
ISLE OF WIGHT COUNCIL - POLICY MANAGING AGGRESSION AND VIOLENCE AT WORK

INTRODUCTION

It is an unfortunate fact that incidents of aggression and violence in society are increasing. Violence can take many forms including verbal abuse, physical abuse, threats, rude gestures, spitting, angry behaviour and malicious damage. Even though there might not be any physical injury there can still be fear and emotional stress the effects of which should not be underestimated. Some incidents of violence have resulted in permanent disabilities and in rare cases, loss of life.

Most Council staff have duties, which involve dealing with members of the public who can at times be aggressive or violent. Those at risk can include receptionists, those who carry out enforcement duties, persons who visit clients at home, lone workers, certain drivers and staff who deal with persons suffering from behavioural problems. Furthermore, staff may be required to impart information which a person does not want to hear, occasionally such persons could be frustrated or angry, may be ill or under the influence of drink or drugs.

The Council regards any form of aggression or violence towards staff as totally unacceptable and in order to minimise risk have agreed this policy, together with guidance on prevention measures and action which needs to be taken should a situation arise.

POLICY STATEMENT

The Isle of Wight Council is committed to safeguarding its staff from potential or actual aggressive acts of violence and sets out policy aims to minimise risk. The Council will:

- 1 Ensure that the layout interview rooms, waiting areas, receptions, offices and other areas where the public have access offer protection to the staff and provide adequate escape routes.
- 2 Where necessary provide security glazing, physical barriers or anti-vault facilities to protect staff.
- 3 Keep security arrangements under review to ensure that they are appropriate and effective.
- 4 Provide emergency call systems and personal attack alarms in areas or situations of risk.
- 5 Provide training for staff, particularly those who deal with members of the public, which aims to increase awareness and knowledge in averting potential aggressive or violent situations.
- 6 Fully support any employee who is a victim of aggression or violence in the course of their work.
- 7 Provide a counselling service and after-care support to staff subjected to aggression or violence.
- 8 Maintain records and monitor incidents to ensure that appropriate action is being taken.
- 9 Provide legal advice and representation following incidents including those whereby an employee wishes to institute proceedings and the police do not intend to prosecute.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF MANAGEMENT

1. Management will actively pursue legal action against a person or persons causing threatening or violent behaviour if this is supported by the individual concerned.
2. To carry out a formal risk assessment exercise and introduce measures which will control or reduce the risks identified.
3. Examine working practices where necessary providing safe systems of work.
4. Ensure that the specific problems for lone workers and staff working out-of-hours have been addressed.
5. Set up a system for marking files in order to make staff aware of difficult or volatile people.
6. Ensure that any emergency procedures are practised and that alarms are tested and maintained.
7. Investigate the circumstances of incidents and take appropriate action to prevent recurrence.
8. Encourage staff to report actual or potential incidents of aggression or violence.
9. Carry out a sensitively conducted debriefing with staff in order that incident report forms are jointly completed.
10. Set standards of acceptable behaviour in the workplace.
11. Identify training needs and ensure that training provided is evaluated for effectiveness.

RESPONSIBILITY OF EMPLOYEES

1. Staff are required to comply with safety policies, safe systems of work and other procedures which are provided for their health, safety and welfare.
2. All employees are expected to conduct themselves in a competent, professional and unprovocative manner in order that they do not provoke aggressive or other unacceptable behaviour from others.
3. Staff should not knowingly subject themselves to foreseeable risk or danger.
4. Check that any personal alarms provided are carried, tested and are in working order.
5. Before visiting sites ensure that details of your movements are left with work colleagues.
6. Utilise the automated lone worker system.

Managers need to be committed to the objective of reducing risk of violence to employees, even though staff at senior level may not be exposed to violence themselves, this will go some way towards reassuring staff that their safety is paramount. Staff morale and confidence will also be boosted if monitoring can show that control measures are effective. Although managers will carry this out, the Health and Safety Section will monitor reports of violence and evaluate the effectiveness of this policy.

MANAGING AGGRESSION AND VIOLENCE AT WORK - GUIDANCE

DEFINITION OF VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION

The Health and Safety Executive define violence as "Any incident in which an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted by a member of the public in circumstances arising out of the course of his or her employment". Generally speaking, any aggressive act is deliberate with the intention of offending or upsetting the recipient physically or mentally, for more than a momentary period.

The information set out in this document is designed to assist in reducing potential risks to the minimum and explains various courses of action that might need to be taken if such a situation arises.

FACING AGGRESSION

People will have different perceptions about the behaviour they will find threatening or offensive, or which causes distress rather than simple annoyance. Without showing anger it should be made clear that threats, rudeness, swearing, violent behaviour, wrongful accusations and other acts of aggression will not be tolerated. It may help to inform such persons what they have to gain or lose. If the behaviour problems persists a senior member of staff should be called and if necessary the Police. Staff have the right to terminate telephone conversations and meetings if verbal abuse persists, having explained to the person that such behaviour will not be tolerated.

Training in dealing with such situations and the use of assertive communication techniques can both go some way towards defusing acts of aggression or violence.

Whatever the cause it is important those employees: -

- Avoid confrontation and potentially dangerous situations
- Minimise and defuse client's frustration
- If felt necessary ask a second member of staff to talk things through with the client/visitor.
- Recognise danger signals
- Be aware of possible triggers
- Stay calm, speak slowly and do not get drawn into a heated argument.
- Avoid making aggressive body language
- Can escape from situations

INTERVIEWS AT THE OFFICE - GUIDANCE FOR STAFF

The following points are listed as basic precautions to observe.

- Where possible work to an appointment system and check for marked files.
- If there are any concerns before or during interviews two members of staff must be present.
- If a panic button or alarm is activated, staff nearby must render assistance first and then call the police if other staff are not available to do this.
- Recognise danger signals when clients are upset. Look after yourself as first priority - it may be necessary to leave the room.
- Avoid keeping people waiting but if unavoidable keep them informed of the situation.

- Make sure area is welcoming and friendly. Invite persons to sit down.
- Remove or secure those items that could be used as missiles.
- Keep between the customer/client and an exit door. Use a desk or table to keep a division between you and the client.
- When interviews are in progress make other staff aware so that they can carry out regular checks on the situation.
- Use strategies taught on violence prevention courses where necessary requesting refresher training to maintain confidence in yourself.
- If persons to be interviewed appear drunk, angry or agitated refer to senior staff member for assessment of the situation
- Interview rooms must be vacated if members of the public use threatening or violent behaviour.
- Update files after completion of interview.

SITE VISIT and HOME VISITS - GUIDANCE FOR STAFF

- ❖ Ask yourself if the visit is really necessary.
- ❖ If travelling by car make sure the vehicle is well maintained.
- ❖ If necessary carry a portable phone, radio or personal alarm.
- ❖ Equip yourself with telephone numbers, loose change or phone cards, torch, help signs etc.
- ❖ Utilise the Automated lone worker system to ensure someone knows where you are going and when you are going to return. Leave a specific location including the complete address.
- ❖ Check client's records beforehand or obtain information by means of a call-out sheet system.
- ❖ If necessary arrange visits in pairs, particularly if a client is known to be violent.
- ❖ On arrival ring the bell and stand back from the door.
- ❖ Explain the purpose of your visit at the outset. If necessary you can then withdraw early and invite the client to come to the office or arrange an accompanied return visit.
- ❖ Invite the client to lead the way.
- ❖ On entering, make a note of the quickest escape route, type of door and handles.
- ❖ Ask for animals to be shut away if they appear to represent a risk.
- ❖ Avoid going upstairs or into the kitchen.
- ❖ At any suggestion of threatening behaviour, leave immediately.
- ❖ Never hesitate to request Police presence if the situation warrants it.
- ❖ If a visit takes longer than expected, ensure that you extend the time for your visit with the

automated lone worker system to avoid unnecessary alarms.

Staff engaged in out-of-hours visits should be equipped with a mobile phone or radios and torches.

PROCEDURES FOLLOWING AN ASSAULT

The victim should withdraw to a place of safety and where necessary summon assistance. Priority should then be given to the treatment injuries, in such cases it may be helpful to arrange for photographs to be taken to use as evidence at a later date.

The incident must be reported to line managers and the opportunity given for debriefing and counselling. It **MAY NOT** be a good idea to send the person home, particularly if they live alone. Post incident procedures must be followed promptly but certainly no later than 24 hours since detailed information can become less accurate over a period of time. If the police have not already become involved they must be informed of the incident at the earliest opportunity. The Line Manager is to investigate the reasons for the incident and suggest any corrective actions necessary.

It is quite common for staff to show little reaction at work but to be severely affected in other environments. Short term reactions to shock include:

- Anger
- General mistrust of strangers and wariness of clients.
- Fear and anxiety - this may include fear of returning to work.
- Feelings of helplessness, isolation, frustration or guilt.
- Loss of confidence, loss of concentration and sometimes memory.
- Physical symptoms such as sleep difficulties, loss of appetite, trembling & outbursts of crying.

If the employee has injuries or appears to be suffering from shock and has not received hospital treatment they should consult their doctor for medical report.

REPORTING OF INCIDENTS

The reporting of all incidents of both verbal and physical aggression is essential to the success of the policy and the appropriate procedure has been in existence for some time. The reporting of an act of violence or aggression will not be construed as failure on the part of the employee concerned.

A copy of the Violence to Staff report form is included in Section 2.02 Accidents, Diseases and Ill Health Reporting. This form should be filled in jointly between the employee concerned and their supervisor/line manager and the form sent to the Health and Safety Section. Managers should retain a photocopy for information purposes. Under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 certain incidents resulting in injury might be reportable to the Health and Safety Executive. (See Section 2.02)

Any absence from work as a result of a physical assault will be treated as an industrial injury for sickness purposes and will not count against your sickness record. Staff must notify their section supervisor/line manager in accordance with the existing system for reporting sickness absence.

DEBRIEFING AND COUNSELLING

It can be deeply upsetting and traumatic to be a victim of aggression or assault. Victims should have an immediate opportunity to talk about their feelings. Line managers will, as part of the reporting procedure, be required to carry out a sensitive debriefing in order to obtain factual information and help individuals start the recovery process. If conducted properly, the debriefing should give all those involved an opportunity to talk openly about their experience of the incident,

express how they feel and think constructively about what support they may want from family, friends and other staff. However, one must also respect the wishes of those persons who do not wish to receive counselling but advise them of services that are available. Any employee of the Directorate of Education and Community Development who wishes to access counselling services should telephone 761321.

OTHER USEFUL CONTACTS

Human Resources Manager	(82)3121
Health and Safety Section	814790 (Int 4790)
Insurance Officer	(82)3625
Legal Advisor	(82)3207

LEGAL MATTERS AND OTHER ASSISTANCE

THE EMPLOYER'S LIABILITY

Every employer has a legal duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of all employees. A risk assessment has to be carried out of all work activities and where necessary control measures introduced. This might include devising and maintaining safe working practices by whatever means appropriate - training, safety equipment, supervision etc.

COMPENSATION CLAIMS

If in the course of their employment an employee sustains injuries resulting in permanent disablement they have a right to make a civil claim for compensation. If any personal property is damaged or stolen as a result of an assault again they may be able to claim under the Council's insurance policy.

INDUSTRIAL INJURIES BENEFIT

Employees may be entitled to Industrial Injuries Benefit if they have suffered injury. The individual should contact the Department of Social Security at Broadlands House, Staplers Road, Newport for further information.

POLICE INVOLVEMENT/LEGAL ACTION

The Council will be pro-active in their approach and will pursue aggressors whenever possible. The Police will then act on the victim's behalf to bring a prosecution. If the Police locally decide not to prosecute, the victim has the right to know the reason and may be able to persuade the Police to change their mind. The Police may be reluctant to prosecute unless actual bodily harm has taken place and in cases where there is conflict or absence of supportive evidence. The individual's supervisor, line manager or any witness can accompany them or write to the Police on their behalf.

If the Police or Crown Prosecution Service then decide not to pursue the matter, the individual can expect an explanation, but their decision is final. If the individual still wishes to pursue the matter he or she will have to take private legal action. The Head of Legal Services will be able to offer advice and guidance as to how the case will be pursued.

CRIMINAL INJURIES COMPENSATION

The Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme is intended to compensate victims of violent crime and particularly those who are seriously injured. Awards are not made below, £1000 and must normally be submitted within three years of the date of the incident giving rise to the injury. The incident must have been reported to the Police. Details are available from Citizens' Advice Bureaux and Victim Support, who can also help with the completion of application forms. A guide to the scheme and application forms can be obtained from:

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board
Blythwood House,
200 West Regent Street,
GLASGOW G2 4SW
(Tel 0141 221 0945)

TRADE UNIONS

UNISON and other trade unions can offer support to members, which might include legal advice and assistance. Contact your local branch secretary or trade union representative for further information.

HOME AND SITE VISITING - CHECKLIST FOR MANAGERS

ARE YOUR STAFF WHO VISIT.....

- 1) Fully trained in strategies for the prevention of violence?
- 2) Briefed about the area where they work?
- 3) Aware of attitudes, traits or mannerisms which can annoy clients etc?
- 4) Given all available information about the client from all relevant agencies?

HAVE THEY.....

- 5) Understood the importance of previewing cases?
- 6) Left an itinerary, detailing where they are going and at what time they will return?
- 7) Made plans to keep in contact with colleagues?
- 8) The means to contact you-even when the switchboard/reception is not in use?
- 9) Got your home telephone number (and have you got theirs)?
- 10) A sound grasp of the organisation's preventative strategy?
- 11) Authority to arrange an accompanied visit, security escort or use of taxis?

DO THEY.....

- 12) Have access to violence report forms?
- 13) Appreciate the need for the procedure?
- 14) Use the forms?
- 15) Know your attitude to premature termination of interviews?
- 16) Know how to control and defuse potentially violent or aggressive situations?
- 17) Appreciate their responsibilities for their own safety?
- 18) Understand the provisions for their support by the organisation?

IS ANYTHING ELSE NEEDED?

CHECKLIST FOR STAFF VISITING CLIENTS OR SITES

HAVE YOU.....

- 1) Had adequate training on the subject of violence and aggression?
- 2) A sound grasp of the council policy and your own workplace procedures?
- 3) A clear idea about the area into which you are going?
- 4) Carefully previewed today's cases beforehand?
- 5) Asked to "double up" take an escort or use a taxi if unsure?
- 6) Made appointment(s)?
- 7) Left your itinerary and expected departure/arrival times?
- 8) Told colleagues, manager etc about possible changes to plans?
- 9) Access to forms for recording and reporting incidents?

DO YOU CARRY.....

- 10) A personal alarm, radio or portable phone and a torch? Does it work? Is it handy?
- 11) A bag/briefcase, wear a uniform suggests you have money or drugs with you?
- 12) A mobile phone where one is provided?
- 13) Out of hours telephone numbers to summon help?

CAN YOU.....

- 14) Be certain your attitudes, body language etc won't cause trouble?
- 15) Defuse potential problems and manage aggression?

REMEMBER THE 3 Vs OF VISITING: VET, VERIFY, VIGILANCE