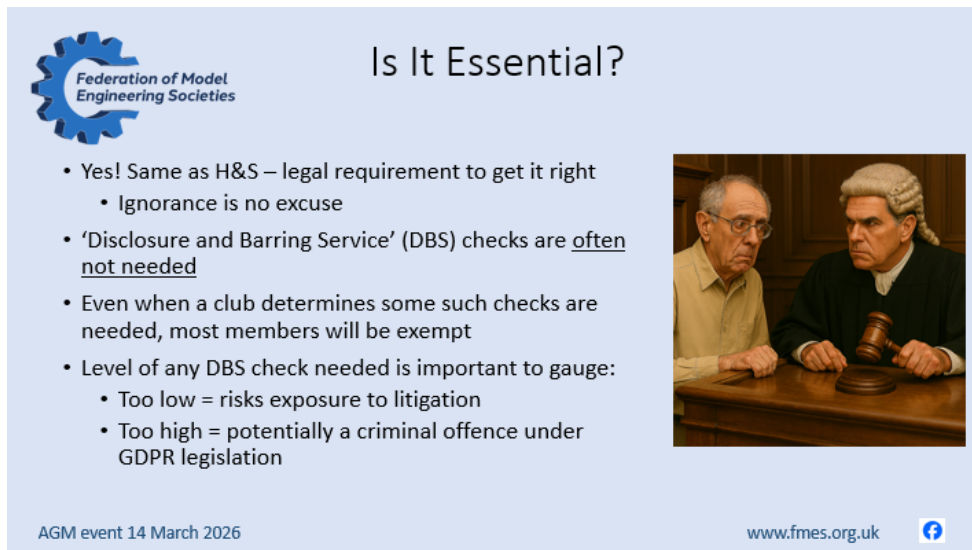
Safeguarding requires a forward looking, 'pro-active' approach by organisations and individuals and is about protecting *an individual's* health and well-being.... not 'child', since it includes ALL vulnerable people including many adults.

The law will assume that anyone under the age of 18 is vulnerable in this context. It is *likely* that the law will also assume older people over 65 or 70 *may* be vulnerable: such individuals may not think of themselves as vulnerable (except say in a physical confrontation), but statistically c18% of the population are over 65, yet they account for c35% of fraud referrals (such as phone scams to 'fix your roof' door knockers). Older adults over 55 years of age lose on average £4,000 per scam, significantly higher than younger age groups.

Everyone is responsible for safeguarding, not just the chair/committee of the club.

There are a lot of parallels with Health and Safety legislation (HASAW Act 1974) in terms of the need for policy, process, 'paperwork' and communication.

Is It Essential?




Federation of Model Engineering Societies

Is It Essential?

- Yes! Same as H&S – legal requirement to get it right
 - Ignorance is no excuse
- 'Disclosure and Barring Service' (DBS) checks are often not needed
- Even when a club determines some such checks are needed, most members will be exempt
- Level of any DBS check needed is important to gauge:
 - Too low = risks exposure to litigation
 - Too high = potentially a criminal offence under GDPR legislation

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Whilst it is tempting to focus on DBS checks as a panacea, do not get 'hung up' on these: for most clubs and their activities (eg public running) and for most members they will not be needed.

Activities can be structured to avoid the need for DBS checks. For example, don't run a specific 'Young Engineers' training activity each week, run it as a 'workshop training' activity *but make it open to all members including younger members and advertise it as such*. The legislation only covers activities **targeted** at vulnerable groups. Or change the frequency of regular activities: the legislation only 'kicks in' at 3 or more activities every 4 weeks.

DBS checks are NOT a panacea: they are not 'boxes to tick' to make everything OK (in the same way that an H&S policy doesn't mean anything unless it is actively implemented, complied with, reviewed etc.

'Forcing' members to have DBS checks will clearly cause problems with loss of motivation or reduction of members, and may, in some circumstances, be illegal under GDPR legislation (because people such as the committee will learn personal information about others that they are not legally entitled to know).

Where to Start?



Where to Start?

- Read the FMES articles on Safeguarding
 - “From Guarding to Safeguarding” Pts. 1 – 4 (available at: <https://fmes.org.uk/safeguarding>)
- Decide what procedures are appropriate to your club and implement them
- Pay special attention to younger members and vulnerable older members (anyone over 70 is likely to be classified as vulnerable to some extent)
- Consider also neurodivergent and transgender members and those in straitened circumstances
- In short: create a ‘safe’ environment



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READ THE ARTICLES ON THE FMES WEBSITE!

Pay special attention in developing and implementing procedures to younger and older members (the potentially ‘vulnerable’ age groups). However, the needs of ALL individuals should be encompassed.

The hobby attracts many ‘neuro-divergent’ individuals (the term is modern and reflects the need to be aware of people who think and act in ways different to ‘the norm’). Why are they more vulnerable? Maybe they are more trusting or less able to spot signs of exploitation: they may be less ‘street smart’ than others.

The author knows of at least two clubs with transgender members (as an example of a potential vulnerability) and ‘insensitive’ comments or gender related banter may be acutely felt by them, making the club a less ‘safe’ environment.

What is meant by a ‘safe’ environment? Obviously, H&S processes reflect on physical harm caused by risky practices: in this case ‘safe’ is a broader awareness and can perhaps be best exemplified by examples such as:

Are there locations at your club where a ‘dodgy’ member could be ‘innocently’ alone with a child on a regular basis? E.g. an indoor OO gauge layout which may attract children (on a running/open day) without their parents being immediately to hand? Think like a parent – would you be happy for your child/grandchild to be alone with a stranger in such a situation? The solution may be a barrier (which could be a part of the layout) which separates the operator from visitors. In other locations, it might be as simple as improving the lighting or pinning doors open whilst visitors are on site. Think about your site and your activities from the perspective of a paranoid parent or an investigating officer/ambulance-chasing style lawyer, following an alleged ‘incident’.

Keeping It Simple



Keeping it Simple

- Appoint a Safeguarding Officer
- Get them some training
- Develop a (written and publicised) club Safeguarding Policy
- Train your members based on this policy
- Check your operating procedures/scenarios and decide if DBS checks are needed and for whom?
- Have a reporting procedure and reporting form
- Refresh member training annually



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There are online and local based training courses available at low cost for safeguarding officers.

Safeguarding training to members is usually best if 'internal' and relevant to club activities. It could, for example for guards and station masters, accompany the usual start-of-season public running procedural training and need to take long.

Deciding whether to require DBS checks (and at what level) is a club decision based on their activities: there are flow charts in the main articles to assist the decision. It is worth saying again, insisting on a more 'severe' DBS check for a role than is actually required can be a criminal offence.


3. Scenarios

There are three scenarios presented here, all of them based on real examples known to the author but with appropriate anonymity.



Scenarios

- Things to think about for each:
 - Is there a safeguarding issue here?
 - If so, what action should be (or should have been) taken?
 - How could the incident have been prevented?
 - Should it be reported to the authorities?
 - Who should it be reported to? (LADO*, Police?)
 - What do you think?



Although these scenarios refer often to *men*, the need to safeguard affects all!

* Local Authority Designated Officer


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There are not always 'right' and 'wrong' answers – the main question is whether you can justify that your actions were 'reasonable' and 'proportionate' in the specific circumstances.

As a guide to help you choose the best path, the author recollects a friend (who is a commercial hot air balloon pilot): when stood on the launch field looking at the weather and deciding if it was safe to fly, he would always think of the phrase 'At the subsequent enquiry....' (meaning in the event of a later issue as a result of this decision). This reminded him of the need to justify such decisions if something did go wrong. In other words, would an incident be regarded as 'an unforeseen accident' or 'an accident waiting to happen'

Note that the legislation is concerned about 'individuals' and not 'men' or 'women': safeguarding does not distinguish any difference in creating a 'safe' environment. The scenarios were presented point by point with requests for comments, thought and other interaction with the audience. The following presents the questions, however the responses and other comments are correlated and presented in the next section.

Scenario 1




Scenario #1

- On a busy running day, a small child runs onto the platform whilst his parents buy tickets
- He tries to climb onto a carriage but is struggling
- The guard lifts him onto the carriage just as his parents arrive
- The parents aren't happy that their child was man-handled by a 'stranger'

• Things to think about for each:

- Is there a safeguarding issue here?
- If so, what action should be (or should have been) taken?
- How could the incident have been prevented?
- Should it be reported to the authorities?
- Who should it be reported to? (LADO*, Police?)
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Does this initial incident ring any bells? Does your club have procedures or physical barriers to prevent this? What would you do if it happens (as the guard)?

Seeing the youngster struggling, what do you do now? Do you help him/her?

Was the guard right to do this? The parents are arriving to see what is happening but not yet close: does this make it all OK now?


What do you do now? How do you deal with the parents? What should you do now procedurally?

 Scenario #1 (contd.)


- Guard's statement: the child was at risk of falling/injury
- The child is the first passenger; the driver was tending the engine; the station master was chatting to the signalman = no independent witnesses
- It is a 'busy' public space – there was every likelihood that inappropriate conduct would be witnessed
- The guard has lifted small children many times over many years, in the course of his duties, without incident
- In this case, the guard has been DBS-checked

• Things to think about for each:

- Is there a safeguarding issue here?
- If so, what action should be (or should have been) taken?
- How could the incident have been prevented?
- Should it be reported to the authorities?
- Who should it be reported to? (LADO*, Police?)
- What do you think?



Naive or Nefarious?

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Does the risk to the child now justify the guards actions?

Does the fact that there are no independent witnesses cause a problem? How could it have been mitigated?


Given the 'busy public space' absolve the guard from any possible charge of inappropriate behaviour?

Does past precedence make it right and OK?

Does the (acceptable) DBS check change anything?

 Scenario #1: Wrap-up

- Preventing a child from falling/sustaining injury is usually a legitimate and overriding principle
 - Any 'handling' should be minimal and proportionate
 - Ensure they are safe - this wouldn't usually include lifting onto a carriage, however!
- The fact that the space was 'public' isn't relevant – paedophiles are opportunists and do take risks!
- The fact he (and others) have 'done it for years' isn't relevant
- DBS checking might help the club show a level of care, but not the individual
 - It is not a paedophile's charter: and is dependent on previously-reported incidents
- Solution: Don't allow children onto the platform without a parent/guardian
- Brief your station and train crews about safeguarding

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The need to ensure safety is paramount, but it should always be proportionate: was there another course of action open to the guard that did not mean such contact?

A risk is that this was an action undertaken by someone with other motives who 'seized a chance' to satisfy them.

Past behaviour is not a valid excuse: the need to safeguard should prompt a review of such behaviour.

DBS checking 'only' provides information relevant at the date of its issue: it does not highlight changes since (hence the recommendation to repeat necessary DBS checks at intervals) and a DBS check will not identify a 'first time' or 'not discovered' offender. The solution here is actually to review on station processes to prevent this sort of thing happening (like require the presence of a parent/guardian for children on the platform).

Scenario 2




Scenario #2


- One of your members proposes setting up a 'Children's Club', which he is happy to lead
- He proposes:
 - Special running days, driving opportunities, make/build activities etc.
 - Stickers, competitions, prizes
 - A newsletter and notifications of events
- The club agrees, and he recruits members and collects electronic contact information
- Some contact information relates to young people directly and some to parents

• Things to think about for each:

- Is there a safeguarding issue here?
- If so, what action should be (or should have been) taken?
- How could the incident have been prevented?
- Should it be reported to the authorities?
- Who should it be reported to? (LADO*, Police?)
- What do you think?



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This sounds like a laudable activity that we should promote, after all we support the interest in the hobby and want to see it continue through other generations.

The proposals are sound and obviously things that support this interest well.

Club agreement now makes this 'official' – any red flags yet? Are there any safeguarding related actions that should be taken at this point?

People are generally happy to give out contact information for this sort of thing and do not necessarily consider their risks in doing so. In particular, young people seeking some sort of independence may be happy to give out their contact details without involving parents.

Any red flags yet? Are there any actions that the club should be taking?




Scenario #2 (contd.)


- The Children's Club leader sends 'round robin' messages to all members detailing events etc.
- He answers specific queries and becomes known for being helpful and kind
- Events happen and are enjoyed; the initiative thrives
- He becomes a 'friend' to one teenage girl on Facebook
- He then sends messages to her network of 'friends', as if he knows her well
- She tells her parents and it gets 'legal'

• Things to think about for each:

- Is there a safeguarding issue here?
- If so, what action should be (or should have been) taken?
- How could the incident have been prevented?
- Should it be reported to the authorities?
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- What do you think?



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Sending out such messages is surely necessary?

And being 'kind' and 'helpful' is surely exactly what the leader should be doing?

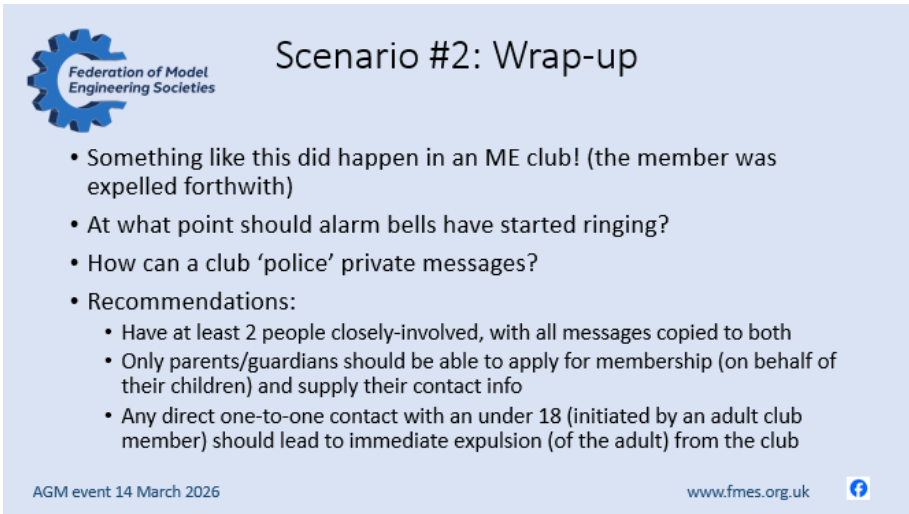
Success and thriving activities are what we all want aren't they?


The leader and this youngster get on well and chat regularly at events: maybe she sees him as a father/grandfather figure as he is supportive? Is this becoming an issue?

It has evolved: should the club be taking action here... or is this a private matter and nothing to do with the club? After all, the emails are not club related (and the club may not be aware of their existence yet).


Oh dear: now the rationale for the whole endeavour is called into question.

This is a difficult one for the club as it may well not know what was going on in the background (how could it see private messages?).



 **Scenario #2: Wrap-up**

- Something like this did happen in an ME club! (the member was expelled forthwith)
- At what point should alarm bells have started ringing?
- How can a club 'police' private messages?
- Recommendations:
 - Have at least 2 people closely-involved, with all messages copied to both
 - Only parents/guardians should be able to apply for membership (on behalf of their children) and supply their contact info
 - Any direct one-to-one contact with an under 18 (initiated by an adult club member) should lead to immediate expulsion (of the adult) from the club


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The process of collecting contact information such as email addresses etc should clearly specify that parental addresses should be provided for under 18's and a parent/guardian should authorise membership (eg a signed membership form). Similarly, group messaging systems (WhatsApp, Facebook etc) should only have parents/guardians/over 18's as members. All involved club members (at least two) should be included in all messages.

Note that the final point, about direct one to one contact does not include 'normal' contact at the club unless this is contrived as out of sight etc: it is primarily aimed at 'secretive' behaviour especially online communication.

In the eventuality that such 'secretive' communication is found to be taking place, the club should report the fact to the LADO or even the police (if obvious 'grooming' is suspected). The club should NOT simply brush it under the carpet – "the member has been removed = problem solved" is not the correct attitude and would probably result in some action being taken against the club, should it subsequently come to light. At the very least, it could generate unhelpful headlines in the local press and/or on social media.

Scenario 3




Scenario #3

- You have a long-standing member, Sid, in his mid 80s, with a number of health and mobility issues
- He is not quite as sharp as he used to be, but loves the club and is keen to help in any way he can
- He used to drive his magnificent 7 ¼" Duchess on public running days, but is too infirm to do that now
- Another (rather younger) member, Roger, regularly helps him out – gives him lifts to the club, helps push his wheelchair on days he needs it and generally looks after him
- Roger is a bit hard up and can't afford to build or buy a loco, although he would love one

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Things to think about for each:

- Is there a safeguarding issue here?
- If so, what action should be (or should have been) taken?
- How could the incident have been prevented?
- Should it be reported to the authorities?
- Who should it be reported to? (LADO*, Police?)
- What do you think?

This slide presents the scene

Sid is clearly a vulnerable adult owing to his developing dependency on Roger. This dependency is causing development of an obligation from Sid to Roger.




Scenario #3 (contd.)

- Roger regularly jokes to Sid that his Duchess must be feeling a bit neglected by now and should be 'loved' as it once was by Sid
- He hints that he is happy to clean and maintain it if Sid will lend it to him – he could even see it running again
- It would 'obviously' still be Sid's loco...
- Sid comes to feel that he would like to help out his friend, especially given all he has done for Sid
- Sid eventually decides that perhaps it would, indeed, be nice to see his Duchess run again and he lends it to Roger

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Things to think about for each:

- Is there a safeguarding issue here?
- If so, what action should be (or should have been) taken?
- How could the incident have been prevented?
- Should it be reported to the authorities?
- Who should it be reported to? (LADO*, Police?)
- What do you think?

Are Rogers overtures regarding the Duchess the beginnings of 'grooming', and laying groundwork for later actions?

He seems to be planting ideas, or if persistent, coercion.

Is Sid doing this from true 'free will' or is he being manipulated by Roger?

Is this all as a result of a problem or just a friend doing favours?

A question to consider: would Sid have done this anyway or is he only doing it because he feels obliged to, or has been manipulated by, Roger?

Should the club even be involved? Is it in any way the club's 'fault' (assuming it is considered as manipulation).



Scenario #3: Wrap-up

- Possible outcome: Sid goes into a home and the Duchess (and Roger) are never seen again...
- This is a tricky one:
 - Sid is *clearly* 'vulnerable' from a safeguarding perspective
 - Roger *may* be entirely altruistic in his intentions
 - Equally, he may be aware of the value of our model locos and looking for someone to exploit
 - Is this the club's problem anyway?
- The club *could* be seen to have allowed or enabled this exploitation
 - Sid's relatives *could* even try to sue the club
- At what point should the club intervene?
 - Perhaps when Sid mentions to another club member what he intends to do (or circumstances indicate what might have happened)
 - Sid's relatives should perhaps be informed

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If you were Sid's relatives, would you be happy if you learnt what had happened? Would you call the police and report a theft (or a scam/con trick)?

It is not clear that such a suit would succeed, but there are probably some grounds for a claim (apart from any distress to a long serving member) and the last thing the club would want would be to fight a complex legal case with its associated costs.

There are perhaps courses of action open to the club in promoting communication with relatives, being aware of what is happening in members lives especially around club activities and interests.

4. Comments from discussions

The following are the comments gleaned from discussion and shared here for general interest. They are expressed by members of the audience in relation to their own specific situation, and should not be used as definitive advice:

Re Scenario 1:

- Should a club have more than one Safeguarding Officer? This was considered sensible to cover absences etc. as long as responsibilities were clear. One club had a Safeguarding Officer with two deputies.
- One club remarked that they had a policy of explicit parental permission to assist passengers.
- One club (traction engine club) had noted that one driver was quick to assist young people onto footplates etc and circumstances later revealed that this was a deliberate ploy by an abuser.
- It was remarked that parents had a duty to manage their children and not allowing them to stray onto platforms etc. This is clearly relevant, and notices making this clear would be helpful, however that does not eliminate the scenario guard from taking appropriate safeguarding measures.

- Some clubs have a manual platform barrier to stop unauthorised access.
- Parents were quick to point a finger in the scenario: in reality parents reactions will be very varied.
- If the guard told the child to stop and was ignored, this increases the risk and need for physical interaction to prevent harm: the point in the scenario is that the risk was enabled in the first place (hence the need prevention) leading to uncertainty and argument.
- Some clubs have strict regulations and would not have allowed this situation to develop.
- One club has CCTV covering the platforms and it is visible to visitors (and capable of making a record in the event of incidents). [*FMES: note the need to make sure that filming is made clear and justified re GDPR refinements, see for example <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/uk-gdpr-guidance-and-resources/cctv-and-video-surveillance/guidance-on-video-surveillance-including-cctv/>]*
- The facts that it was a big open public space, a lot of visitors and the guard had done it many times before without issue are not defences.
- How do you calm down ranting and raving parents? [*FMES: a good question and an essential skill in customer relations*]

Re Scenario 2:

- Do not contact children directly, always go via parents.
- One club insists all such communication goes through the Secretary.
- It was commented that direct communication can still happen [*FMES: yes, and it can be difficult to spot, clubs should implement workable procedures that reduce the risk, and train members appropriately*].
- It was noted by a few clubs that anyone can set up a disconnected 'Friends of XXXX club' Facebook page with no reference to club permission. [*FMES: yes, and if/when its existence becomes known at least the club should probably publicly disassociate itself from the page*].

Re Scenario 3:

In the workshop, time was too short for extended discussion on this scenario, the presentation being mainly restricted to a brief run through:

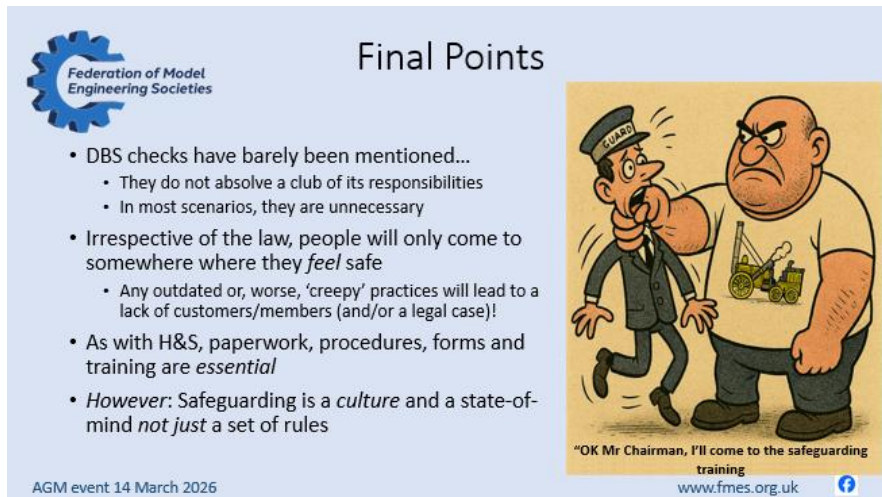
- In the example, the feelings of the relatives (in this case) will drive any litigation or complaint and the club may have to defend itself accordingly.
- It would be a good culture in the club for all members to become aware of the potential for such happenings and for any concerns to be relayed as they happen to club management for consideration of any involvement, such as contacting relatives before matters reach an awkward stage.

5 Summary and Next Steps

Summary

This report is intended as a guide to the main articles with some examples of potential safeguarding issues.

The workshop ended with a brief summary:



Final Points

- DBS checks have barely been mentioned...
 - They do not absolve a club of its responsibilities
 - In most scenarios, they are unnecessary
- Irrespective of the law, people will only come to somewhere where they *feel* safe
 - Any outdated or, worse, 'creepy' practices will lead to a lack of customers/members (and/or a legal case)!
- As with H&S, paperwork, procedures, forms and training are *essential*
- *However:* Safeguarding is a *culture* and a state-of-mind *not just* a set of rules

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This highlights the need to use the Safeguarding regulations as a support to make all club environments a safe place for all current and future members and visitors by reinforcing the caring and support aspects and making all members aware of their responsibilities in strengthening the positive safe culture of the club.

What was considered normal or acceptable years ago is not what modern parents (for example) may consider normal now: lifting children onto carriages is an example of this: most parents probably will not have a problem *but some will*.

In the same way that club members generally will mention something that they think is an H&S issue – something that they have spotted but others missed, possibly owing to greater familiarization with the requirements of the Health and Safety Act – the club should set out to generate a similar culture for safeguarding issues as well. Is a club member acting a little strangely around young people for example (we all have a radar for this sort of thing, especially those with a lot of 'people empathy')?

Next Steps

With the publication of the FMES Safeguarding articles, then this workshop with its limited opportunity to hear from clubs on the topic, FMES has provided a baseline set of information relevant to model engineering clubs (and maybe other such organisations with similar types of activity). How FMES should proceed to strengthen this support is a moot point and we require feedback from clubs (with and without perceived safeguarding needs) to decide how this should be developed for future improvement. Apart from the need to support member clubs in their awareness of relevant legislation, we would like to see a

positive increase in the attraction of people (young and old) to participate in 'our' hobby through clubs, so your thoughts on how we should set about this would be useful. In particular, your feedback and comments on topics including the following would be appreciated:

- We need feedback on our articles and other published material on this topic, so we can decide how well these are received and where they might be strengthened and made more useful.
- How should we support clubs more to develop their membership, especially for young people setting out on their hobby and professional careers?
- What assistance could we give to clubs to help them develop compliance with the legislation in the fullest way (ie including developing a 'safe' culture in the club)?
- Is there a role for good practice workshops to exchange ideas between clubs?
- Is there a need to provide online training specific to the hobby that all clubs could use to train (or reinforce training of) safeguarding officers?
- Others?

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