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Violence at Work Policy

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1. INTRODUCTION

This policy has been produced in response to the requirements of Section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 which places a general duty on the Council as an employer to ensure the health, safety and welfare of its employees.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

2.1 The Council has a legal responsibility under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and recognises with concern, the vulnerability of employees to violence and aggression in the course of their work. The Council, treats this seriously and will act to prevent, wherever possible, such situations occurring and minimise the consequences of violence should it occur.

2.2 For the purpose of this policy, violence is defined thus:

'Violence Is Behaviour Which Produces Damaging and Hurtful Effects, Physically Or Emotionally On Other People'.

2.3 The above definition is not limited simply to physical assault but permits the inclusion of equally distressing and intimidating verbal aggression. Incidents arising from racial, sexual or religious harassment are also included. The definition also extends beyond the employees to include his or her colleagues or property and/or family.

2.4 It must be recognised that the guidelines set out in the policy cannot be fully comprehensive, particularly for an organisation such as the Council, where the range of duties and extent of public contact is so extensive. Therefore the extent to which these guidelines are implemented must depend on the degree of risk. An assessment of the risk is therefore necessary and arrangements for dealing with that risk must be put into affect.

2.5 The responsibility for implementing the requirements of this policy and for the preparation of an implementation strategy rests with each Director or Head of Service.

POLICY GUIDANCE

3. EMPLOYERS' RESPONSIBILITIES

- 3.1 The Council has a legal duty under Section 2 (1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of their employees. This duty extends to protecting employees from violence.
- 3.2 The Council is concerned about the possibility of violence to employees in the course of their work and will take reasonable steps to minimise the risk. It is important that employees who are at risk of violence and aggression, or actually experience it, feel valued and supported.
- 3.3 To this end, the Council will provide guidance, administrative procedures and information on the support available. This will be reinforced by a programme of training for appropriate employees in the prevention and management of violence and aggression.
- 3.4 The environment and working practices of employees, particularly those who are vulnerable will be monitored. Where necessary, suitable control measures will be identified and implemented within resource allocations, to ensure that the risk of violence is reduced and its effect mitigated.
- 3.5 A senior officer of each division must be designated to take responsibility for the overall monitoring and review of violence to employees.
- 3.6 The distress and shock caused to employees by an assault or threat of an assault including verbal abuse is acknowledged and employees will be given support where appropriate.
- 3.7 Managers and supervisors must consider the health and safety of employees when allocating and organising work.

4. EMPLOYEES' RESPONSIBILITIES

- 4.1 Employees have a legal duty under Section 7 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 to have regard for their own health and safety at work and for other people who may be affected by their actions.
- 4.2 This not only includes acting responsibly, but also following any competent instructions, information, etc. given to them in the interests of health and safety. It is the responsibility of all employees to recognise the contribution they can make to their own health and safety and that of other people through their professional practice and the exercise of personal responsibility.

5. RECEPTION AREAS

- 5.1 It must be recognised that many clients visit Council premises in a state of anxiety. They bring with them a problem or problems which are important to them and for which they seek a solution. It is essential that the reception facilities and the response by reception staff demonstrate security, comfort, caring and confidence to assist them to feel at ease, rather than to accentuate any tension they may be experiencing.
- 5.2 An improvement in the general standard of appearance of reception facilities should have high priority. Furniture and the state of decoration are important. But of equal importance when considering violence is the question of total design. Factors which should be considered include:
- visitors to reception should be received in a courteous and friendly atmosphere where they do not feel anonymous and where they do not lose their personal dignity
 - reception areas must be kept clean and comfortable and also be a pleasant looking place and where toilet facilities should be easily accessible. They should also be as private as possible and not a general meeting area for employees
 - where alarms are fitted employees in the building should know what is expected of them when the alarms are activated
 - all doors leading to the receptionist must be capable of being locked
 - no visitor should have access beyond the reception area without prior agreement. Consideration should be given to visitors being issued with identification and signing a register
 - if visitors come to see an employee, then in the event of delay, arrangements should be introduced to ensure that they are kept informed of the reason for the delay. Prolonged waiting with no indication of how long a visitor may be required to wait could provoke feelings of frustration and lead to a display of anger
 - visitors should be encouraged whenever possible to make prior arrangements before visiting the office
 - there should be no heavy objects such as ash trays or ornaments etc., lying around the reception area, as these could be used as a missile or weapon.

6. INTERVIEW ROOMS

- 6.1 Many of the observations made in connection with reception areas apply to interview rooms. They form an important part of the office facilities because, amongst other things, they provide an area of privacy in which employees and visitors can meet. This arrangement respects the right of visitors to privacy and confidentiality.
- 6.2 It is especially important, therefore, that the design of interview areas should ensure that employees are positioned in such a way that it is possible to make a hasty exit i.e. position interviewer closest to the door. Providing means by which interview rooms can be overviewed from outside, possibly through a window in the wall or door offers a further element of protection.
- 6.3 The following points must be borne in mind, particularly if violence is predicted:
- avoid seeing a visitor in the interview room on one's own, particularly if the visitor is 'known' previously to have a violent nature
 - observe the visitor at all times
 - sit or stand between the visitor and the door. This will enable employees to withdraw from a violent situation quickly
 - keep a reasonable distance between you and the visitor, i.e. desks should be large enough to distance the public and the employee
 - there should be no heavy objects such as ash trays or ornaments etc., lying around the interview room, as these could be used as a missile or weapon
 - call for assistance by shouting or using any alarm system provided, unless this is likely to prevent you controlling the situation. Where an alarm is fitted in the building employees should know what is expected of them if activated
 - withdraw from a violent situation if you are able
 - one employee should be designated to check all interview rooms at the end of each working day to ensure that no-one is left to interview alone.

7. OUTDOOR AND PERIPATETIC WORKERS

7.1 The potential for violence with employees who have to make visits in the community or isolated locations is greater than in a public place where there may be other people around to give assistance.

7.2 The following points need to be considered:-

- at least one office based employee should know the appointments of any employee outside the office. Consideration should be given to an 'office diary' being placed in each office and left in a conspicuous position
- a procedure should be introduced to check that at the end of each working day, all employees who have been out of the office have returned or have telephoned to state they have completed their calls without incident
- a closer liaison between each division and outside agencies (e.g. police etc.) is needed when dealing with members of the public with a history of violent behaviour. This closer liaison should improve the flow of information and prevent potential violent situations
- where violence is considered a possibility, then, if practicable, a member of the public should be seen in the office.

7.3 The potential for violence is greater in a client's home than in a public place therefore:

- if violence is considered a possibility, employees must check with other agencies, including the police, in order to obtain maximum information about the client
- preventative measures such as joint visiting and back-up procedures must be considered. Senior officers must be consulted in such cases
- employees must inform reception/senior officer of their whereabouts and their expected time of return to the office
- any arrangements to meet/visit a client with a known history of violent or aggressive behaviour must be discussed with senior officer beforehand
- where work is going on with a known aggressive client or family, information must always be shared with other colleagues who may be involved.

7.4 Transporting a client:

- do not make arrangements to transport a client unaccompanied when your better judgement suggests an escort is necessary. Be clear about the assistance you require and ask for it
- a client who is likely to be violent should not be carried in a car or other vehicle without proper supervision. When such a journey is necessary the advice of a senior officer must be sought to ensure that appropriate assistance is available for it. Also, arrangements should be agreed about vehicle details, the route and notification that the journey has been successfully completed
- the client should sit in the rear seat whenever possible
- the escort should also sit in the back, and behind the driver to minimise the risk of interference with the control of the vehicle
- if the car has rear doors, child proof locks may provide some further protection
- if, when transporting a client, the situation becomes volatile, stop the vehicle at the earliest opportunity. Do not proceed on the basis that you might reach your destination before trouble occurs.

8. POSSIBLE INDICATORS WHICH SUGGEST IMMINENT POTENTIAL VIOLENCE

8.1 All employees must be aware of indications, which suggest that a violent situation may arise. Signs which people project can often act as warnings of impending violent activities. These signs include:

- restless behaviour involving pushing, noisiness and jostling
- deliberately provocative conduct (e.g. name calling)
- a person being unnaturally quiet and withdrawn or, alternatively, excitable and boisterous. (a noticeable behavioural change from the norm)
- attention seeking conduct (if ignored)
- over sensitive reaction to correction or instruction
- a feeling of heightened tension
- threatening conduct, verbal abuse
- previous history of violent conduct

- person under the influence of alcohol, drugs or solvents
- tenseness or agitation
- voice pitch and volume may increase
- a person may reply to questions abruptly very often with gesticulations
- pupils may become dilated
- signs of muscular tension in the face and limbs.

8.2 However, never consider one sign in isolation. Always consider the entire situation.

9. HANDLING OF INCIDENTS (AVOIDANCE TECHNIQUES)

9.1 Guidelines can never cover every eventuality. The reality is that employees, whatever their level of responsibility or duties, must use their experience, skills and, above all, their common sense when faced with an aggressive and threatening person or group of persons. The following guidelines should assist:

- if possible warn clients in advance of any possible disappointments or problems
- try not to react to verbal abuse personally in order not to exacerbate the situation. Details of personal abuse must be recorded and passed to the manager/supervisor
- adopt a calm, reasoned and reassuring attitude. Try and signal non-aggression and try and be polite and objective. Speak calmly, quietly, slowly and firmly
- offer alternatives - agree to talk at a later date
- consider leaving the person alone, though do not ignore them completely. Let them know they are going to be left in peace
- explain you only represent the Council and that you are doing a job
- bear in mind information known about the particular person
- if a build-up exists, attempt to introduce a more familiar employee, or one not involved in the immediate conflict
- put a sizeable object e.g. table between potential assailant and yourself

- keep the door/escape route clear
- no provocation - straight discussion of the problem - do not engage in a row
- take a positive approach if possible. Remember that the person is probably feeling concerned and may be looking for ways out
- maintain distance and watch for sudden changes of response - do not threaten in any way
- disperse any onlookers
- carefully remove any potential weapons e.g. scissors, if they haven't already been removed pre-interview
- if threatened with a weapon, the assailant should be asked quietly but firmly, to put it down, but no attempt should be made to disarm the person
- avoid sudden moves and slow down your moves
- maintain eye contact
- don't encroach on the person's space
- if the situation escalates and control is being lost, call for assistance - withdraw
- if a person is damaging property, he/she should be left to get on with it.

10. WHEN VIOLENCE OCCURS

10.1 However good a manager is, whether precautions are taken, or whether procedures are established in the management structure, the possibility of violence, assault or threatening behaviour cannot be totally eliminated. This is particularly true when officers have to provide information or take action not to the liking of that person. Therefore:

- if an interviewing room or reception area is near an alarm, the alarm should be raised
- if attacked, an employee should attempt to break away and try to get furniture or equipment between himself/herself and the person. An employee should try to calm the person down by talking. Alternatively, it may be best to leave
- if a person is damaging property he or she should be left to get on with it, but an employee should try and move away from the situation - personal safety is always more important than property

- if, after a warning, the person continues to exhibit violent behaviour, reference should be made to the senior officer on duty with a view to calling the police
- if the person is carrying some kind of weapon, an employee should not forcibly attempt to take it away. An employee should avoid grappling and withdraw from the scene if possible
- if an employee finds him or herself in a position where the only effective remedy is the use of physical force to restrain another person it must be emphasised that only minimum and reasonable force may be used in order to calm and restrain the person involved.

11. ACTION TO BE TAKEN IMMEDIATELY AFTER ASSAULT OR AN ALLEGATION OF ASSAULT

11.1 An employee who has been assaulted or who is the subject of an allegation of an assault must report the incident to his/her manager as soon as possible and should, if they wish, contact their recognised trade union representative

Reporting Procedure:

- all incidents involving violence must be reported by completing a VIOLENCE AT WORK - INCIDENT REPORT FORM HS(V1) at the end of the policy. Copies of completed forms must be forwarded to the Health and Safety Adviser, Human Resources
- all completed forms will be treated with utmost confidentiality
- an assault or a threat of an assault may be reported to the police by any of:
 - the victim
 - manager after following divisional procedures
 - a third party who may have an interest in the matter or have been a witness
 - a combination of the above
- although the wishes of the victim may be taken into account, the Council has a responsibility to protect all its employees and will report a serious assault or threat of an assault where the circumstances warrant it
- the Council will consider initially, legal proceedings to protect employees where there is a connection between their work and any threats of, or actual physical assault

- if an incident, in the opinion of the Council does not warrant criminal prosecution, no objection will be raised to an employee making a formal complaint to the police or pursuing a civil action
- in certain circumstances, consideration will be given to assisting employees in pursuit of their claims. This assistance will be subject to the approval of the Council in each and every case
- apart from the in-house reporting procedures, on Form HS(V1), certain incidents involving violence must be reported to the Health and Safety Executive on Form F2508. Please refer to the Council's Policy (HS5) on the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences for full reporting details and procedures.

In The Event Of An Assault: Courses Of Action:

- employees who suffer shock or injury should obtain immediate medical attention
- where appropriate, employees will be referred to the Council's Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit as soon as practicable for a medical report
- decisions will have to be made on appropriate courses of action where employees have been assaulted. These actions will depend on the circumstances and whether violent behaviour or aggressive behaviour continues and presents an unacceptable risk to employees.

12. AFTER AN ATTACK

- it is often best for an employee to get back to work as soon as possible subject to medical fitness; he/she should not risk aggravating an injury and should not hesitate to consult his/her doctor. An employee should not return to work unless he/she feels able to do so
- an employee should draw his/her own lessons from the incident and learn by them; this does not mean that an employee has to dwell on any mistakes he/she made
- a victim's manager should aim to de-brief the employee as soon as possible after the attack. This has the dual function of obtaining valuable information and also making the victim feel (realistically) a useful part of the team again
- managers should not feel apprehensive to ask whether the employee wishes to go straight back to the same job as before. It should not be assumed that the employee wishes to transfer to another post

- every opportunity should be given to the victim to say what assistance he/she feels the Council might be able to offer to achieve a full recovery.

13. COUNSELLING

13.1 Incidents of violence and aggression can be very distressing. They can cause fear and apprehension, distress, anger, guilt and depression.

13.2 There may be a feeling of panic about dealing with the client in question again and a fear that other clients will also be violent. A sense of failure and loss of confidence may affect an employee's work for some time. It is essential that employees who have experienced violent or severely aggressive episodes should have speedy access to debriefing and counselling. This can cover both personal feelings and professional questions about the future management of a case.

This may be obtained:

- through other employees in the department who have been the victims of violence or aggression
- through an external counselling service
- employees of other divisions or voluntary organisations. A directory of individuals providing a counselling service must be established and employees will then have a choice in who they seek support from
- through the Council's Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit, Tel No. 01443 494003.

13.3 When discussing the assault or threat of assault with the manager, the victim may wish to be accompanied. Support and assistance should be made available to help the employee overcome the experience and the manager should discuss the options available with the employee.

14. TELEPHONE VIOLENCE

14.1 Although this does not involve physical violence, it can nevertheless be extremely disturbing for an employee.

14.2 If an employee is subjected to the above, they should:-

- tell the caller in a courteous tone to refrain from speaking in the manner which is causing the offence, or the receiver will be replaced
- if the caller continues, replace the receiver and discontinue the call

- inform the manager about the telephone call, giving the date, time and if possible, the name of the caller
- if the same caller rings back and continues to be abusive replace the receiver and inform the manager. If, however, the purpose of the call is to apologise then an employee should accept the apology, but still inform the manager
- records should be kept of all abusive calls.

15. **TRAINING**

Different employees face different risks. To enable precautions to be taken, there are a variety of training needs which will need to be addressed:

- to enable the employee to retain control in difficult and potentially dangerous situations and to take necessary steps to protect themselves
- to enable precautions to be taken to avoid harm to employees in the workplace and to support employees who suffer aggression or abuse in the workplace
- to raise employees awareness.

16. **RECORDS**

Maintaining records of known violent clients is essential. This will ensure that all referrals are assessed and only responded to in an appropriate manner and at a level, which that assessment indicates is necessary.

17. **PERSONAL ALARMS**

In some instances it may be necessary to provide employees with personal alarm systems e.g. cordless telephones, high pitched beepers, etc especially if they are operating in situations which are regarded as vulnerable to aggressive or violent behaviour. Whether or not these are provided will depend on the result of the risk assessment.

18. **ADVICE**

Advice on the implementation of the policy can be obtained from the Health & Safety Team, Human Resources, Tŷ Elai, Dinas Isaf Industrial Estate, Williamstown, CF40 1NY

Details of Assailant(s)		Witness(es)	
Name(s)		Name(s)	
Address(es)		Address(es)	
Age:		Age:	
Male/Female:		Male/Female:	
Other Details:		Other Details:	
Outcome			
Injury, Verbal Abuse, Anti-Social Behaviour, Damage to Personal/ Other Property? (Please state)			
Other Relevant Information			
Are you prepared to take legal action against your assailant?		Yes	No
Have you been counselled by your manager?		Yes	No
Do you wish to receive counselling?		Yes	No
Were the police called to the scene of the incident?		Yes	No
To your knowledge, do the police intend prosecuting your assailant?		Yes	No
Manager's Signature	Signature of Witness(es)	Signature of Victim	
.....	
Date:	Date:	Date:	

MANAGERS CHECKLIST

	✓ As Appropriate		
	N/A	Yes	No
• Has a risk assessment been carried out to determine those areas of work where employees are at risk?			
• Has action been taken as a result of the assessment, prioritising areas of greatest concern?			
• Are reception areas of good standard of appearance?			
• Are interview rooms designed so as to protect employees, so far as reasonably practicable, from violent situations arising?			
• Have safe systems of work been prepared for outdoor and peripatetic workers?			
• Are there procedures in place so that employees are fully aware of the 'indicators' (warning signs) to look out for?			
• Have employees been made aware of the action to take when violence occurs?			
• Have employees been informed of the reporting procedures to follow after an assault or allegation of an assault?			
• Have procedures been put into place whereby an employee, on return to work after an assault, is fully debriefed and that a counselling service is made available?			
• Will employees (dependant on the risk), receive training on how to deal with violent situations?			
• Are appropriate records being kept?			
• Depending on the risk, are personal alarms etc, being provided if employees are operating in situations regarded as vulnerable to aggressive or violent behaviour?			
• Are monitoring procedures in place to ensure that the requirements of the Policy are being met?			

Completed by: _____

Confirmed by: _____

Name: _____

Name: _____

Designation: _____

Designation: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____