

Health, Safety and Wellbeing Guidance

Core | Consider | Complex

Risk reduction and control measures for lone working and violence & aggression

Health, Safety and Wellbeing Service



Supporting you in managing Health, Safety & Wellbeing



This guidance gives examples of the issues and risk reduction measures that should be considered when carrying out a risk assessment for work activities involving lone working or where there is a risk of violence and aggression.

1 Reducing the risk of violence and aggression within offices and other buildings

Controlling Public Access

Some areas of buildings and grounds need to be open to the public but uncontrolled access to all areas may cause unnecessary risk. During a risk assessment consideration should be given to the working environment to determine whether it presents any risks by its design or layout and if these risks could be resolved by;

- positioning of entrances
- lighting of entrances and other access routes and thoroughfares
- Relocation of work activities which do not need to be in public areas
- Escape routes

Reception Areas

Managers must ensure that the procedure for dealing with visitors is adequately communicated and followed at all times. It is important that the procedure is maintained to avoid confusion and delays leading to frustration and agitation. If money is handled, managers should consider the most appropriate place for this to be undertaken.

Where offices have the facility for visitors to attend meetings it should be possible to access information efficiently and quickly so that visitors can be dealt with promptly. Where delays occur, visitors should be kept informed. Members of the public must not be allowed to leave the reception area and enter the main offices unless escorted.

Individuals working in reception areas must be provided with adequate information and training on how to undertake their job safely. Training may include public contact skills and how to handle potentially difficult situations with the public. New and inexperienced staff should be given support and adequate supervision.

Reception area design should avoid “frustration triggers” such as poor hygiene and loud music. Effort should be made to ensure reception areas are light, clean, airy, have a comfortable room temperature and are not subject to excessive noise. Comfortable chairs should be provided for visitors and where appropriate attention should be paid to the need for toys and reading material.

Consideration should be given to the potential for items in public areas to be used as weapons and to cause disruption. Normally pictures and leaflet displays should be firmly fixed to walls, plants in fixed containers and chairs and tables are of a suitable weight and design so they are less easy to use as weapons.

Offices are advised to display the County Council poster outlining the Policy on Violence and Aggression on Council premises.

The potential for violence can be reduced by;

- Receiving all visitors courteously, acting professionally and treating them with dignity;
- Informed visitors of any delays, reasons for the delays and how long they can be expected to wait; and
- Avoiding loud music and providing some form of distraction e.g. something to read.
- Ensure objects that could easily be used as a weapon are not accessible.

If there is a significant risk of violence and aggression, it may be appropriate to provide;

- Screens or security glass at reception desks however screens and other obstacles may impair communication and make visitors more agitated. It may be more appropriate to use wider desks or counters which are a less provocative way of creating distance from potentially violent individuals.
- Equipment such as panic buttons to enable staff to call for urgent assistance. Panic buttons must be appropriately sited and connected to offices whose occupants can respond quickly and effectively. The procedures to be adopted when the alarm sounds must be documented and practised to ensure that where the alarm is activated the response is appropriate.

Interview Rooms

Interview rooms should be welcoming to put visitors at ease and should be carefully laid out and used to ensure that the risk of violence is minimised whilst maintaining privacy. Managers should consider the following;

- Location of room. Rooms to be used for interviews/meetings should be in a busy and not isolated area of the building and they should have a vision panel or some other way of observing the room from outside.
- Furniture and fittings which are difficult to use as weapons should be selected.
- The ease of making a quick exit from the room (escape). Where rooms have an escape route, staff should sit next to this. NB Where there is no escape route staff should try to ensure that they do not stand or sit in a situation which leaves them vulnerable in the event of an attack including sitting between the visitor and the door to maintain a clear escape route. It is important that the interview rooms are arranged so that, if at all possible, interviews are conducted with a desk or table between the interviewer and the visitor.
- The need for easy communication between staff, while retaining privacy.
- The use of CCTV and/or possibly recording facilities in certain interview rooms.

Where it is deemed necessary interview rooms should be fitted with a readily accessible panic button or panic strip for use in emergencies. Where fitted managers will ensure there is an agreed communicated and practised procedure for use and response. When the interview room is in use the alarm must always be monitored.

Preventing Intruders

Members of staff who encounter potential intruders should;

- Approach the person without blocking their exit route. It should be ensured that the potential intruder can freely leave at any time and on no account should anyone prevent the

person from leaving the premises

- Establish quickly and politely who the person is by asking the person to produce proof of identity.
- The potential intruder should not be approached if the area is remote (corridor, storeroom, etc.). In this instance, members of staff should either wait until the person is within a more conspicuous area (other members of staff present) or approach in pairs.
- If a member of staff does not feel confident enough to question a potential intruder they shall inform their manager, the premises manager, or their deputy immediately of the person's presence. They must then take the appropriate action as identified above or any other that is deemed necessary (call the police, etc.).
- If the potential intruder has been identified as a genuine visitor, they should be escorted to the main reception area and normal procedures followed.

Building access out of normal hours

A risk assessment must be undertaken to consider the risks and control measures required by individuals who are key holders for premises (either in or out of hours) to ensure that this activity is as safe as reasonably practicable. Adequate information and knowledge must be in place regarding the premises layout, alarm systems, locking and unlocking procedures and any emergency procedures.

Working alone within a premises outside office hours

From time to time staff may need to carry out their work outside of normal office hours such as weekends and evenings. Precautions must be taken to ensure that health and safety continues to be protected;

- Where work is not scheduled or routine e.g. evening or weekend clinic/service premises managers or caretaking staff must be informed.
- Written procedures may be required in certain premises requiring regular contacts.

Cash handling

Where it is necessary to handle money specific guidelines and advice must be available and communicated on how this may be done safely. Individual personal safety is more important than money and if there is any threat of violence the money should be relinquished.

Sensible precautions will minimise the risk of robbery;

- Avoid setting patterns which others can discern. Ensure routes, parking and timing are as varied as possible.
- Keep money out of sight. If change must be provided a small, separate float should be used. Ensure confidentiality- carrying or collecting money must not be discussed in public

2. Working Practices and Patterns

Agile working

Agile working from home or touchdown centres would normally be classified by risk assessment as low risk. Technology such as lync and mobile phones can be used to keep in touch with individuals working in this way and control measures such as up to date outlook calendars and contact details will normally be adequate. Where individuals work remotely and visit locations which are not under control of the council or where they may be the only person this must be included in the risk assessment and adequate controls implemented.

Visiting locations not under the control the council

When a location to be visited is in the community or under the control of another organisation the activity, the location and the members of the public who may be present or involved must be considered. The risk assessment for any activity may need to consider issues including the potential for violence or where lone working is inappropriate because of physical hazards.

Managers must implement safe working procedures where lone working may not be appropriate before an activity takes place. Examples may include; work at height; the use of certain chemicals; the use of machinery or vehicles; carrying money or valuables and working in a confined. All relevant information that is available should be provided to those undertaking the visit or activity.

Risk assessments, guidelines and procedures which are designed to control risks to health and safety must be communicated to those involved in the activity.

General points to note:

- A system of identifying the location and schedule of individuals who make visits should be in place, maintained and monitored. The system must include names, addresses and where possible contact numbers of intended visits and expected arrival and departure times. This may be the Outlook Calendar system. Where appropriate, managers should identify a designated contact, a backup and agreed times/situations for individuals to call the contact or themselves. Details of vehicles used by lone workers should also be available.
- Lone workers must be encouraged to regularly self assess the situation they are in and the risks to which they are exposed
- Staff must be trained to carry out the tasks and must be competent to use any materials or equipment required.
- Where regulations, codes of practice or guidelines are in place which prohibit working alone employees must be made aware e.g. Confined space working or carrying out specific work in the community and ensure that the appropriate guidelines or codes of practice are followed.
- Where there is a history of incidents involving locations, activities or specific members of the public, sharing experiences and concerns within the organisation and between other relevant organisations is essential. Sharing of information should be undertaken formally via the appropriate communication channels and accurately recorded.

- The information system must be checked as a matter of course, making sure the information is accurate, updated and removed as necessary.
- When visiting the homes of clients or members of the public any historical information about the individual or their circumstances which may be relevant must be communicated including hazards at the location such as dogs, previous violence. This information may need to be considered as part of a risk assessment prior to a visit.
- If during a visit something is identified which makes the visitor feel threatened they should leave the premises as soon as possible.
- Where it is established that wearing identifiable clothing could present a risk, staff should not wear the identifiable clothing or ensure that the clothing is not obvious.
- Managers and staff should be sensitive to situations where it is known that service users may be prejudiced to staff's age, ethnic background, gender or sexual orientation. Case discussion will enable management to consider the appropriateness for an employee to handle a case.
- All parties to systems of contacting managers/colleagues as a control measure for lone workers must adhere to the contact arrangements. The integrity and effectiveness of this type of system rely on all participants complying.

Home Visits

- When staff are to meet a service user who is either unknown to themselves or the service, the following actions should be taken;
 - Arrange an initial meeting at the office base if appropriate.
 - If the person is already a council service user check the relevant information system and refer to the service user file prior to carrying out a home visit.
 - Where a risk of violence is identified appropriate staffing levels must be considered (this can include representatives of other agencies).
 - Details of visits and expected return times must be available at the office base in line with local procedures.
- If it is felt that there is a risk of harm on arriving then the visit may be cancelled and an alternative appointment arranged.
- Staff must be alert to situations where service users are becoming confrontational or aggressive and should remove themselves from any closed, locked room or building. Staff need not hesitate to withdraw from a situation which is causing them discomfort or harm and call for help.
- Ensure that staff have as much information on the client and the client's home environment prior to the visit so that risks can be assessed.
- Ensure that staff carry an ID badge and are prepared to identify themselves.
- Staff should try to ensure that when they enter a premises/home for the first time that they make themselves familiar with the door lock on the exit door.
- Wherever practical avoid the service user/relative being between them and the exit.

Training should be made available, where necessary, in the use of conflict resolution or defusing techniques. This training may include being aware of non-verbal communication; how to behave in

a non-confrontational way; the importance of good customer care; being polite and listening to clients.

Knowledge of the location to be visited

Staff should have knowledge of the location where they will be working, for example the location of accessible car parking or public transport.

- Staff should be in possession of full address details, telephone numbers and alternative contacts to minimise the likelihood of getting lost.
- Where staff must report to a security point prior to starting work (e.g. for security checks) they must always do so even when visits are to regular and familiar places.

Procedures for dealing with animals

- If there is a known problem with animals at a particular address or location, the occupants should be contacted and requested to remove or secure the animals before arrival.
- If staff are confronted by an aggressive animal on a first visit to an address they should not put themselves at risk.
- If a request to remove or secure the animal has provoked a negative reaction all possible efforts should be made to ensure the situation is managed and deescalated.
- Should hostility become evident alternative arrangements should be made to carry out the visit such as using a nearby office location.
- Any instances of staff being injured by a dangerous animal should be recorded by the Line Manager in the same way as other violent incidents.
- Internal information systems should be flagged to record the incident against the premises.

Travel and Transport

Travel to and from appointments or between locations during working time will need to be considered where this may present a significant risk. Control measures which may be considered include:

Use of public transport

- Where possible wait for transport at a busy, well-lit area.
- Sit near the driver of the vehicle or in an aisle seat.
- Be familiar with any emergency alarm on the vehicle and sit near it.
- Avoid empty upper decks on buses or empty train compartments.
- If threatened inform the driver /guard or police and report incidents to managers.

Use of vehicles

- Items such as bags, mobile phones or other equipment should never be left visible in a car.
- Avoid looking for vehicle keys in bags etc. when outside but have them in hand.
- Lock vehicle doors when inside particularly when travelling at slow speed and or stopped at traffic lights.
- Park as close as possible to the location being visited.
- At night, park in a well-lit area, facing the direction of travel required when leaving.

- Do not stop even for people who may appear to be in distress or requiring help especially after dark. Stop as soon as is practicable and safe to do so and contact the emergency services as appropriate.
- If individuals believe they are or may be being followed they are advised to drive to the nearest manned and lit building such as supermarket or petrol station to request assistance. They are **not** advised to drive to their home.
- Sounding the car horn to attract attention to summon help if needed.
- In the event of a breakdown, where it is safe to do so remain in the vehicle, put on the hazard lights and call for assistance. (On motorways police and driving authorities advise leaving the vehicle and standing a short distance away, if drivers feel threatened in any way and cannot do this advice is to sit in the passenger side of the vehicle)

Travelling by foot

- plan a route before setting off to avoid going through areas which may be less safe e.g. underpasses or remote areas
- Awareness of the surroundings is essential and making sure you can see and hear if someone is behind and shouting to you is important.
- Walk briskly if possible. Do not stop in areas that are unknown to look at a map or ask for directions. Go to a 'safe' place such as a petrol station or shop and ask for directions.
- If the individual believes they are being followed, they must trust their instincts. Crossing the street and heading for a busy area may be appropriate.
- Minimise potential street crime and distractions by not using mobile phones. If it is necessary to use a phone or respond to a call/text message this should be done in a safe place such as a shop.
- Remain alert to people around and stay in the centre of the footpath facing oncoming traffic
- Carry the minimum amount of baggage and if possible bags should be held under the arm with the clasp close to the body.
- If someone attempts to steal belongings or County Council property these should be relinquished immediately without challenge.
- Consider keeping house keys and mobile phones separate from bags.
- Wearing sensible low heeled footwear with non-slip soles should be considered.
- Where possible avoid overtly displaying valuables.
- Use cash point machines in well lit, busy areas.
- Carrying a torch for use in an emergency may be advised for some individuals/situations.

Use of Taxis

- Where possible a taxi should be booked in advance from a reputable company.
- If no taxi has been booked use a reputable private hire (taxi) company or go to a recognised taxi rank.
- Do not use any unlicensed private hire mini cab.
- Sit in the back of private hire/minicab behind the driver and have a mobile phone readily accessible
- Do not give personal information to the driver.

Cycling

- avoid unlit areas and quiet roads
- Secure bicycle near premises in a well-lit area if possible.
- Avoid looking for keys in bags etc. when outside but have them in hand
- Fit and use front and rear lights on all bicycles when dark
- Avoid making repairs to bicycles in isolated areas – where possible push the bike to the nearest safe place e.g. petrol station; guarded car park to make repairs.
- If there is an attempt to steal a bicycle it should be relinquished immediately without challenge.

Threats to property

Individual personal safety is more important than property. If violence is directed solely at property, individuals are not expected to protect it by putting themselves at risk. Consideration should be given as to whether it is appropriate to call the Police.

Verbal Abuse

Where an individual is subject to verbal abuse that offends them, either face to face or by telephone, they should inform the person that they will end the conversation if the abuse does not stop immediately. Should this fail to have the desired effect the conversation should be ended and the Manager informed accordingly.

Nuisance or Malicious calls

In the majority of cases nuisance or malicious calls only happen once, however, there are occasions when these calls become repetitive and are sometimes directed at one individual. If such calls occur the following procedures should be followed;

- Remain calm. Try not to encourage the caller with an emotional response.
- Do not enter into any conversation; terminate the call.
- Do not provide details of staff members to callers. Collect contact details from the caller and arrange for a return call.
- If the caller is making direct threats to individuals and these are believed to be real and immediate, inform manager and contact the police immediately.
- If you believe that the threats made are not immediate, then the line manager should be informed and the local police station contacted (101 from any landline or mobile phone).
- If calls are silent don't coax the caller into speaking; quietly end call if no-one speaks.

Where members of staff identify that they are experiencing repeated malicious telephone calls they must inform their line manager who shall;

- Report the calls to the Police and obtain a crime number.
- Contact the BT Specialist Bureau on 0800 661 441. Specially trained investigators will use their knowledge and experience to tackle the problem. In extreme cases they can also work with the Police to trace calls.

- If malicious calls are made to a mobile phone it may be possible to block the caller, change the number or if the situation is more serious a referral can be made to the EE Nuisance Calls Bureau (NCB) where it will be investigated further.
- Make a record of the situation in accordance with the procedures laid down locally.

Offensive Weapons

Incidents involving offensive weapons are rare and may occur following a change in circumstances for members of the public such as reduced care provision, financial issues, health and environment or where enforcement action is being taken.

There are two main areas of risk;

1. Discovering offensive weapons in premises being visited,
2. Offensive weapons being used to threaten or intimidate

If an offensive weapon is discovered;

- Leave the premises if you feel threatened.
- Do not move or handle the item even it is believed that it is a replica.
- Do not challenge the owner or occupant of the premises about the item.
- Inform any accompanying staff or agencies about the presence and location of the offensive weapon.
- Inform line manager immediately or when safe to do so.

Managers receiving information about offensive weapons must;

- Liaise with the police to obtain additional information and identify the appropriate action.
- Using the information obtained from the police to decide whether to approach the owner/family about the offensive weapon or leave this to be addressed by the police.
- Record information about the offensive weapon on the appropriate information system (e.g. the SCH CISS, Flare systems).
- Initiate an individual risk assessment for the service user/ review and amend risk assessments as appropriate.

Equipment used to protect lone workers

There are many types of electronic devices and other equipment that can be used to reduce the risks to lone workers. Equipment can include;

- Mobile Phones
- Personal Alarms
- Lone Worker Protection Systems

All equipment provided should be regularly cleaned and checked to ensure it is working (e.g. are batteries charged).

Whilst useful a mobile phone should never be relied on as the only risk control measure. Lone workers should leave details about any visit in advance, including its location, nature and when they expect to arrive and leave. Afterwards, they should let their manager or colleague know that they are safe.

If provided:

- A mobile phone should always be kept as fully charged as possible.
- The lone worker should check signal strength before entering a lone worker situation.
- The lone worker should ensure they can use the mobile phone properly, by familiarising themselves with the handset and instruction manual.

If a lone worker protection system is considered appropriate managers should consult with the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Service to ensure that it is suitable and the process and systems supporting them are in place. Technology should not be seen as a solution in itself and consideration must be given to its limitations.

Code of conduct

Staff in any type of work situation where local bye-laws, guidance, regulations or codes of practice are in place governing their code of conduct must abide by them at all times. Where necessary these should be displayed in a prominent place

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