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1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this procedure and associated guidance is to ensure that employees and others are not exposed to avoidable risks to their health and safety associated with violence or aggression arising in the course of the Council's activities.
- 1.2. Where violence or aggression is likely, the Council has a duty to minimise or eliminate the risks to health and safety.
- 1.3. Violence at work is defined as behaviour which produces physical or emotional harm.
- 1.4. This procedure has been the subject of consultation with Heads of Service and Trade Unions and has been ratified by the Council's Corporate Board.

2. Applicability

2.1. This procedure applies to:

- All non-school based employees working for the Council, including those working from home or at non-Council locations
- Other persons including Elected Members, Consultants, Agency staff and contractors working for the Council, external organizations working with the Council, whilst engaged on Council business.

2.2. It is the responsibility of each employee and other person named in section 2.1 to familiarise themselves with and adhere to this procedure.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1. The Head of Finance has overall responsibility for ensuring that the procedure is managed appropriately in accordance with these agreed standards.

3.2. The Risk and Safety Manager, in liaison with the Head of Human Resources is responsible for:

- Directing and reviewing this standard.
- Ensuring that there is effective consultation and communication on this procedure
- Publishing and promoting the adoption of this procedure and guidance.
- Ensuring the procedure and guidance complies with health and safety legislation and best practice.

3.3. Heads of Service and service managers throughout the Council are responsible for the day-to-day management and implementation of this procedure.

3.4. Heads of Service, in liaison with their service managers, are responsible for developing and maintaining service specific procedures for handling violence and aggression, ensuring they are fit for purpose and comply with this procedure. They

are also responsible for recording the necessary risk assessments and dealing appropriately with violent incidents against staff members.

3.5. Heads of Service, in liaison with service managers, are responsible for ensuring staff receive appropriate training.

3.6. All staff are responsible for familiarising themselves with, and ensuring that they comply with this procedure and any appropriate training provided.

4. General Principles

4.1. The Council recognises the risks faced by some staff in discharging their duties.

4.2. Actual or threatened assaults on staff are wholly unacceptable to the Council and this procedure and guidelines are intended to provide assistance to staff in the management of violence.

4.3. The Council recognises that certain duties may carry inherent risks to staff and all reasonably practicable steps will be taken to minimise or reduce these.

4.4. In acknowledgement of these risks, appropriate staff training will be provided. Training will be reviewed and updated as necessary. For staff identified as being at risk of violence in circumstances related to their employment, attendance at identified training will be compulsory.

4.5. All incidents of violence or threatened violence involving staff must be treated seriously. The procedure and guidelines must be followed in potentially violent situations, even where violence does not materialise.

4.6. The Council is committed to supporting any member of staff who is assaulted while carrying out his/her official duties, or where the assault takes place outside his/her official duties but where the assailant is or has been a customer or is in some way connected to the work of the Council.

4.7. Assault on a member of staff away from normal work premises is the concern of the Council provided that it arises in the direct course of that member of staff's employment.

4.8. In certain circumstances the Council will exclude clients from its premises where aggression and violent behaviour is encountered. Similarly it may be necessary to refuse services to persons in the community where similar behaviour is encountered. Appropriate service-specific procedures will apply in such circumstances.

4.9. A complaint will be made to the police where employees are physically assaulted by the public whilst undertaking official duties. In addition, the Head of Legal and Electoral Services may, if adequate evidence is available, instruct external solicitors to pursue civil proceedings against the perpetrator.

4.10. In rare circumstances it may be appropriate for the Council to apply for an injunction or other legal remedy against a perpetrator; for example, if there is a perceived danger of further attack against an employee(s). Such decisions will be taken by the relevant Corporate Director in liaison with the Head of Legal and Electoral Services.

4.11. The Council is responsible for ensuring that consideration is given to the provision and maintenance of features which will minimise the risk of violence at the design stage of new Council buildings and also when structural alterations are made to existing buildings, (see Section 10 for further information).

5. Procedure for managing violence and aggression against staff

5.1. Risk assessments which are completed for service/line managers, must include the personal injury hazards to staff potentially exposed to violence and/or aggressive behaviour. This is a legal requirement and Heads of Service must determine which of their staff could be at risk.

5.2. Guidance on the completion of Risk Assessments is to be found on the WBC Health & Safety webpages. In addition, advice can be sought from the Health and Safety team. Risk assessment training is available via Social Care & Corporate Training. Heads of Service must ensure that there are sufficient trained risk assessors within their service.

5.3. Where a member of staff is assaulted or threatened in circumstances relating to his/her employment, he/she must report the incident to his/her line manager as soon as possible.

5.4. Where injury or shock has occurred, the employee must be referred to WBC's Occupational Health Service through HR. Counselling support will be provided, if required.

5.5. Where an incident occurs, the Head of Service must ensure that details are recorded on the Council's incident reporting system (Webrisk). The Head of Service should consider making a record on the Council's 'Clients of Concern' register (*see the Recording of Clients of Concern Policy and Procedure*).

5.6. If a particularly significant incident occurs, or where an escalation of aggression occurs within a Service Area, an appropriate investigation must be carried out by the relevant service manager. Any changes to service-specific procedures that result must be approved by the Head of Service and communicated to all staff.

6. Procedure for protecting staff who handle money

6.1. Arrangements for the delivery and collection of money are kept under review by the Head of Finance.

6.2. All money collected must be banked in accordance with the Council's Financial Rules of Procedure. Service/line managers must ensure relevant staff understand and use these procedures.

6.3. Staff who are confronted by a potentially violent or aggressive situation when carrying money should not put themselves at risk and should hand the money over to the assailant(s).

6.4. Where possible, staff who are assaulted while carrying money should note the details of the assailant's appearance or any other useful information, such as vehicle registration details, which may help with a subsequent enquiry.

6.5. All incidents must be reported to the police, even where no theft occurs (see Section 7 below).

7. The Role of the Police

7.1. In the event of a member of staff being assaulted or threatened in circumstances relating to their employment, or where criminal action has occurred, the incident must be referred to the police by the staff member or his/her line manager. Where possible, evidence should be preserved.

7.2. Where urgent help is required (for example, in the case of a physical assault), the employee should contact the police (via '999') at the time of the incident. The employee should contact the police direct and not use local contacts.

7.3 Employees should ensure they exercise caution and discretion when investigating a disturbance and should involve the police as appropriate.

7.3. In the case of a severe disturbance at a workplace (e.g. office or reception area), the police must be requested to attend when all reasonable steps to deal with the situation have failed.

7.4. Where an employee calls the police direct, he/she must also inform his/her line manager as soon as possible.

8. Training and Support for Employees

8.1. Employees who are identified by their service manager/Head of Service as at risk of violent or potentially violent situations must undertake relevant training.

8.2. 'Managing Challenging Behaviour' training is available on the Social Care and Corporate Training programme.

8.3. In the event of an incident of violence or aggression, or potential violence or aggression, against an employee, the line manager must ensure appropriate support is provided.

8.4. Support should include a referral to the Council's counselling service, if the employee wishes to take this up. This is available through the Human Resources Operations team.

8.5. Absence from work directly attributable to assaults related to employment will be recorded as 'authorised other' absence and not sickness absence. In addition, an absence of over 3 days from work, due to physical injuries, will trigger a requirement to report the incident to the Health & Safety Executive, in order to comply with the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995.

8.6. Employees who have been victims of assault in circumstances related to their employment shall be given such leave of absence with pay as is considered reasonable by the Head of Service to take legal advice, appear in court, consult with their Trade Union representative and/or to receive counselling and/or medical advice.

- 8.7. The Council will assist an employee who has been the victim of an assault in circumstances related to his/her employment with the legal support necessary to allow the member of staff to recover damages from the perpetrator(s) of the assault.
- 8.8. Where an employee is involved in a prosecution, a relevant senior officer of the Council will accompany him/her to the police station as support during interviews.

9. Guidance on handling potentially violent situations

9.1. There are many causes of, and reasons for, violence. It may follow action by the Council which the client objects to, such as planning enforcement. Some individuals may be more prone to aggression or violence – for example, individuals suffering from a form of mental disorder, or an individual under the influence of alcohol or drugs. However, it should be noted these conditions may not necessarily lead to aggression or violence, nor will it always be possible to predict aggressive or violent situations.

9.2. Employees should always be alert to the possibility that their own behaviour or actions may initiate a violent response. This may happen unwittingly because of the client's circumstances which may be unknown to the employee. It may, however, result from behaviour from the employee which is entirely controllable, such as adopting a challenging posture or demonstrating an apparent need to dominate or exert authority over the client.

9.3. Other examples of actions/behaviour from the employee that may initiate a violent response include:

- Fear of clients or poor relationships with them
- The effects of stress or tiredness, resulting in reduced levels of tolerance
- Inconsistency in the imposition of controls and rules
- Misreading of gestures by clients
- Inexperience and/or lack of support from supervisor/line manager
- Increased openness in dealing with clients, such as involving them in reviews and discussions, thus facing them with unpleasant truths
- Failure to use the Council's Clients of Concern register, when designated as an authorised user by their Head of Service.

9.5 The following tables give examples of situations where violence can occur, some 'warning signs' of violence and some 'Do's and Don't's':

Potentially Violent Situations can include:

- Personal frustration obviously being felt by a client/customer
- A need to confront or challenge a client/customer
- A need to dominate/win a situation
- Exhaustion or stress in a member of staff
- Inexperienced staff lacking support, adequate training and/or supervision
- A lack of information on the background of a client/customer
- A change of routine

'Warning Signs' that can precede violence can include:

- Restless behaviour from the client/customer that can include pushing/jostling
- Deliberately provocative conduct
- A client/customer who is unusually quiet/reserved or abnormally loud/boisterous
- Over-sensitive reactions from a client/customer
- A feeling of tension in an interview
- A previous known history of violence
- A client/customer under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol
- A client/customer who may be tense or agitated
- A client/customer's voice pitch and/or volume increasing
- A client/customer responding to questions abruptly and/or with gesticulations
- A client/customer's pupils may become dilated
- A customer/client may exhibit signs of tension in the face or limbs

When violence is anticipated DO:

- Discuss the situation and plan a course of action with the line manager/ an experience colleague
- Ensure that support and/or 'back up' has been organised where appropriate
- Prepare clients/customers in advance if you are to be the bearer of distressing news. Where possible, hold the conversation in Council offices
- Remove in advance any potential weapons –e.g. plant pots, ashtrays.
- Remove your neck-tie, necklace or other jewellery which could cause injury if violence occurs
- Consider sitting down for the meeting. This is less aggressive
- Try to maintain a relaxed posture
- Stay aware of your own feelings and reactions to those of your client/customer. You are then more able to adjust your own response to reduce the risk of violence
- Listen to a clients/customers thoughts and feelings and communicate recognition
- Remove yourself and your client/customer from a group, if possible, if the group's presence is exacerbating the situation (it can be harder for your client/customer to back down in front of peers).
- Consider any previous known confrontations between employees and your customer/client
- Try to remain reasonable. Only attempt to put limits on the customer/clients behaviour if you think this it will be effective.
- Remove yourself immediately if you feel you are about to be attacked.
- Call the police if you are threatened with violence or attack.
- Lock doors and windows in buildings or cars to prevent an aggressor's access to you.

When violence is anticipated DO NOT:

- Touch/make contact with a potentially violent person to try to eject them or to prevent damage to property
- Move suddenly, as sudden movement may alarm the customer/client
- Become physically overbearing
- Point/gesticulate at the customer/client
- Put either yourself or the customer/client in a corner. Make sure you each have exits and that either of you can back down without losing face.
- Get into a verbal battle or feel, or act, as though you always have to win the point.

10. Guidance on planning the design of the workplace

10.1. The general design and physical environment of buildings, waiting rooms and reception areas may significantly affect the likelihood of outbursts of aggression and violence, especially since people may be under stress in unfamiliar surroundings. For example, badly designed waiting areas which isolate visitors from staff, impede communication and flow of information are likely to increase risk.

10.2. Such factors cannot necessarily be considered in isolation but must be seen within an integrated approach to specific local circumstances. It will be appropriate to consider environmental redesign in some instances but not in others.

10.3. Examples of such changes are physical rearrangement of seating and room layout; segregation of visitors; colour; lighting; and activities to reduce boredom. Apart from improving the physical comfort and facilities for visitors, even small changes within a room can make it seem less hostile and more welcoming. Such changes may lessen the chance of an aggressive response. Specific measures which could be considered include the following:

Reception	An easily identifiable and accessible reception desk/area. This allows a member of staff to receive incoming visitors, make sure they are seen in the proper turn, answer enquiries and generally keep an eye on waiting visitors for signs of problems.
Lighting	Diffused and glare-free lighting which is of sufficient brightness to enable all areas of the room to be viewed and monitored by the receptionist for security reasons. There should be no hidden corners where people can deliberately hide or move unseen.
Space	There should be sufficient personal space so that visitors do not feel crowded and thus threatened by other disturbed visitors who may be sitting in close proximity.

Noise	Noise is a potential stress factor. Reduction in levels may be important in reducing problems. Consider whether bumpy floors, noisy trolleys, banging doors etc may be contributing. Appropriate sound absorbing surfaces or materials and baffling/curtaining may help. These should not, however, restrict vision.
Colour	Wall coverings and surface finishes in waiting areas should be subdued although pictures and plants adding colour can be visually pleasing
Boredom	During long waiting periods boredom can often lead to anxiety. This may be relieved through the provision of reading materials, vending machines and toys for children.
Telephones	Access to pay phones can enable people to communicate with friends, family etc
Furnishings	Chairs should be sufficiently comfortable for long waiting times. Furniture should not be capable of being used as missiles.

10.4. The design of interview rooms should, in addition to the above, incorporate easy access/escape, alarms and/or panic buttons and ease of contact (visual and/or auditory) with colleagues.

10.5. The design of interview desks should include an adequate depth of desk to prevent physical contact with interviewees. The presence of CCTV cameras (real or dummy) can act as a deterrent to violent attack. There should be a policy of not having loose objects present upon the interview desk, which could be used as a weapon or projectile.

10.6. In addition, the following general considerations should apply:

- Doors to staff areas should be capable of being locked
- Areas open to the public should not be able to be locked by visitors
- Alarm systems should not be obtrusive
- Public notices should not be threatening
- Sign posting should be clear and concise and adequate for purpose.