

Lancashire County Council Occupational Health and Safety Management System Corporate Guidance

Dealing with Violence in the workplace

This guidance has been developed to help managers and headteachers to undertake a risk assessment of violence in their workplace by identifying situations where there may be a risk of violence and determining and implementing appropriate measures to reduce that risk.

See also HSE publication INDG69 (rev) "Violence at Work – A guide for employers" at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg69.pdf> and County Council Lone Working Guidance at [Intranet / Schools Portal](#) and Security Guidance at [Intranet / Schools Portal](#)

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• Introduction

The guidance covers some of the more common situations upon which advice has been sought and does not cover all situations where violence could occur or all the measures that could be taken.

• Identifying the areas of risk

All line managers have a responsibility to undertake a risk assessment of each of his/her employees' work activities in order to identify whether or not there is a risk, or potential risk of violence in their area of work. Lone working and the physical and personal safety of employees should be amongst the factors taken into account.

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Managers should:-

- List the jobs where employees' interaction with others could place them at some risk;
- Identify any jobs or places of work where employees feel threatened or vulnerable;
- Involve employees through Team meetings, PDR etc.;
- Record and analyse violent incidents to determine whether they are isolated incidents or there is a recurring problem or whether the abuse has a racial or sexual motivation and whether or not they involved people using the service or a member of the public.

NOTE: As well as actual assault, racial, sexual or other harassment at work is also a criminal offence, punishable by imprisonment under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (1994). Harassment is the intentional use of abusive language or insulting words or behaviour which causes distress.

Risk assessments should not be restricted to consideration of incidents which have already taken place. Managers should take account of any work situation which is associated with a known pattern of violence and put in place appropriate controls.

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- **Deciding what action to take and taking action**

Possible actions to consider:-

- **Security of Premises**

It is important that security arrangements for each building are kept under constant review.

Wherever possible, external doors should be self-locking rather than requiring the use of keys to lock them at night.

A safe egress from the building should be maintained at all times.

Lighting outside the buildings should be adequate to allow staff to exit safely at night. Car Parks (where provided) should be well lit.

Where possible, situations where employees are working alone in an isolated office or building which is open to the public, should be avoided. Where it is necessary for such a situation to occur, arrangements should be made to minimise risks. If employees work shifts, or late into the evening, they should be encouraged to leave together in small groups. Also employees who are to be lone working should position their cars/motorbike or cycles as close to the final exit as possible

Where employees work alone, a lone working risk assessment should be developed and communicated to employees.

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○ Reception Areas

(a) **Positive Measures** - The way in which clients and members of the public are received may well have a bearing on how they act. Whilst appreciating the constraints of limited finance and resources, the following are some suggestions for creating a more congenial environment.

Reception areas should ideally have:-

- easy access
- good lighting
- inviting atmosphere
- interesting and informative display boards
- play space for children
- reading material for adults
- easy access to toilets including where practicable, toilets accessible to customers with disabilities

Waiting time should be kept to a minimum. Having to wait a long time reduces the level of tolerance. Where there is a delay, the reason should be explained to the person waiting and apologies made, especially if an appointment has been made.

(b) **Precautionary Measures** - If a receptionist thinks a situation is developing where violence may occur, it should be possible for another, preferably senior member of staff to respond quickly to any call for assistance. Any alarm raised must be treated seriously. No one should be made to feel foolish or inadequate if they summon assistance, only to find assistance is not required. This must be expected from time to time.

The installation of alarm systems with readily available panic buttons should be considered. If an alarm is installed, ensure that it is audible in occupied areas of the building and that all employees are trained to respond on hearing the alarm. A programme of drills and checks on the functioning of the alarm should be set up.

Glass screens in the area should be avoided if at all possible, but if necessary, should be of shatter-proof glass.

Managers should ensure as far as possible, there are no convenient missiles/weapons to hand, e.g., framed pictures. It is appreciated however that this may be difficult in some worksites e.g. residential establishments, but management should take responsibility for raising staff awareness around such dangers in these cases.

Access from the reception to work areas or interview rooms should be by controlled access where practicable.

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○ Interview Rooms

In addition to the points raised above, the following points should also be considered for interview rooms:

Interview rooms should not be totally isolated. If clients are known to be violent, it is advisable to interview such clients in a room close to where colleagues are working, and to ensure that observations can be made from outside the room e.g. vision panels in the door.

If trouble is anticipated and there is no other method of observation available, interruptions by other members of staff should be considered as a means of checking on employees, though the likelihood of this causing irritation should also be taken into account.

When interviewing clients, employees should be seated between the client and the door, to maintain a clear escape path if required.

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○ Information Exchange

Managers and supervisors must make employees aware of potentially violent situations or clients relating to the work of the service.

Discretion must be used regarding clients, but it is essential in order to ensure employees' safety that all case files should contain information of a threatening behaviour or acts of violence.

All relevant information should be made available to employees regarding the background of new clients.

Information, where appropriate, should be shared with other colleagues who may be involved, e.g. receptionists, drivers, home care assistants, social workers may all be in contact with the same person, in so far as the Data Protection Act, 1998 allows.

Note: Health & Safety takes precedence, on a need to know basis, over issues of confidentiality and data protection.

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○ Visits away from the Workplace

A risk assessment should be developed for all employees who work away from Council establishments.-See LCC Lone working/Personal Safety guidance – [Intranet](#) or [Schools Portal](#).

This should help ensure that employees do not forget essential safety systems when preparing for a meeting e.g. informing supervisors where they are going, taking personal attack alarms, mobile phones or radios with them.

The following points should be considered:

- If an employee has to meet a client for the first time and it is envisaged that there may be some element of risk, they should be instructed to arrange the initial meeting in the office and ensure other people are nearby.

If an outside visit is essential and there is doubt about employee's safety, two people should be sent to the initial meeting whenever practicable.

- Employees should inform their supervisors where they are going and the expected time of return. A system could be arranged, whereby they telephone in at pre-arranged times, especially if they are working alone or visiting potentially dangerous locations. If the employee is detained and anticipates arriving back significantly late, they must be instructed to let their supervisor know. If an employee does not return to the office or fails to call in as arranged, the supervisor must ensure that contact is made with the last listed address, to determine if the visit has been made or concluded. If not, the supervisor should work back from there in accordance with the visiting list.
- In appropriate circumstances, the Police should be contacted. Details of the employee's vehicle i.e. manufacturer, model, colour and registration number, should be readily available to pass to the Police.
- If an employee has to visit a client where there is a known history of violence, racism or sexist behaviour or where the employee has to visit isolated/vulnerable situations, or have to deal with unpleasant aspects which could cause distress to clients, they should not go alone. It is management's responsibility to ensure that the back-up help is available.

A review of staffing levels may be necessary in some cases. Where it is not feasible to send a second person, then alternative provisions should be made to ensure the employee's safety, e.g. arranging to meet at a secure venue or requesting Police accompaniment or provision of a mobile phone to summon assistance if necessary.

- It is important to consider if certain times of the day and locations may involve an increased risk of violence. When meeting a client for the first time, the appointment could take place at a secure venue and under controlled conditions. For example, instances of attacks to employees have occurred whilst they were working in the proximity of public houses/night clubs
- Even if employees do not feel vulnerable, managers may not allow some visits, if in their view, the employee is under-estimating the risk. It may be useful for managers to develop their own criteria on which to base risk assessment for employees involved in visits away from the workplace.

- It is particularly important that employees check out at the end of the day and that if they are not returning to the office, they telephone in to their supervisor to confirm that all is well. Such a call may be to the work base or to the supervisor at his/her home number depending on how late the last visit was made. The object is to ensure that managers can be sure that the employee has completed the scheduled calls safely.

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○ **Deployment of employees**

Sometimes customers and clients are antagonised by class, age, colour and sex differences between them and County Council employees.

It may be a risk sending an employee into a situation where a client is known to be racist or sexist, or into a location where racial tensions are high. Where it is identified that an employee is more vulnerable, they should not be expected to deal with the situation without extra support from management who have responsibility to promote equal opportunities within relationships both between employees and between employees and users of County Council services.

If a client persists in verbally abusing members of staff, be it racially, sexually or otherwise motivated, despite being told that such behaviour is unacceptable, they should be advised that consideration would be given to the suspension or cessation of the service provided.

Managers should, of course, take account of the client and the circumstances in which the abuse took place, when deciding whether or not to cease or suspend service provision. Legal advice should be sought before doing so, as in many circumstances, the Authority has a duty to provide a service and must be very clear of circumstances in which it is decided to suspend or cease to provide the service.

Managers may also find that they have to exercise discretion in a situation where the relationship between a client and an employee seriously deteriorates for whatever reason. A manager's handling of any re-allocation arrangements will need to be sensitive to the employee's reaction, which may well be a sense of professional failure.

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○ **Working Untypical Hours**

Employees should not be asked to work alone outside normal hours unless it is essential.

All employees should have made appropriate travelling arrangements. Where necessary, the provision of a taxi may be considered in appropriate cases, as determined by the risk assessment for the task in question.

It may be worth considering that employees who must make visits at night be supplied with a two-way radio or mobile phone. Alternatively, staff should be instructed to make regular telephone calls to an agreed base. In either case, the supervisor would have to assess the feasibility of setting up an 'on call' rota. The

risk assessment will be the main determinant of any control measures that are required.

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- **Cash handling**

The risks of staff of handling cash, even in small amounts, should be considered and appropriate measures taken to reduce these risks so far as is reasonably practicable. These include adopting safe, secure working procedures and appropriate security measures, such as varying the time and route when taking cash to the bank, two people taking cash for banking etc

The procedure should also cover security and safety when cash is in transit and at its collection points. The advice of the local Crime Prevention Officer should be sought as appropriate.

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- **Information & Training**

Information and/or training should be provided that is suitable for employees who could be exposed to violent situations to inform them of how to spot the early signs of aggression, and either avoid it or cope with it. Employees also need to fully understand any system set up for their protection. The County Council has an E-learning courses dealing with Personal Safety and [Dealing with Challenging and Dissatisfied Customers](#), on the Learning Zone Training for managers and employees in dealing with violence, racism or sexism at work issues may also be available through the Learning & Development Team.

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust, 14 East Sheen Avenue, London SW14 8AS (0171038201839) is a charity aiming to increase awareness of danger in the workplace, providing free booklets on personal protection and techniques for coping with the results of violence. Trade Unions are also a source of information as well as Police Crime Prevention Officers.

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- **Use of reasonable force**

Employees should be made aware of the general position on the use of force in particular circumstances:-

- a) **Self-Defence**

Physical restraint should only be used in self-defence when it is impossible to back-off, or in the defence of others who may be under attack. Such force should be reasonable in the circumstances, in that physical restraint should be the least force sufficient to restrain the person and should seek to avoid injury.

- b) **Eviction of Abusive Person(s)/Demonstrators**

Employees should be told that if abusive person(s) or demonstrators will not leave when repeatedly requested to do so, then no physical attempt should be made to evict them, and that the Police should be called to deal with the situation.

c) Detention of Intruder/Suspected Thief

Only appropriately trained employees should attempt to detain an intruder or suspected thief by physical restraint, and then only if there is a very strong reason for believing that the person concerned is involved in a theft from County Council premises or vehicle(s).

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- **Recording and Reviewing**

Managers should record the significant findings of the risk assessment and any action decided upon. The County Council provides a Risk Assessment pro forma for this purpose, which can be found at [Intranet / Schools Portal](#).

The risk assessment should be reviewed regularly to check that it still is a true reflection of the current situation and that the actions taken are working. A review should always take place following an incident or where there are any significant changes to the situation.

This can be done by consulting employees and by looking at incident records. If the actions are not working, managers should add further measures or change the existing ones. It is particularly important to review the assessment if the job changes or if a violent incident occurs.

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