

Lone Worker Policy – Children’s Social Care, Bath and North East Somerset

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1. Introduction.

This policy sets out the approach of Bath and North East Somerset (BANES) Council Children’s Social Care in managing Lone Working. BANES Council has a legal duty to look after the health, safety and welfare of its employees and this includes a duty of care to reduce, as far as reasonably practicable the risks associated with lone working. Within the workplace Serious incidents can lead to poor staff morale, high levels of absenteeism and retention problems which can cost the organisation large sums of money in staff replacement costs, higher insurance premiums, compensation payments and poor image of the Local Authority. These duties are set out in the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and the Safety Representatives Safety Committee Regulations 1977

2. Policy Statement:

B&NES Council is committed to the provision of a safe place of work for all employees, clients, visitors, contractors, volunteers and those affected by or involved in Council activities. We will ensure that lone workers are not exposed to additional or greater risk than any other workers. More specifically we will ensure that Lone workers are identified, hazards and risk are assessed and appropriate action is taken to reduce these risks.

3. The definition of ‘lone worker’

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines lone workers as “those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision”. This means that all workers who work unaccompanied for large periods of time are classed as lone workers. In the social care field, this can include staff who works by themselves in the following situations:

- Work outside normal working hours. e.g. working with people who use services in the evening, at night, during weekends and bank holidays
- Visiting people in their own homes
- Handling cash
- Travelling to quiet rural areas, or high risk urban areas
- Using their car as a mini office/base.

Social Care workers can encounter a number of problems associated with these situations, for example:

- Being accosted by people on the street in quiet areas, during darkness or on public transport
- Having to park in unlit, isolated areas
- Visiting hostile or threatening service users and their associates
- Theft

4. Roles and Responsibilities

Each Service Area is responsible for implementing arrangements to ensure lone working is effectively managed and that all employees are made aware of this policy statement and accompanying guidance.

Lone Working			
Service Directors Responsibilities	Head of Service Responsibilities	Managers / Supervisors Responsibilities	Employees Responsibilities
Ensuring sufficient resources are made available for the identification and protection of lone workers	Identify any posts that undertake lone working	Ensure that duty of care remains a shared responsibility between worker and employee, identifying lone workers and hazards by completing a lone working hazard checklist for staff or a work team	Ensure that duty of care remains a shared responsibility between worker and employee and take reasonable care of themselves and others affected by their actions
	Putting in place suitable lone working protection systems for all activities within their areas	To carry out a lone working risk assessment for employees or work team. Risk assessments to be reviewed at a minimum annually	To assist their manager in completing a lone working hazard checklist
	Ensure that lone working risk assessments are undertaken	To implement suitable control measures as identified in risk assessment	Following guidance and procedures designed for safe working
	Ensuring all staff receive relevant training to ensure competency in safety matters	To monitor lone working protection systems	Reporting all incidents that may affect the health and safety of themselves or others
	Ensure lone workers are not put at more risk than other employees	Ensure that any accident, hazard and violent incidents are reported and any control measures identified are implemented	Taking part in training designed to meet the requirements of the policy
	Ensure all staff receives training in dynamic risk assessment and 'Plan B' exit strategies.	Ensuring that identified lone working staff attend relevant training	Ensure that employees, agency and voluntary workers, during their induction period, have adequate

	additional controls in place	
	Ensure procedures are in place in an emergency and that adequate support mechanisms are in place when staff off site	

5. What help and support is available

- All staff must read the lone working policy
- Lone working and 'break away' training is run, and booking can be made via the 'learning zone'
- Families where there is an identified risk will have risk assessments in place.
- Lone working should feature within regular team meetings
- Additional information is available of the internet [Health and Safety | Intranet](#)

6. Risk assessment

The crucial element in ensuring the safety of lone workers is the risk assessment. The main aims of the risk assessment are to find out whether the work can be done safely by a lone worker, to ensure the lone worker is not put at any greater risk than those who would do the job together and to identify any jobs that are too difficult or dangerous for a lone worker to carry out.

6.1 Formal Risk Assessments

The assessor should evaluate the risk on a cost versus benefit basis. It should be 'reasonably practicable' for the organisation to reduce the risk.

The steps that should be taken when carrying out a risk assessment are (Template at Appendix I):

- Identify the possible risks to the safety of care workers working alone – this can entail using real life incidents or near misses from previously recorded information and from care worker experiences or by looking at possible worst case scenarios for each aspect of work
- Identify safety measures to prevent incidents from occurring or to protect care workers who are working alone
- Record this information in an accessible place (this is a requirement if the organisation has more than five employees)
- Provide information and training to staff about the possible risks and measures to prevent incidents occurring
- Managers and supervisors should monitor and review the risk assessment regularly to ensure it is still valid.

Some of the questions that will need to be asked are:

- Is there a risk of violence?
- Do you have certain groups of workers who may be more at risk, e.g. young workers, disabled workers, pregnant women, junior members of staff?
- Is the lone worker medically and physically fit to work alone?

- If the worker's first language is not English, will they be able to understand the risks and safety measures?
- Who will supervise the lone worker and how will this be done?
- How is communication for every eventuality managed within the organisation?
- Are there systems in place if the lone worker becomes ill or has an accident?
- Can equipment and/or technology be used to reduce the risk to lone workers?
- Does the person using the service, or others in the household, have an infection that could be spread?
- Has the lone worker been trained in how to deal with accidents and incidents whilst working alone?
- Can the risk be sufficiently managed by the lone worker?

Legislation requires the organisation to assess the risks only for hazards that are 'reasonably foreseeable'.

6.2 Dynamic Risk Assessment

Best practice has shown that an understanding of dynamic risk assessments is a key element to manage safety. Dynamic risk assessments are made by workers as a situation develops, and do not follow the template of a formal assessment. Rigid rules for risk management make it difficult for workers to act upon common sense, and in many cases can have a detrimental effect on safety by pressurising workers to act in way that may be counter intuitive to what is actually happening in a situation. By equipping staff with the skills to make dynamic decisions, safety can be improved and a culture for safe situation based decision making can be developed.

By undertaking regular situational judgement assessments that map employee competence, confidence, engagement and behaviour, companies find out what their staff truly know, how they work and the decisions they are likely to make on the job. This knowledge could be the key to preventing errors and misunderstanding that could lead to incidences and injuries.

In order to make a dynamic risk assessment you need to ask:

- Is your decision objective and not based on emotion?
- Is your decision logical?
- Is your decision justifiable?

If you answer these three questions with sound common sense, then you can be confident that your dynamic risk assessment will be clear and effective. It is vital that staff who have to carry out dynamic risk assessment are trained in good personal safety techniques and are provided with the necessary skills and tools to make a safe retreat.

The use of dynamic risk assessments will help staff to respond appropriately to a developing situation and minimise the risks to their personal safety.

7. Potential safety measures

There are a number of safety systems the organisation could adopt to help reduce the risk of harm to the lone worker. These include the following.

7.1 Assessment – Visits to known Families/ Locations

Aggression:

Assessments of people's needs should include whether they or any of their friends or family is likely to become aggressive whilst the worker is carrying out their duties. The assessor can then determine

the type of training that the worker might require or whether the worker should go into the home alone.

Dogs

The presence of animals in the house and whether these would be likely to become aggressive is also an important part of the assessment. Assessors can then discuss with the person, the most appropriate course of action to protect the worker from injury.

Location:

The assessment will also be the ideal opportunity to review the location to be visited, whether this is in an isolated rural area or a high risk urban area. This will provide an opportunity to assess what the additional risks to the care workers might be and plan for these accordingly. Parking facilities should also be part of the location assessment, including whether the care worker would be expected to park in an area adjacent to the home or whether they would need to park a distance away, which may cause additional control measures to be added.

7.2 Visits to unknown people and locations

The first time a worker visits a new person or location, they will be unsure of the situation they are entering and so should remain alert for any sign of threat.

If the person to be visited is not present, the care worker should not enter the address, and should explain to the person at the door that another appointment will be made.

Workers should pay particular attention to entrances and exits, how doors are opened and shut and whether the door would need to be unlocked in order to leave the property – in which case a care worker should say that it is company policy not to work in anywhere that they are locked in. They should always follow someone into the building, not enter first.

Workers should be wary of any changes in behaviour of the person being visited or others present. They should try to keep calm and distance themselves from any angry or aggressive person.

Workers should not meet aggression with aggression. They should try to stay calm and diffuse the situation.

If the worker feels uncomfortable in any way, they should remove themselves from the house as soon as possible, making an excuse such as having to get some paperwork or equipment from the car. They should then phone for advice or help. If they do not want to go back into the house, they should call the person visited on the phone to say they have been called back to the office urgently. Future visits would then need to be planned in pairs if deemed safe.

7.3 On-call systems

Where a worker has to carry out visits out-of-hours, either in the evenings, an on-call system is required for a care worker to be able to alert someone at work to an emergency situation.

7.4 Scheduling

Office staff should be aware of who each worker is to visit during the day, the order of the visits and the amount of time they should spend on each visit, so the organisation knows where the workers should be throughout the day. This is to be done using the online calendar. This is so that if a worker goes missing, the office would have an idea of where they should have been at a given time.

7.5 Emergency alert systems – ‘Buddy system’

The organisation should have in place an emergency alert system to deal with emergencies as they arise. This is not only an on-call system for out of hours working, but a system that operates at all times in case of an emergency.

This might be a ‘buddy system’ whereby two lone workers contact each other at certain times throughout the day. It may be a system whereby workers ring into the office at set periods throughout the day. It may be a system where a worker can ring into the office and give a code word if they are in a difficult situation so that someone can summon help quickly or it might just be having a person at the end of the phone for the lone care worker to contact during any emergency.

An emergency action plan should be agreed for each team in the event a care worker fails to call in on time or is not following the schedule and cannot be traced.

Part of each care worker’s personnel records should include up-to-date contact details of the next of kin or person to contact in an emergency.

7.6 Driving safety measures

Ensure the worker has a car that is roadworthy. Keep a record of the care worker’s car including car tax due dates, current MOT certificate, service records and current insurance policies.

Before leaving from any visit, workers should have their car keys to hand so that they can get into the car quickly. Also they should lock their doors while driving between visits. These suggestions are especially important when travelling at night or in quiet rural areas or high risk urban areas.

If driving in hazardous weather conditions, workers should not put their own safety at risk. When driving through a storm or torrential rain, it may be safer for the worker to stop and let the worst of the storm pass by. This may prevent an accident occurring. It may not be safe for workers to drive through thick snow and alternative methods of transport or personnel based closer to the addresses to be visited may be a safer option.

7.7 Parking safety measures

Assessment will highlight any parking problems, but workers should be mindful of alternative places to park, especially if the visit is taking place in dark, unlit areas. Also, the care worker should be aware of car park entrances and exits, payment machines and their own personal safety when parking. Any incidents or suggestions for a safer method of parking should be communicated to the manager and other staff visiting the same address.

7.8 Accident and breakdown procedures

If the care worker is involved in a car accident or breakdown (and if they are able), it is important to summon help as soon as possible from the appropriate emergency or breakdown services. They should also let their own organisation know that they are unable to continue their visits.

When waiting for services (unless attending an injured person), the worker should stay in the car with the doors locked. (Except if on the hard shoulder of a motorway or similar road, as per Highway Code guidance).

7.9 Regular reminders and training

Team members should all be issued with Lone Working Guidance at induction, and be encouraged to attend the 'lone working and break away' training.

All staff members need to know:

- What the system is
- The type of emergency situation in which they should be calling for help
- Who to contact
- How to contact them
- Any 'code words' that are required
- How to record accident, incident and near miss

Team meetings should have a regular slot to pick up issues of lone working and to remind workers about the policy.

Workers who work alone must be competent to deal with situations as they arise. They will receive supervision on a regular basis. The significance of the risk will determine how often care workers are supervised. Part of the supervisor's role is to provide guidance on specific areas of lone working about which the care worker may be concerned. It is the manager's role to ensure that any areas of concern are risk assessed and measures put in place to control these risks. If the manager cannot control the risk adequately, two members of staff may be required to carry out the task.

Further information can be found at:

- [Violence at Work Employers Guide](#)
- [Violence in Health and Social Care](#)
- [Stalking and Harassment Legal Guidance \(Crown Prosecution Guidance\)](#)
- [Managing Harassment \(NCC Manager's Resource Centre\)](#)
- [NCC Harassment Handbook \(HR Personnel Handbook\)](#)
- [The National Stalking Helpline](#)
- [Protection against Stalking](#)
- [Advice for victims of online harassment](#)
- [Suzy Lamplugh Trust](#)
- [Working Alone \(HSE Guidance\)](#)
- [Guide for employers to control risks from lone working \(HSE Guidance\)](#)

8. Reporting

8. How and when to report an incident and what further action will be taken

8.1 Support

If an incident does occur, there are some immediate actions and long term activities which can be used to support employees:

Within the first 24 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Debrief <p><u>If Appropriate:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide medical assistance• Police attendance• Contact Family/next of kin• Escort home if necessary
1-7 Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reporting on incident• Support from colleagues and management• Counselling if appropriate
7+ Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Action Plan and risk assessment complete• Follow up with Police/ Employer• Continued support as required.

8.2 Information included in the reporting of accident, incident and near misses.

Care workers should know the types of accidents, incidents and near misses to record and who they should report them to.

- a report of what happened
- details of any injuries
- details of the care worker, assailant (if any), any witnesses, car registration numbers
- date, time and location of the incident
- what happened following the incident – sickness, hospitalisation, redeployment etc?

8.3 Review of incident

Regular monitoring and evaluation of incidents is important to improving risk assessments and revising the lone working policy. Information which should be collected includes:

Any accidents or incidents should be examined to see whether these are covered by the risk assessment and review whether any safety measures are still valid. If the incident is new, or the safety measures are no longer valid, the risk will need to be re-evaluated and new safety measures arranged.

Near misses are useful to report too, as these are potential incidents waiting to happen. These might include accident black spots, adjacent car parking not being available or car parks being full causing care workers to park a long distance away from the address to be visited, road works causing care workers to run late (not as scheduled), or care workers phoning for help and no-one answering the phone. These should be added to the risk assessment along with any control measures that might be appropriate.

8.4 Caring for lone workers after incidents and accidents

If a care worker is involved in an incident, they must be treated sensitively to avoid any long term distress. This may involve a number of measures:

- Feedback/ Debrief– it may be therapeutic for the worker to discuss the incident, what happened, what they did, how they felt the situation was handled, could they have done anything more or better. This session is not meant to be critical of the worker.
- Time off work – the care worker may need to take time off work to recover from the situation, especially if they have been injured in some way.
- Redeployment – if the incident is so severe that the care worker can no longer work alone, consideration could be given to redeploying the staff into another part of the organisation.
- Financial or legal help – it may be appropriate for the organisation to offer some financial and legal help to the worker, particularly if they have had to take an extended period of time off work or if they need to take legal action against the perpetrator. It must be remembered that the incident happened to the worker whilst they were working for the organisation.
- Further training – there may be a need to make other staff aware of the incident and discuss how they could tackle this in the future.

9. Conclusion

Children's social care work is carried out by a high proportion of lone workers who are more vulnerable than those workers who carry out caring duties for people in residential or institutional environments.

This guidance gives an indication of the types of risk that staff working by themselves might encounter. It also looks at the measures which can be taken by organisations to raise the safety of its staff to the level of staff working jointly.

When workers are working alone it is important that they have access to or the ability to contact someone in the organisation if they encounter an accident or incident. It is also important that the workers know every day, who this person will be and that the person is available.

If workers follow the procedures they have been given by the organisation, the likelihood is that they will remain as safe as staff who work together.

Appendix II: Legislation

There are no legal duties on employers specifically in relation to lone working and no legal bar to people working alone. However, there is legislation to ensure a safe working environment. The following are relevant:

Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

All employers have a duty to maintain a safe working environment 'so far as reasonably practicable' for their employees under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. This means that employers are expected to protect their workers against risks to their health and safety. The Act also expects that the working environment is safe and that training to ensure the health and safety of workers is carried out. These requirements are not only for office-based staff but lone workers and the environments they encounter too.

Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

The regulations make it clear what employers must do under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the main requirement of which is to assess all the risks to the health and safety of their employees and, if the organisation has more than five employees, to record the outcomes of the assessment.

The risk assessment should identify the risks associated with lone working, outline any safety measure that can help to reduce the risk and ensure that the safety measures are put into practice and reviewed regularly to make sure they are still valid. If the risk assessment shows that the risk is too hazardous for one lone worker to manage alone, other arrangements will need to be introduced. The regulations also expect employees to take reasonable care for their own personal safety.

There are several other pieces of legislation which might need to be considered for lone workers in the social care field.

Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations 1981

The regulations require employers to provide first aid equipment so that emergency first aid can be received by employees if needed. This could include the provision of first aid equipment in the car for lone workers travelling alone in case they are involved in accidents and incidents.

Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998

If care workers use equipment in the course of their working day, e.g. car seats, the regulations require the risks to the health and safety of employees to be assessed. This is to ensure that the equipment is safe, suitable, regularly maintained and is used only by those who have been specifically trained in its use.

Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR)

These regulations place a legal duty on employers to report deaths, major injuries (or injuries that require more than three days off work) and dangerous occurrences at work. This would include accidents and incidents that happen as a result of lone working.

Corporate Manslaughter and Homicide Act 2007

This legislation allows an organisation to be convicted when the death of someone has occurred to whom it owes a duty of care, e.g. a staff member or a person using the service, due to the negligence of the organisation. This can include a failure to put into place adequate risk management systems.