Central Bedfordshire Council			Health and Safety Guidance	
Reference Number	**G05**	**Links to Policy:** Lone working and Violence and Aggression Policy	**Date** June 2010	**To be Reviewed** June 2011
Guidance Title	**Lone Working and Violence and Aggression Risk Reduction Measures**			

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Version	Date Approved	Changes	Reason for Alterations
1		Original	

1. Application

This guidance applies to all working environments within the Council where lone working applies and/or there is a risk of aggressive or violent behaviour.

2. Introduction

This guidance gives examples of the risks 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.

3. Guidance
A. The Workplace

Public Access

Some areas of Council buildings and grounds need to be open to the public. However, uncontrolled access to all areas may expose staff to unnecessary risk. During a risk assessment managers should give consideration to the working environment to determine whether this presents any risks by its design or layout and how these risks could be resolved by;

- Careful positioning of entrances
- Good 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 to staff and followed at all times. It is important that a proper routine is maintained to avoid possible confusion and delays leading to frustration and aggravation. Reception staff should 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 design reception areas to be light, clean, airy, cheerfully decorated, have a comfortable room temperature and not be subject to excessive noise. Comfortable chairs should be provided for visitors to sit on and attention should be paid to the need for soft toys for children to play with and reading material supplied for visitors.

If money is handled, managers should consider the most appropriate place for this to be carried out

Pictures which are firmly fixed to walls and plants in fixed containers are less easy to use as weapons.

The potential for violence can be reduced by;

- Receiving all customers courteously and treating them professionally and with dignity;
- Ensuring that any people kept waiting are informed of any delays, reasons for the delays and how long they can be expected to wait; and
- Avoid loud music and provide people who are waiting with something to do such as something to read.
- Objects that could easily be used as a weapon, e.g. scissors should never be accessible.

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

- Screens or security glass at reception desks. But remember that screens and other obstacles may impair communication and make the situation worse. In many instances, wider desks or counters are a less provocative way of distancing staff from potentially violent people.
- 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 staff must know what to do should they hear the alarm.

Where offices have the facility for visitors to attend meetings with staff the reception should be able to access information efficiently and quickly so that visitors can be dealt with promptly. Where delays are inevitable, 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.

Offices are advised to display the Council Customer Service charter outlining the Policy on Violence and Aggression on Council premises.

Interview Rooms

Interview rooms should be made welcoming to put service users/visitors at ease and should be carefully laid out and used to ensure that the risk of violence against staff is minimised whilst maintaining the need for privacy. Managers should consider the following;

- Rooms to be used for interviews/meetings should be in a busy (not isolated) area of the building and they should have a vision panel in the door (or some other way of observing the room from outside).
- Furniture and fittings should be selected which are difficult to use as weapons.
- The ease with which staff can escape. Where rooms are fitted with an escape route, staff should sit next to this. NB Where there is no escape route staff should try to ensure that when interviewing they do not stand or sit in a situation which leaves them vulnerable in the event of an attack. In this respect, 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 service user. Also, staff should sit between the service user and the door to maintain a clear escape route if required.
- 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/meeting rooms in offices should be fitted with a readily accessible panic button or panic strip for use in emergencies. Correspondingly, each office manager will ensure there is a clearly laid down and agreed procedure of response. The room in which an alarm bell is situated must always be staffed when the interview room is in use.

Intruders

Members of staff who encounter potential intruders on their work premises should;

- Approach the person without blocking their exit route. Members of staff should ensure that the person can freely leave the premises at any time and on no account should they 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 person should not be approached by an individual member of staff 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 the person in pairs.
- If a member of staff does not feel confident enough to question a potential intruder they shall inform the premises manager, or the deputy immediately of the person's presence. They would 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 the person to be seen notified.

Building Access

Where staff are key holders a risk assessment must consider the information required by the staff member to carry out this activity in as safe a manner as possible. Staff must have knowledge of the premises layout, alarm systems, locking and unlocking procedures and any emergency procedures.

Where keyholders are called out "out-of-hours" a risk assessment and written safe working procedure must be in place identifying and hazards and outlining any required control measures (e.g. two people may need to be present)

B. Travel and Transport

Consideration should be given to how the staff will travel to and from appointments or between locations during working time where this may present a risk to them.

Use of public transport

- Where possible staff should wait for transport at a busy stop or station that is well lit.
- Advise staff to sit near the driver of the vehicle or in an aisle seat.
- Staff should make themselves familiar with the emergency alarm on the vehicle and sit near it.
- Travelling staff should avoid empty upper decks on buses or empty train compartments.
- If threatened by other passenger/s staff must always inform the driver or guard and report incidents to managers.

Use of vehicles

- Items such as bags, cases CDs or other equipment should never be left visible in a car.
- Staff should be advised to hold the vehicle keys in their hand when leaving premises in order to avoid looking for them outside which could compromise personal safety.

- The inside and outside of the vehicle should be checked for possible intruders before entering.
- Once inside the vehicle all doors should be locked especially when travelling at slow speed and when stopped at traffic lights.
- Staff should always try to park as close as possible to the location being visited.
- At night, parking should be in a well lit area and facing the direction in which they are leaving.
- When driving, especially after dark drivers must not stop even for people who may appear to be in distress or requiring help. Stop as soon as is practicable and safe to do so and contact the emergency services as appropriate.
- If staff are being followed or if in doubt as to whether they are being followed, they are advised to drive to the nearest police station or manned and lit building such as a petrol station to request assistance.
- Using the car horn to attract attention can summon help if needed.
- In the event of a breakdown, where it is a safe to do so staff should 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

- Where staff may travel on foot, planning a route beforehand to avoid going through underpasses or taking short cuts through areas which may be less safe is advised (e.g. parks especially after dark.)
- Staff should walk briskly if possible and physically able to do so and do not stop in areas that are unknown, for example to look at a map or ask for directions. Instead they should go to a 'safe' place such as a petrol station or shop and ask for directions.
- If staff think they are being followed, they must trust their instincts, crossing the street and heading for a busy area may provide more reassurance of safety.
- Minimise potential street crime by not using mobile phones overtly in any area. 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.
- Staff should always remain alert to people around them and stay in the centre of the footpath facing oncoming traffic
- Carry the minimum amount of luggage and if possible bags should be held under the arm with the clasp close to the body.
- Awareness of the surroundings is essential and making sure you can see and hear if someone is behind and shouting to you is important.
- If someone attempts to steal belongings or County Council property staff should relinquish the property immediately without challenge.
- Keeping house keys and mobile phone separate from handbags should be considered.
- 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 staff.

Use of Taxis
- Wherever possible a taxi should be booked in advance from a reputable company.
- If no taxi has been booked staff should go to the office of a reputable taxi company or go to a recognised rank to hail a cab.
- Advise never to use an unlicensed mini cab.
- Safety organisations advise that passengers should sit in the back behind the driver's seat and have a mobile phone readily accessible
- Staff must not give out personal information to the driver.

Cycling
- When cycling avoid unlit areas and quiet roads
- Secure bicycle near premises in a well lit area if possible.
- Always hold the bicycle lock keys handy when leaving the premises in order to avoid looking for them outside which could compromise personal safety.
- 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 someone attempts to steal a bicycle staff should relinquish it immediately without challenge.

C. Knowledge of the job/location or service user

When carrying out work alone it is important that staff have been made aware of all information about the job to be done, the location and (if necessary) and the service user(s) involved. Staff should have read and understood any guidelines and procedures which are in place aimed at controlling the risks to health and safety.

General points of note:
- The risk assessment for any job may need to consider specific issues such as potential for violence or where lone working may not be carried out because of physical hazards.
- Managers must identify these jobs and implement safe working procedures before the activity takes place. Examples of this may include; work at height; the use of certain chemicals; the use of machinery or vehicles; ccarrying money or valuables and cconfined space working.
- Consideration may need to be given to doubling-up for some jobs, 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 required and must be competent to use any materials or equipment required.
- Staff should let colleagues and managers know where they are during the working day. The use of work diaries and information boards to show the location staff during the day can be a useful tool.
- Where tasks are identified as requiring more than one person to complete them staff must be made aware of this via the risk assessment process. For example, managers may define that working at height must be carried out when two or more staff are present and not by a lone worker or access to the home of a named service user may require 2 or more staff to be present.
- 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.

Knowledge of the service user/client(s)

- Where a service user, job or location has a history of incidents, sharing experiences and concerns between employees within an organisation and between other relevant organisations is essential. These should be formally recorded and shared via the appropriate communication channels.
- This information must be made available to staff or other agencies likely to have contact with the service user.   Staff must check the information system as a matter of course, making sure the information is accurate, updated and removed as necessary.
- 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.
- When visiting the homes of service users, complainants or persons being investigated, any historical information about the service user or their circumstances which may be relevant to the staff member must be communicated.
- Any hazards present in the location being visited must be recorded and passed onto the staff member e.g. dogs on the premises.
- Any known hazards relating to the client or their family e.g. any previous history of violence or aggression or behaviour triggers, must be recorded and assessed prior to the visit.
- Where staff see or hear something which makes them feel threatened they should leave the premises as soon as possible.

The location

- 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.

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.
- Staff working at weekends or very late at night must ensure that all windows and doors are secured to prevent unauthorised access.
- There must be access to a telephone and first aid equipment for staff working alone.
- There should be an agreed system in place to alert colleagues in an emergency.

D. Working Practices and Patterns

General
Working methods should be regularly reviewed and risk assessments carried out to determine the levels of risk and the precautions that should be taken.

- Managers who set staffing levels need to ensure there are always enough suitably trained staff to cope with any foreseeable risks.
- Staff should be made aware that they need not hesitate to withdraw from a situation which is causing them discomfort or harm and call for help.

Home or Site Visits
- When staff are visiting or seeing service users away from the base all staff must be aware of this through diary or other systems.
- When staff are to meet a service user who is either unknown to themselves or the service for the first time, the following action should be taken;
    - Arrange an initial meeting at the office base if appropriate.
    - If the person is already a council service user and known by the service 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.
- 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.
- Portable alarms should be available on request.
- Mobile phones should be available on request for staff use when visiting at night or outside office hours, or when circumstances require it.
- 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.

During a home visit
- 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.
- If staff feel that there is a risk of harm on arriving they should not to enter the house and arrange for an alternative appointment.
- 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 staff must avoid being in a situation where the service user/relative is between them and the exit.

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.

Escorting patients/service users
- Where there are known risks or identified potential risks about a service user location or type of work consideration should be given to the most appropriate mode of transport based on a risk assessment.
- It may not be appropriate for a lone worker to drive, unless in an emergency and alternative arrangements may need to be made.

Cash handling

The Council has general systems for safeguarding employees dealing with cash and ensuring the security of cash.
By virtue of their work, some staff are required to handle cash and therefore specific guidelines and advice must be available and communicated to staff on how this may be done safely.
- If any member of staff is threatened with violence while carrying money, they must never put themselves at risk.
- Sensible precautions will minimise the risk of theft or robbery;
    o Avoid setting patterns which others can discern. Ensure routes, parking and timing are varied as much as possible.
    o Provide means for keeping cash out of sight. If staff must handle change, provide them with a separate, small float.
    o Ensure confidentiality. Members of staff should never discuss that they carry or collect cash.
    o Staff must be informed that their safety is more important than money and if threatened they should hand over the cash.

Threats to personal or council property
If violence is directed solely at property, staff are not expected to put themselves at risk to protect it. Consideration should be given as to whether it is appropriate to call the Police when property is targeted.

Interviews/Telephones

Where staff are being subject to verbal abuse from a service user that offends them, either face to face or by telephone, they should inform the person that they will withdraw from the interview/telephone conversation immediately. Should this fail to have the desired effect, then staff should withdraw and inform their Manager accordingly. If necessary, subsequent calls from that service user can then be diverted to another member of staff.

Malicious calls

Staff may receive malicious or nuisance telephone calls. In the majority of cases these calls only happen once, however, there are occasions when these calls become repetitive and are sometimes directed at one particular member of staff. 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; simply place the handset down and terminate the call.
- If the calls are silent don't attempt to coax the caller into speaking; just replace the handset gently if no-one speaks.
- Don't ever give out any details about yourself, your family or other employee unless you are absolutely sure you know and trust the caller.
- If a caller requests details about another member of staff they should be asked for their contact details so that they can be passed on to the member of staff concerned who will get in touch with them.
- Where members of staff identify that they are experiencing repeated malicious telephone calls they must inform their line manager who shall;
  - Report the malicious calls to the Police and obtain a crime number. Making malicious calls is a criminal offence.
  - Contact the BT Specialist Bureau on free phone 0800 661 441. Specially trained investigators will work with staff using their knowledge and experience to tackle the problem. In extreme cases they can also work with the Police to trace calls.
  - Make a record of the situation in accordance with the procedures laid down locally.

E. Offensive Weapons

"An offensive weapon means any article made or adapted for causing injury, or intended to cause injury."

It is important to remember that incidents involving offensive weapons are rare. Events of this nature can occur following a change in circumstances for the service users, for example, a change in their care provision, financial circumstances, health, family situation, environment or where enforcement action is being taken.
There are two main areas of risk;
1. Staff discovering offensive weapons in premises they are visiting or working in
2. Offensive weapons being used to threaten or intimidate staff

Staff discovering offensive weapons in premises they are visiting or working in must;
- Not move or handle offensive weapons under any circumstances even if it is suspected or they are informed that it is a replica.
- Not challenge the owner or occupant of the premises about the offensive weapon.
- Inform any accompanying staff or agencies about the presence and location of the offensive weapon.
- Inform their line manager immediately or when safe to do so.
- Leave the premises if they feel threatened.

Managers on receipt of information about offensive weapons must;

- Liaise with the police to obtain additional information about the offensive weapon and the appropriate action to be taken.
- Using the information obtained from the police to decide whether to approach the owner/family about the safety of 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 Swift, Flare systems).
- Initiate an individual risk assessment for the service user/ review and amend risk assessments as appropriate.
- Contact the Health and Safety Team if further advice and assistance is needed

F. Suitable lone worker protection systems

See annex C for appropriateness of systems for protection against risk.

The following are recognised lone working protection / monitoring systems:

<u>Out of office boards</u>
Staff are expected to log in / out on the board and informing their manager or another staff member their expected location, contact details and time of return. Staff are expected to update the board with details to inform their manager that they will be remaining in the building past normal office hours. This system only works if everyone operates the system and there is someone monitoring return at all times.

<u>Central Administrator</u>
A department may nominate a central administrator who keeps a log of appointments, which have a risk rating attached. Depending on the level of risk identified in the risk assessment on the visits, the person may have time to call into the central administrator at the end of an appointment, or the end of the day.

Protocols regarding the timescales for raising the alarm should be in place and all staff should be aware of them. This is down to the line manager to put in place.

Ensure staff sickness and holiday is taken into account and a contingency plan put into place.

<u>Buddy Systems</u>
Team members partner up and let each other know when they have arrived at appointments and when they are leaving. The "buddy" takes responsibility for contacting the other person if they have not signed in or out when expected and raising the alarm should the need arise.

There must be a protocol in place if the lone worker fails to check in at an agreed time or if they raise the alarm i.e. timescales for action.
Ensure staff holiday or sickness is taken into account and a contingency plan put into place.

Personal Attack Alarms

They are designed for personal use and emit a high frequency noise when set off. They are deterrents in nature and should only be used as part of a lone worker protection system.

Mobile Telephone

A mobile phone should never be relied on as the only means of communication. Lone Workers should always check the signal strength before entering into a situation, where they are alone. If there is no signal, the Lone Worker should contact their manager or colleague ahead of a visit, stating their location and the nature of their visit, along with an estimate of the time they think they will need to spend at the visit. Once that visit is completed they should let their manager or colleagues know that they are safe;

Emergency contacts should be kept on speed dial as this will speed up the process of making a call to raise an alarm.

The phone should never be left unattended but should be kept close at hand in case an emergency arises.

The use of a mobile phone could potentially escalate an aggressive situation and the Lone Worker should use it in a sensitive and sensible manner.

"Code" words or phrases should be agreed and used that will help Lone Workers convey the nature of the threat to their managers or colleagues so that they can provide the appropriate response, such as involving the police.

The mobile phone could also be a target for thieves, and great care should be taken to be as discreet as possible, whilst remaining aware of risks and keeping it within reach at all times.

CCTV

CCTV may be considered as measure to control the risk of violence against an individual's property or person and will only be determined if there is a serious risk. The level of risk will be considered and appropriate control measures determined through a robust risk assessment process involving input from the police.

Electronic lone worker system (Reliance)

To be worn around the neck and also used as an ID holder and are low key in nature. These systems in order to be effective have both Geo Positioning Systems (GPS), and mobile phone technology built in. The GPS will maintain a location to within a few meters (subject to signal i.e. not inside buildings). If activated by the user the mobile phone technology will allow a call center to monitor the situation. Once activated the monitoring center will carry out any actions that have been requested e.g. call Police and relevant manager following the escation procedures

Reliance offer a range of products which are competitively priced and have been agreed through procurement. These systems can be issued individually or a department can have a pool of the devices. It is vital that staff are trained on the use of these systems. The devices will be purchased through individual directorate budgets.

These systems are _very_ effective as part of a lone worker protection system.

Key Information - Managers should keep the following information on file for their employees who are lone workers.

- Contact number, including home, mobile and number for next of kin or people you live with.
- Car details, including make, model, colour and registration number.
- Medical Information, including any health issues that may affect you whilst lone working.
- Recent photograph should also be considered.

G. 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