

Manager Guidance

MANAGING VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION

Employees who deal directly with the public may occasionally be exposed to the risks of aggressive, violent or threatening behaviour. Aggression, violence, threats, harassment or intimidation towards Council employees will not be tolerated. This guidance is to assist managers to implement the Council's policy on work-related aggression and violence.

If you manage staff that have direct contact with the public, whether inside the workplace or elsewhere, you have a responsibility for identifying and determining the appropriate measures that need to be put in place to prevent and deal with such threats.

Violence is

The Health and Safety Executive's definition of work-related violence is:

'any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work'

Although obviously dangerous, physical attacks are comparatively rare. Verbal abuse and threats are more common and could often be discounted as insignificant. However, if persistent verbal abuse and threats can also damage employees' health through anxiety or stress.

Assessing the problem

The first step in managing violent and aggressive situations is to decide if there is a risk to the personal safety of your employees. This is established through your risk assessment process, whereby you look at the hazards surrounding each individual job role. Employees also play an important role in identifying the risks. You may think that there is no problem; your employees views may be very different. Ask them if they ever feel unsafe, threatened or intimidated.

▶ Decide who might be harmed

Identify those employees at risk – front line staff are normally the most vulnerable, as are lone workers, but don't forget to consider those that deal with the public over the telephone. Consider those particularly working:

- in an enforcement capacity;
- directly with members of the public;
- in people's homes;
- in disadvantaged or isolated areas;
- with cash;
- with people in distress or in a crisis situations; or
- away from colleagues or direct supervision.

Where appropriate, identify potentially violent people in advance so that the risks from them can be minimised.

▶ Incident Records

These records are important in enabling you to build up a complete picture of the problem. You can use the details from your incidents to check for patterns – look for common causes, areas or times.

Employees should always be encouraged to report all incidents of violence or aggression (including verbal abuse or threats) promptly and fully, following the Council's procedure. Let them know that this is what you expect.

Deciding what action to take

Having identified that violence or aggression could be a problem, you need to decide what needs to be done to protect your employees.

Check your existing arrangements, do you already have precautions in place that are adequate or should more be done? Remember it is usually a combination of factors that give rise to violent or aggressive behaviour. Factors which you can influence include:

- the level of training and information provided to employees;
- the working environment; and/or

- the design of the job.
- Consider the way these factors work together to influence the risk of violence or aggression.

▶ **Training, information, instruction**

You need to make sure that your employees have received adequate information, instruction and/or training.

The level and extent of training will depend on the nature of the work, as well as the knowledge and experience of the individuals. Young and new workers will need extra consideration. Think about training in:

- interpersonal skills to deal with difficult clients;
- identifying the early signs of aggression;
- the use of appropriate breakaway techniques;
- managing conflict;
- active listening;
- assertiveness; and/or
- negotiation skills.

Provide your employees with information on the procedures you have put in place to protect them. Also consider providing them with the safety fact sheet – ‘Personal Safety Tips’.

Provide your employees with any information they might need to identify clients with a history of violent or aggressive behaviour or to anticipate factors which might make these behaviours more likely. Consider:

- marking files or records to identify clients with a known history of violence or aggression; and
- managing the transfer of information about clients with a known history of violence or aggression, both within and between agencies.

▶ **The work environment**

Take a look around the work environment. Could you provide better seating, décor, lighting in public waiting areas and more regular information about delays?

Consider security measures such as:

- CCTV, alarm systems, coded security locks;
- wider counters and raised floors on the staff side;
- trained security guards;
- for employees away from the base – panic alarm, automatic warning device (e.g. SoloProtect), or emergency code words.

▶ **The design of the job**

- know where employees are – use diaries, in/out board, regular phone contact at pre-arranged times, buddy system, end of shift contact.
- make arrangements for employees working away from their base to keep in touch.
- maintain numbers of staff at the workplace to avoid a lone worker situation developing.
- arrange for staff to be accompanied by a colleague if they have to meet a suspected aggressor at their home or at a remote location.
- use cheques, credit cards or tokens instead of cash to make robbery less attractive.
- bank money more frequently and vary the route taken to reduce the risk of robbery.
- check the credentials of clients and the place and arrangements for any meetings away from the workplace.

The threat of violence does not stop when the work period has ended. It is good practice to make sure that employees have arrived home safely if they have gone home straight from a visit.

Employees are likely to be more committed to the measures if they help to design them and put them into practice. A mix of measures often works best. Try to take an overall view and balance the risks to your employees against any possible reaction of the public. Remember that an

atmosphere that suggests employees are worried about violence or aggression can sometimes increase its likelihood.

Once you have decided on the control measures that you are putting in place to manage violence and aggression prepare detailed safe working procedures for your employees to follow. Employees must be made aware of and understand:

- the hazards to their personal safety from violent and/or aggressive behaviour;
- the precautions that you have put in place to control the risk that they must follow;
- what they should do to protect themselves;
- to let you know if they feel threatened or intimidated;
- to inform you of any problems in the safety procedures; and
- how to report any instances of violent or aggressive behaviour.

Record you findings

The risk assessment for the job role should identify the hazards and the control measures that you have put in place. Risk assessments are a working document for both managers and employees. If the work situation changes, review your assessment. Be prepared to add further measures or change existing measures where these are not working.

Procedures for employees to follow should be documented. This should include what they need to do in an emergency situation.

Review and revise your procedures

Regularly check that your assessment is a true reflection of your current work situation. Check that the procedures in place are still effective. If the job changes or an incident occurs, check whether additional measures are needed.

Personal support for staff

Support is available for staff that have been subjected to aggressive or violent behaviour. Help should include your personal support and debriefing as their manager, plus referral to the Employee Assistance Programme, if necessary. Further advice on this is available from Human Resources.

There may be exceptional circumstances where the procedures that you have in place fail to control a situation. In these instances you should consider following the 'Procedure for Dealing with Potentially Violent or Aggressive Situations'.

Additional information

Aggression and Violence Policy

Risk Assessment – manager guidance

Personal Safety Tips

Procedures for Dealing with Potentially Violent or Aggressive Situations – manager guidance

If you need any further information or advice on a health and safety matter, or require this document in an alternative format, the Central Safety Unit can be contacted on 01706 92 5615 / 5060.