Lone working guidance

This procedure forms part of the Council's Health and Safety Policy and is designed to assist when considering the risks involved with lone working. Lone working is defined as those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision.

The general duties placed on employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare at work of all employees including a safe system of work for all workers incorporates lone workers to ensure that any lone working activities under Council control do not endanger others not in their employment. The Council recognises that lone working is necessary to facilitate some services.

Overview of Lone Working

Whilst lone workers may face increased risk to their safety and security, and it is imperative that adequate systems are designed to offer them adequate protection; it is equally important that these risks are not over emphasised thereby creating an unnecessary fear amongst staff that is disproportionate to the reality of the risks faced. It is important that lone working systems, whether procedural or physical, are designed based on fact and that readily available analytical tools are utilised to help identify measures necessary for lone workers protection i.e. Police Force Crime Statistics Web Sites, incident reports etc.

Risk assessment

Risk assessments should consider any lone working aspect of an activity being assessed. Consideration of the lone working elements of the task should include the identification of associated hazards with particular consideration being given to:

- the remoteness or isolation of the location where the work is to be carried out
- the needs of the service user(s)
- the environment or working conditions (e.g. abnormal and hazardous conditions, unhygienic or isolated conditions, poor lighting, animals on scene) in which the work is to be carried out
- ability to communicate, in particular to summon assistance
- the possibility of violence, including alcohol or drug related
- driving, including carrying equipment between locations
- travelling at night
- travelling in dangerous weather conditions
- consideration of any vulnerability of staff member (e.g. expectant mother, women, inexperienced, young workers or those with an underlying medical condition)
- the anticipated "worst case" scenario (e.g. assessments under Mental Capacity Act where the situation could suddenly change on scene).

Dynamic Risk assessment

Dynamic risk assessment is a term used when the situation in which risk arises changes and consists of on the spot decision-making; it is not a replacement for the systemic assessment of risk arising from the activities of Council staff.

Lone working staff need to remain alert to the situation they are in. Warning signs allow staff to consider all the facts to make a personal risk assessment and, therefore, a judgement as to the best course of action (for example, to continue with their work or to withdraw). At no point should the lone worker place themselves, their colleagues or their patients/service users at risk or in danger.

General Control Measures

Control measures introduced to manage the risks lone workers may be exposed to must include instruction, training, supervision and / or protective equipment in that hierarchical order. Lone workers should be at no more risk than other workers. Therefore, the risk factors which relate specifically to lone workers must be assessed by employers and appropriate action taken to reduce the risks.

Whatever system you introduce based on the findings of the risk assessment must meet the needs of those undertaking the task.

Risk assessments should go through the agreed process for consultation, review and monitoring in line with the guidance on risk assessment.

Know the risks:

- put your own personal safety first, then others
- know how to, and be prepared to, call for help if you get into difficulty (have emergency contact numbers on speed dial) if there is an emergency
- avoid putting yourself or other people at risk
- avoid escalating violence or threats of violence — wherever possible walk away if you feel threatened in any way, keep out of trouble by avoiding confrontation
- try to put yourself in a position where you can escape from where you are
- follow people into their homes, this reduces the likelihood of a door being locked behind you
- be aware of peoples' body language, including the impact your body language may have on others
- if you are concerned about your safety or anyone else's inform your line manager
- let others know you have arrived where needed and returned safely
- know how to use communications equipment and alarms
- make sure the communication equipment you may have is operating adequately, fully charged and tested regularly
- report any problems through the incident reporting system

Managers should ensure:

- lone workers have full knowledge of the hazards and risks they are exposed to
- lone workers know what to do if something goes wrong
- someone else knows the whereabouts of lone workers and whether the activity being undertaken is particularly hazardous
- the appropriate level of supervision and contact as determined by the risk assessment
- emergency arrangements should be in place to protect or assist lone workers in the event of fire, accident or illness or an incident of violence
- lone workers should receive appropriate training including, conflict resolution training (CRT) and equipment as determined by the risk assessment, to ensure they are competent and able to deal with reasonably foreseeable problems
- Consider safety devices such as panic alarms, mobile phones, lone worker devices (e.g. Bold)

Employees should:

- do all they can to ensure their own safety and that of colleagues
- attend any relevant training before entering a lone working situation

- ensure that planned whereabouts is easily obtainable (e.g. by ensuring online calendar is up to date). This is especially important when undertaking a visit that might be higher risk
- make sure that your manager or someone else in your team knows how to contact you
- keep your emergency contact details up to date
- conduct proper planning prior to a visit including identifying any pre-existing risk assessments, apply control measures and utilise continual dynamic risk assessment during a visit
- properly utilise all provided technology
- report all incidents even where they consider it to be a minor incident, including 'near misses' to enable appropriate follow up action to be taken

Safety in the Community: Home Visits

All visits require a risk assessment to be completed, departmental checklists can be helpful to ensure consistency when considering risks. When planning home visits consider the following:

- is a home visit necessary? Could the person be interviewed on Council premises?
- what intelligence is available to inform the risks associated with the home visit? Intelligence could be about previous incidents, colleagues experience, likely occupants, safer times of the day etc
- follow people into their homes rather than enter before them – reducing the risk of them locking the door behind you and preventing easy exit
- could it be a joint visit with a colleague or with partner agencies
- consider whether the visit needs police presence (e.g. child removal / mental health assessments, previous information about violence)
- is there a possibility of a service user's relative or friend being present which may add to the risk - try to check this out beforehand
- establish effective contact/tracking arrangements and procedures in place if an emergency arises
- do not go into a person's home if they appear to be drunk or ill etc. unless you have another colleague with you, and you both deem it safe to enter
- when visiting an unknown building check out the layout and exit, try to sit near an exit route. Be aware of potential weapons
- ask that pets are kept out of the room
- think about where you sit, plan your exit
- if the person you are visiting/anyone else present starts to get abusive/ aggressive then leave immediately

Give full consideration that during Mental Health Act assessments the situation can be very dynamic. Although an Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) e.g. Social Worker may go into an assessment as part of a team they are frequently then left alone whilst arrangements for a bed, and/or ambulance are made. The AMHP should ensure they remove themselves from the property/vicinity if they assess threat is present or their personal risk has increased. Appropriate assistance or advice should then be sought e.g. police, AMHP manager.

Safety in the community: travelling by car

In the course of work staff may have to make journeys in their car alone. The information given below is intended to give practical guidance on how to reduce the possible dangers that may occur whilst driving alone:

- do not give lifts to strangers or accept lifts from a stranger in the event of breakdown / collision
- always lock doors and open windows minimally when driving alone, particularly at night and in isolated areas
- when parking, face the car the way you intend to leave
- when parking at night, park near a streetlight and as close to the service user's home as possible
- allow enough time for your journey if you are driving, so you minimise risk taking
- always lock away any valuables out of sight in the boot
- never leave the car unlocked or the ignition key in it when it is unattended
- when returning to the car, always have the door key ready. It is better not to stand by the car searching for the key
- if you see an incident or someone tries to flag you down, think first. Is it genuine? How would you best help? It might be safer and also more helpful and practicable to report what you have seen using your mobile phone
- if you believe you are being followed, keep calm and continue driving to a busy place e.g. garage, police station etc. where help could be available. If necessary, draw attention to yourself by sounding your horn
- if other drivers or vehicle occupants try to attract attention e.g. indicating a fault with your vehicle, ignore them and avoid eye contact
- if a car pulls in front of you and causes you to stop NEVER turn off the engine. If the driver or passenger approaches: reverse as far as is safely possible and ensure doors and windows are locked. If necessary, draw attention to yourself e.g. by sounding the horn

When travelling on foot or using public transport:
- think ahead, be alert and be aware of your surroundings
- keep to busy, well-lit roads and avoid poorly lit or quiet underpasses
- avoid carrying valuables (i.e. excessive amounts of cash or expensive jewellery, laptops)
- always sit near the bus driver on a driver-only bus or stay downstairs
- if possible, wait for the bus at a busy stop that is well lit, or a bus stop close to area of activity - for example, a garage or a late shop
- have the fare ready, separate from other money or valuables
- try to avoid having hands full with heavy bags

Incident Reporting and investigation
Staff should report all incidents and near misses, including incidents of violence and aggression that occur, in line with the Council's reporting procedures.

Consideration should be given to whether information about the incident needs to be shared with others through a warning flag or similar.

Consideration should be given to whether a debrief is needed and how to practically arrange that. Ongoing support can be sought through the Occupational Health service.

Consideration should be given to reporting incidents of violence and aggression to the police.

Incidents should be investigated in line with the investigation procedures.

References, Supporting Documentation and Further Information.

Lone workers: how employers should protect them; HSE

Protecting lone workers: how to manage the risks of working alone (INDG73)

Lone workers – your health and safety; HSE

Suzy Lamplugh Trust (www.suzylamplugh.org)

Useful Links

HSE online:- www.hse.gov.uk

HSE books:- www.hsebooks.co.uk