



Signs Adult at Risk Policy

Abstract

Signs is a digital safeguarding system, accessible through PRONTO on both desktop computers, laptops, and force smart phones (MDT). All officers and staff who have public contact have access to Pronto and the ability to use Signs to submit safeguarding referrals.

Supporting Documents

- [APP – Domestic Abuse PP – Domestic Abuse](#)

Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 Signs is a digital safeguarding system, accessible through PRONTO on both desktop computers, laptops, and force smart phones (MDT). All officers and staff who have public contact have access to Pronto and the ability to use Signs to submit safeguarding referrals.

1.2 Signs covers multiple processes including DA, HBA, fraud. This policy specifically covers the **Adult at Risk** element.

2 Scope

2.1 The purpose of this policy/procedure document is to cover both the circumstances of when an Adult at Risk Signs needs to be completed, and the information that needs to be included within it.

2.2 Information sharing via Adult at Risk Signs is a vital part of safeguarding vulnerable adults. It facilitates early and effective identification of risk, joint decision making and coordinated action. It helps all partner agencies build a more complete picture and identify any safeguarding concerns or emerging problems that may require intervention ('joining up the dots'). Serious Case Reviews often record that a failure to share information has been a key factor in the failure to protect people.

3. Statement

3.1 Information sharing between safeguarding agencies is often a key topic at inquests. The quality of the police Signs, or the lack of a Signs could be scrutinised by the Coroner following a death, or by PSD or the IOPC following a serious incident.

3.2 For the reasons highlighted above, it is critical that a Signs is completed promptly, when required, and that it contains relevant detail and information.

Procedure

1. IDENTIFYING WHEN AN ADULT AT RISK SIGNS IS REQUIRED

1.1 The general purpose of Signs, is to help officers / staff with raising and recording concerns and observations about the needs, vulnerabilities, and risk issues of subjects, following them coming to the notice of police.

1.2 The purpose of the Adult at Risk sub-category, is to provide information to Adult's Social Care, where the Police believe they have potentially identified an '**Adult at Risk**' - this is defined by The Care Act 2014 as someone who:

- Has needs for care and support (whether or not the authority is meeting any of those needs).
- Is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect, and
- As a result of those needs is unable to protect himself or herself against the abuse or neglect or the risk of it.

1.3 If the adult is clearly not an 'Adult at Risk', then there is no requirement to share the Signs with Adult Social Care. In fact, Social Services have no obligation or legal power to take the Signs when they are not going to act, as they do not have an intelligence or information gathering function. It is for this reason that it is important that we only share the right type of information, in the right circumstances. Otherwise, we run the risk of overwhelming Social Services and diluting their capability to help people that are genuinely in need.

1.4 Police are not trained to make definitive assessments on Social Care or Mental Health needs or the potential support required (even specialist officers in the Police Single Point of Access - PSPA). Officers/staff with public contact are also **NOT** expected to make a definitive assessment as to whether an adult is an 'Adult at Risk' as per the statutory definition. Their role is to *potential* Adults at Risk, and flag them to PSPA for review. When deciding whether to submit an Adult at Risk Signs, Officers/staff must base any assessment of an adult on reasonable judgement and observation, as well as information passed to them that they believe to be reliable - then apply the principles set out in this policy.

3.5 Similarly, concerns around a subjects mental Health in isolation is not necessarily a matter for Adult Social Care to deal with. However, if left unchecked it may develop into Social Care needs, and police are not trained to make this assessment. So, police should consider mental health concerns when making a decision on completing an Adult at Risk Signs. Ultimately PSPA will make the decision as to whether the information requires sharing with Adult Social Care.

3.6 An Adult at Risk Signs is **NOT** required for every contact with a vulnerable Adult. As explained above, the aim is to provide Social Services with good quality information, for Adults at Risk. Social services do not need to intervene for all Vulnerable Adults, or in every circumstance when a Vulnerable adult is involved.

3.7 It is for the **reporting officer/staff** to decide and justify whether a Signs is required or not, based on this policy and their own reasonable judgement.

3.8 The PSPA are available within office hours, Mon-Fri. The hunt number is **01483 636451**. They can provide guidance on Signs and access Adult Social Care information to see if an adult is currently open to any Adult Social Care Team.

3.9 If you are unsure or unable to seek advice or clarification on whether a Signs is required or not, **submit a Signs**. There will be no criticism for erring on the side of caution.

3.10 When a Signs *is* required, it must be completed **prior to the termination of duty**. **There are no exceptions**.

3.11 There are both general principles and mandatory circumstances when an Adult at Risk Signs must be submitted.

3.12 The general principle for when an Adult at Risk Signs must be submitted, is if an adult is potentially an 'Adult at Risk' as per the Care Act description mentioned above.

3.13 The legal definition of Adult at Risk identifies three criteria,

- **Care and Support needs**
- **Is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect**
- Being unable to protect themselves due to their care support needs.

Officers and Staff considering an Adult at Risk Signs only need to make a reasonable assessment on the first two criteria (highlighted in Bold). **BOTH elements should be present if they are to be considered as a potential Adult at Risk**. I.e.

- If the adult only has potential care and support needs, there would be nothing for Adult Social Care to take action on, as they are not at any risk.
- Alternatively, if the adult clearly doesn't have care and support needs but has been a victim of crime, again there would be no reason for Adult Social Care to intervene.
- An adult with potential care and support needs who has also been a victim of crime **WOULD** be suitable for a referral to PSPA.

The third element of the definition will be considered by PSPA and even they may need to refer to adult social care for specialist social care skills.

3.14 **Care and Support needs** is to be viewed as a simple and broad definition. Does the adult have any social / behavioural / disability / medical / developmental / educational / mental health or medical conditions – (regardless of any support that is already in place). If so, we should be submitting an Adult at Risk if their needs are not being met. Again, 'needs being met' should be considered in simple and broad terms. Are they able to live a healthy, safe and fulfilling life? Making use of their home and services in the community? The list of potential issues is obviously very wide but give as much detail as possible about what you have identified and the impact on the person.

3.15 **Is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect** - should also be considered broadly. As well as the usual meanings for abuse and neglect, exposure to crime as a victim or suspect and exploitation should be considered. In general, if the circumstances of the incident are likely to impact on the care/wellbeing/mental health of a subject, this element would be met.

3.16 **Always remember to think wider, and about anyone else who may be affected.** For example, if you arrest a person who cares for a relative. Does a Vulnerable Adult Signs need to be completed for the relative? Likewise, always consider any affected children, this could be the subjects' children or children they have contact with. If children are affected, a Child at Risk Signs **MUST** be completed.

3.17 Risk factors to be considered where identifying if a Signs may be required.

- **Physical Harm**
- **Emotional Abuse**
- **Sexual Abuse**
- **Neglect** – includes failing to provide adequate food, clothing, medical aid or accommodation

- **Significant Harm** – this may be a single traumatic event, a compilation of events, or suffering through witnessing the ill treatment of others, such as witnessing domestic abuse
- **Repeated presentation at hospital with unexplained injuries**
- **Disability**
- **Self-harm or threats/attempts to commit suicide**
- **Evidence of inappropriate sexual behaviour**
- **Social isolation & particular vulnerability**
- **History of mental ill health**

3.18 Risk factors relating to those in contact with subjects that may indicate a Signs is required (may be current or previous).

- **Violent or sexual offending**
- **Abuse**
- **Domestic abuse**
- **Abuse of animals**
- **Grooming**
- **Failure to provide medical**
- **Threats or attempts to self-harm or commit suicide**
- **Misuse of illegal or prescription drugs and or alcohol**
- **Mental ill-health**
- **Failure to take responsibility for previous abuse**

3.19 Listed below are the circumstances, where an Adult at Risk Signs **MUST** be completed, as these are deemed to automatically meet the required criteria for PSPA assessment. PSPA will make an assessment regarding onward sharing with partners.

- **CRIME** – When any adult is arrested and brought into Police custody or is subject of out of custody cases of voluntary attendance in criminal investigations and who either has: Additional vulnerabilities, Care and support needs, is a carer, or works in a position of trust with vulnerable adults.
- **MISSING** - In all missing occurrences involving a vulnerable adult or where the missing occurrence has an impact on another vulnerable person (i.e. the misper is a carer).
- **SUDDEN DEATH** - In cases of untimely or sudden death of an adult, which will result in care or support needs arising for another person, such as the death of an adult who cares for another person. Or if the Subject is currently known to Social Services. PSPA can help identify 'known' persons for you, however there are

likely to be indicators on NICHE such as warning flags, VA occurrences etc. that would suggest the subject is likely to be known.

- **DOMESTIC ABUSE** - Whenever there is adult involved who either has: Additional vulnerabilities, Care and support needs, is a carer, or works in a position of trust with vulnerable adults.
- **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DISCLOSURE SCHEME (DVDS)** – following a disclosure having been made or refused.
- **CHILD SEXUAL OFFENCES DISCLOSURE SCHEME (CSODS)** – following a disclosure having been made or refused.
- **SEXUAL ABUSE** – Whenever there is adult involved who either has: Additional vulnerabilities, Care and support needs, is a carer, or works in a position of trust with vulnerable adults.
- **EXPLOITATION** – Whenever there is adult involved who either has: Additional vulnerabilities, Care and support needs, is a carer, or works in a position of trust with vulnerable adults.
- **SECTION 136 MHA** – A Signs is only required for section 136 if the subject usually resides in another force area. PSPA share the Signs to ensure that force gets the information. Otherwise, a Signs is not required as the MH team have other referral methods and they will have the details provided on the S136 handover from Police.
- **EXTREMISM OR FIXATED WITH VIOLENCE** – Any adult showing these characteristics should be referred to PSPA.
- **OPPORTUNITY TO INTERVENE EARLY** - For all incidents whenever there is adult involved who either has: Additional vulnerabilities, Care and support needs, is a carer, or works in a position of trust with vulnerable adults, where the police believe there may be a risk of harm or an opportunity for partner agencies to provide support. If in any doubt, ask yourself “do they need help?”

3.20 This means that by exception, an Adult at Risk Signs is **NOT** required when an officer is able to identify with certainty, that the subject is not an Adult at Risk, nor do any of the mandatory circumstances apply. For example, an adult with a mental health issue, who lives independently and has all suitable care requirements catered for, reports a crime on behalf of a friend. This would NOT normally require a Signs. However, if the incident was having an effect on their mental health or wellbeing, then a Signs would be required.

3.21 Even in cases where there is no apparent concern for the adult, **the following two questions should always be considered by the submitting officer/staff.**

- **Is the subject likely to be known to Adult's Social Care?** Have there been a lot of previous Signs? Have they had a recent intervention from social services?
- **Is this current incident part of something bigger?** Have they had more than one recent contact with police? Have other incidents happened where Signs haven't been submitted? Is there a pattern or trend emerging?

If the answer to either of these questions is 'yes', then submit a Signs. This helps ensure that smaller pieces of a larger picture are not missed.

3.22 If a Signs is not completed following contact with a vulnerable adult, the rationale must be recorded on NICHE. Occurrences may be reviewed as part of wider safeguarding as well as by supervisors, so it must be clear why a Signs has been considered and discounted. This also helps Police teams that deal with occurrence management, as they will know it has been considered.

3.23 Where there are repeat visits to a location, then a Signs should be completed every time it is required. For example, you visit the house of an adult at risk twice within 24 hours. The fact that the vulnerabilities identified are the same on both occasions does not matter, if a Signs is required it should be completed each time. This helps highlight urgency and repetition to both Signs and Social Services. A common-sense approach using professional judgement is acceptable. For example, if you drop an adult at risk home after they have been subject to an incident, and you re-attend after an hour to allow them to calm down/eat a meal/get changed, this would only require a single Signs.

4. WHAT INFORMATION SHOULD / SHOULD NOT GO IN A SIGNS

4.1. There are 2 main concepts to remember with Adult at Risk Signs

- They will be shared with Adult Social Care, who do not have access to NICHE. So, they cannot research deeper than the information provided on the Signs. For that reason, the information on the Signs needs to be able to be understood in its own right.
- They are used to explain to Adult Social Care, that we believe they need to take action to safeguard a potential Adult at Risk. So, we need to clearly identify the concerns and the impact that they are having on the subject.

Every field within the Signs should be completed, with consideration to these concepts.

5. 'Niche incident summary' field

5.1 This should be considered as the 'blurb' of the incident. When automation is used this field acts like a summary so that Signs reviewers can quickly scan Signs history and understand it, without having to read the full documents. Therefore, it should be concise and clear such as

'Male visited by police unable to use his home, as he cannot climb the stairs, and was unable to wash and dress himself'

6. 'Incident detailed summary' field

6.1 This field acts as the detailed incident account for the whole form – similar to the OEL on NICHE. Each individual person is then attached below and will have their own risk assessment questions. Therefore, this summary should be used to explain the incident and general actions.

6.2 Set a basic scene and reason for Police attendance. Use clear simple language. Do not use police jargon or acronyms.

6.3 Explain the actions you have taken and remember to include any outcomes or anything that may impact on safeguarding, for example arresting a suspect, bail conditions etc.

7. 'Risk factors' and 'adult concern' sections

7.1 Signs is a guided form and where detailed information is required, there is an explanation attached to the questions. In terms of general principles;

7.2 Give as much detail as possible around the concerns you have identified, the impact they are having and what help/support you think the subject needs. Police cannot make definitive assessments on Social Care or Mental health issues, so avoid using any language or terms that implies this. However, you can relay information that you have been told, so long as it is clear it has come from the subject themselves or a third part.

7.3 Remember the opinions of the subject themselves – the Voice of the Person. Often officers either forget or are reluctant to include the subjects' thoughts/concerns/opinions. Often this is critical for identifying risk or what help is actually required.

7.4 Include professional factual observations but avoid opinions or language that is potentially derogatory or insulting. Be conscious of the type of language used to ensure it is not 'victim blaming'. Consider the impact of trauma on subjects, using a trauma informed approach. Remember Signs is potentially disclosable in numerous situations, including

Coroners Court. There is potential for inappropriate comment/language to have significant impact on these processes.

7.5 Explain relationships between the subjects you are listing. Particularly parents/carers. As detailed above, Social Services are unable to access NICHE so we must explain the involvement of every subject we identify.

7.6 Contact details are vital for all key subjects, especially for carers of vulnerable people. If we are asking Social Services to take action to safeguard, then we must provide them with the ability to be able to contact the subjects. Include as much as possible, but phone numbers are always preferable. Don't be put off if you are concerned that a contact method or phone number may not be 'safe' or will put a subject at risk. Include it in the form and note in the comments that the number is 'not confirmed as safe'.

8. The following must NOT be included in a Signs

- **Complete copy and paste of the OEL** – they rarely are concise enough or give the right information. There is also the risk of disclosing sensitive information without a proper purpose – for example addresses, telephone numbers and witness details.
- **Unnecessary or excessive information** – keep the information concise and relevant to your concerns.
- **Unrelated Intelligence** – Intelligence relating to the risks and issues identified can be included and will be assessed by PSPA for sharing. Please make sure any intelligence is highlighted. If the intelligence does not relate to the risk and issues, complete a 3x5x2.
- **Unmanaged risk** – keeping people safe is a core Police function and a statutory duty. We cannot pass risk to social services if we have the immediate ability to take action to keep people safe. A Signs may take several days to be reviewed by PSPA and shared with Social Services (although in most circumstances it will be a lot quicker – particularly when graded as High, which have a target of next working day). Therefore, by submitting a Signs you are acknowledging that the risk has been managed to a level where it is suitable to wait for up to this length of time, for it to be reviewed. If not, there are various other actions that can be taken to manage risk, such as repeat visits, Police protection powers, Emergency duty Team, Mental Health Crisis line etc. A Signs should still be submitted in parallel with any action taken and the action taken should be explained in the Signs.
- **References to 'see OEL' / 'PNC' or other systems** – Social services have no access so all relevant information must be included.

9. CONSENT

9.1 The Police do not need the consent of the adult, or their carer/guardian to complete a Signs and share it with the Police Single Point of Access (PSPA). This is as long as the principles of when an Adult at Risk (outlined in this document) have been followed. You must not let others influence your decision and should follow this policy.

9.2 Surrey Police PSPA will use their agreed processes, in accordance with the Multi-Agency Information Sharing Process (and other procedures) to establish whether the Signs needs to be shared externally with safeguarding partners.

9.3 However, although consent is not required, wherever it is possible to do so, those completing an Adult at Risk must advise (whoever is suitable in the circumstances) that a Signs is being submitted and that they may receive contact from Social Services. Avoid using the technical term 'Signs' and say, 'Safeguarding form' or similar as this is more likely to be understood by the recipient.

9.4 Consent to share a Signs is different totally separate to the consent that Social Services may need to work with an adult. There are sections on the Signs that deal with this secondary consent. If the adult or their carer/guardian consents at this stage to voluntary contact from social services, it should always be recorded as it can make intervention from Social Services quicker and easier.

10. SUBMITTING A SIGNS TO PSPA FOR REVIEW

10.1 Signs will automatically apply a risk grading to a submission, based on the risk categories selected. There is an option for the submitter to increase the risk if required. As a general principle, **remember to grade on ongoing risk**, rather than current risk. For example, the arrest of a suspect may minimise current risk, but what happens to the risk if they are released from custody?

10.2 If the Adult at Risk questions are selected by an officer/staff on a Signs, once they have completed the form, Pronto will send a NICHE tasking to PSPA. Pronto will also attach the Signs to NICHE. In normal operation, this is automatic and there is no requirement for the officer/staff to undertake any further steps.

10.3 However, it is **CRITICAL** that officers check that Pronto has not raised any errors when syncing, as this may mean that the Signs is not attached to NICHE or been sent to PSPA for review. Once Pronto has finished syncing, it will display a final screen highlighting any issues. If unsure, check NICHE to see if the documents have been attached and a task created. All officers with a Pronto account have access to Pronto Manager, where the Signs

can be manually downloaded if required. PSPA can also be tasked via Niche unit number 4500900.

10.4 Signs that are received by PSPA will be reviewed to see if they meet the criteria to share with Adult Social Care. They will be prioritised by the BRAG rating, so it is important that if the concerns are serious/urgent/time critical that they are BRAG rated correctly.

10.5 If a Signs is shared with Social Services, it can trigger several levels of intervention, ranging from advice and guidance, up to the use of statutory powers. All of which are aimed at promoting safeguarding for vulnerable children.

PSPA will place an update onto the Signs itself, this is where you should check to see if your Signs has been processed and what the outcome was. PSPA no longer regularly update the OEL.

10.6 Adult Social Care aim to provide an 'outcome' for each Adult at Risk Signs that they process. There is an automated process that will add the outcome to the relevant Niche OEL and task the OIC for that occurrence. This will normally be within 7 days of the Signs being shared but can vary. If the outcome of a Signs is required or there are any queries over the outcome, officers/staff should contact PSPA.

11. SUPERVISOR MANAGEMENT OF SIGNS OCCURRENCES

11.1 Supervisors should regularly check the quality of the Signs that their team are creating. By finalising an occurrence (particularly as no further action) supervisors are validating that the correct safeguarding information has been recorded and passed to PSPA.

11.2 In general use, NICHE will not allow for an occurrence to be finalised with open taskings. When supervisors close all tasks without care, in order to file an occurrence, they may close the PSPA Signs tasking. If the Signs tasking to PSPA is closed, prior to PSPA reviewing the Signs, then it will not be reviewed and shared. The Signs will sit unchecked on the occurrence.

11.3 For this reason, an occurrence should not be closed until the Signs has been reviewed by PSPA. This is best practice. However, if there is an urgent need to file an occurrence prior to the Signs being reviewed, it is the filers responsibility to re-open and re-task the Signs task to PSPA, once the occurrence has been filed.

11.4 NICHE is fully auditable as to when tasks were closed, and this may be reviewed should there be a serious incident or adverse outcome and lack of multi-agency information sharing is called into question.