

VIOLENCE AT WORK

Physical Environment, Main Offices

As funds permit, the Local Authority will move towards a situation where staff at office locations will work within a "haven" from which clients will be excluded (Clients being defined as members of the public for whom the Authority provides a service). Whilst the Council strives to be accessible to the public they also have a responsibility to ensure the safety of their employees.

All future building projects involving interview rooms and/or reception areas should consider the following;

- A desk / counter at a suitable height and width to prevent anyone from leaning over and touching the member of staff;
- A canopy above the reception desk/counter which would restrict someone trying to jump over the desk/counter
- Toughened / safety glass
- Panic alarms (see separate guidance)
- Loose items, which could be used as missiles/weapons by irate members of the public e.g. hot drinks, fire extinguishers, brochure holders, hole punches. These should be either relocated e.g. on the staff members side of the counter where they would not be accessible to the member of public or fixed securely.
- Good lighting
- Comfortable temperatures
- Appropriate reading material/display boards
- Working practices are to ensure that waiting times are kept to a minimum and an explanation is given for delays.
- CCTV may need to be considered.

Interview rooms should have the following features:

Two doors, one for the public opening into the reception area and one for the staff which will allow them to escape into the "haven" and which can easily be locked behind them.

A desk / counter at a suitable height and width to prevent anyone from leaning over and touching the member of staff.

Chairs for use by the staff must glide smoothly over the floor to allow staff freedom of movement if they feel threatened, items which could potentially be used as a weapon should not be kept within the interview rooms;

Doors should be fitted with vision panels to allow visibility into the room.

Panic Alarms

Interview rooms and reception counters will be fitted with panic buttons, which will sound in the staff area. Where appropriate, arrangements will be made for a member of staff to seek further assistance when the panic alarm is sounded.

All panic buttons will be positioned strategically so staff can easily activate them if required.. The alarm will sound remotely in appropriate areas where it is likely that there will be staff able to assist.

Staff within the premises must be trained to respond to activation of the panic alarm and provide appropriate assistance.

The response time from activation of the alarm should not exceed 30 seconds.

Testing

All panic buttons will be tested weekly. A record of the testing will be entered in the logbook provided for this purpose. The Office Manager or nominated person (normally the custodian/caretaker) at each office will be responsible for seeing that this testing is carried out. Occasional drills will be carried out by the Health & Safety Manager to gauge the response of staff to the sounding of the panic alarm. Where necessary, training will be given to ensure that staff can differentiate between panic alarms and other alarms.

Physical environment, other work places

There are many other places where staff work other than the main offices, i.e. Museums, Parks, Depots, the Bus Stations, Car Parks, Public Halls and Public Conveniences.

The Health & Safety Manager will be consulted about all proposals for construction and alteration of such places and the safety of staff, bearing in mind the risks involved.

Specific working procedures for these places will be devised by managers and discussed and agreed with the Health & Safety Manager.

Meeting clients in our offices

Reception - receptionists are the first point of contact between staff and visitors to our offices, and therefore, must:

- Familiarise themselves with the names and addresses on the Register. (See Page C-3)
- Obtain the name and preferably the address of all persons seeking an interview with a member of staff.

When the **receptionist** is aware that the person in reception is one of the following then, they must warn the officer coming to reception.

- On the Register. (See Page C-3)
- Under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Angry.

Conducting Interviews

There are separate guidelines for the use of each interview room/reception area. Officers should be issued with a copy of and familiarise themselves with the guidelines for any area in which they may be asked to work.

Officers must not bring clients into offices themselves. The security door system is installed to prevent the public from entering this working area.

There will be occasions when despite their best efforts to provide clients with care and consideration, the degree of verbal abuse being received by staff exceeds their personal tolerance threshold. Under these circumstances staff are permitted to terminate interviews (face to face or on the telephone). Termination of interviews under these circumstances must be reported to a senior officer in writing.

Meeting clients away from the offices

The Local Authority accept that visiting clients in their homes, on building sites or in any of the other numerous situations in which staff find themselves, is inherently more risky than meeting them in the relatively controlled environment of its offices. In recognition of this fact, all staff that carry out this type of work should be given a full day's training undertaken by an experienced consultant.

In addition, the following procedures will apply to all staff whenever they leave the offices to meet a client:

- Mobile phones - Although a mobile phone is of no use if a VAW incident is in progress, it does however enable staff to keep their work place informed of progress and changes to itinerary. Additionally, if they should be trapped in their car, this would enable them to summon help. All staff will be offered this facility when they are meeting clients away from their office base.
- Itinerary logging - All departments will operate a log system to keep track of staff out of the office on site or home visits. A duty officer will be appointed who will be responsible for regularly checking that staff have not gone missing. In particular, the duty officer will ensure that all staff are accounted for at the end of each working day.
- Departments will make such additional arrangements as are appropriate where staff regularly carry out home or site visits out of hours.
- No officer will visit, unaccompanied, a name or an address which appears on the Register.
- Whenever there is a matter to be discussed that is likely to cause distress or resentment, careful consideration will be given for the need of a two persons visit.

The Register

The Council maintains a Register of names and addresses of members of the public who pose a threat to staff. The purpose of this Register is to disseminate information known only to one group of staff throughout the Authority (including ARP), so that staff are aware of the potential dangers when meeting these people.

The Health & Safety Manager will update the Register on a regular basis, with advice from the Data Protection Officer on how the register should be managed.

The Register consists of the names and addresses of and reported information about people who fall into one of the following categories:

- They have assaulted an officer of the Council or a member of their family.
- They have threatened to assault an officer of the Council or a member of their family.
- We have received information from a reputable source (usually the police) that extreme care should be taken when dealing with them.
- They have made unfounded allegations of a serious nature against an officer of the Council.
- They have caused damage to property.

Every entry on the Register must be backed up by a written report signed or countersigned by a senior officer (normally on General Reporting Form). The Health & Safety Manager (or his deputy in his absence) is the only person authorised to make additions to the Register.

Access to the information held on the Register is restricted to those who need to see it.

When amendments are made to the Register, those that have access to the register will automatically be notified.

NOTE: No hard copies of the register are to be made.

The register will be reviewed annually, to determine which names if any should be removed and the relevant managers consulted.

Incidents and Incident Reporting

If it is believed by a member of staff that a member of the public poses a threat and is being redirected from one department to another, it is imperative that the staff in that department are forewarned of such a threat by the quickest possible means (by face to face or telephone).

If it is believed that the member of the public concerned poses a potential threat to Council staff in the future and their name is not already on the Register, the Health & Safety Manager should be notified immediately by telephone.

All incidents must be reported promptly (General Reporting Form). The Health & Safety Manager will investigate every incident, with relevant managers/supervisors and staff.

The Police must be summoned if a member of staff is physically attacked.

If the incident is serious, e.g. a physical assault is involved or the member of staff is traumatised, the section head should immediately inform the Health and Safety Manager who will advise on the support to be provided to the member of staff involved. The Authority will provide professional counselling in appropriate cases.

The Crown Prosecution Service will normally prosecute offenders where there is sufficient evidence. Following serious incidents, where the CPS takes no action, the case will be referred to the Head of Legal Services. Provided that there is sufficient evidence, which may lead to a reasonable chance of success, the Authority will undertake a private prosecution on behalf of the member of staff who has been assaulted. To assist in this process, the Health & Safety Manager will normally arrange for the taking of statements from staff and witnesses, in addition to any statements taken by the Police.

Internal recommended safe working practices

A senior member of staff shall be told of any interview with a potentially violent person or when the subject matter could cause distress or resentment. Consideration should be given to the person most suitable to conduct the interview and the need to have a colleague present.

Although a member of public may appear to be aggressive (in which case the interview should not be started until the person is calmer) this can be relieved by providing a helpful response.

Staff should be aware of "early warning" signs of violent behaviour. Should violence become imminent the officer should alert colleagues by using the panic button and/or leave the room and report to a senior member of staff. If an act of violence is committed without warning, colleagues must be made aware of the situation immediately by whatever means is appropriate, e.g. panic button, shouting.

If the panic alarm is activated or a colleague obviously needs help, response should be immediate and assistance called for. Remember, even if you cannot offer physical support, your very appearance may be enough to defuse the situation; you should also raise the alarm and alert other staff.

External recommended safe working practices

When a home or site visit is required and the interviewee is known to be potentially violent or the subject matter is so contentious it is likely to cause distress and resentment, the interviewer should be accompanied by a colleague.

It is NOT suggested that this should be the norm because a one to one interview is likely to be more effective and the presence of a second person could be counter productive. It may be feasible, in contentious situations, for the person to be offered an interview in an office where better control measures are in place.

Departments should maintain a log of staff on home or site visits during office hours, showing the time of appointment, the name and address of the interviewee and expected time of return. Consideration should be given to appointing a "duty officer" to make sure that, all staff are accounted for during office hours.

Staff conducting home visits after office hours should notify the "duty officer" or adopt the "Guardian Angel" system as per instruction 14 lone workers.

Visiting or inspecting premises

All staff should follow the following guidelines when visiting or inspecting premises:

- Ensure your whereabouts is known;
- Park your car out of immediate sight;
- If the interviewee is aggressive from the outset, do not enter the property, conduct the interview on the doorstep or suggest that you return later;
- When inside allow the interviewees to proceed you into rooms, specifically invite him/her to do so;
- If there is a dog then ask the interviewee to lock it up;
- State your intentions clearly;
- Do not speak in jargon; make sure that you are understood;
- Do not continue taking notes if the interviewee becomes aggressive;
- Do not attempt to pacify an aggressive interviewee, Leave immediately without explanation.

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