

POLICY FOR HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELFARE

PART C - ARRANGEMENTS

Section 9

VIOLENCE AT WORK

VIOLENCE AT WORK

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Council Statement of Intent

The Council aims to achieve high levels of health and safety in all of its undertakings. We are committed to reducing risk to employees.

We do not expect, nor will we tolerate, physical attacks or verbal abuse of our employees. We will provide training and support to our staff and take reasonable steps to avoid violence towards our staff at work. We will also, where appropriate, support our employees by taking action if a violent or abusive incident occurs.

The council recognises that it has an obligation to strive to eliminate the danger posed by threats of violence at work.

In particular, we will;

- endeavour to minimise the risk to employees from potentially violent or threatening behaviour,
- provide training for employees who may have to face violence at work,
- not tolerate verbal or physical harassment of its employees, assaults upon employees or their property by clients or other members of the public, (This also applies to incidents occurring outside work hours which arise from work activities),
- where violence occurs against an employee and where an assailant can be identified, consider issuing a formal letter to the person concerned, warning that legal action may be taken,
- if requested, provide legal advice and financial support to victims of violence at work (subject to certain criteria and limitations).
- record and investigate all reported incidents of violence at work and take available remedial action as necessary,
- provide or arrange access to welfare and counselling facilities for victims.

[NOTE Violence or harassment between employees is covered by Human Resources disciplinary, grievance and harassment procedures. Reference should be made to the appropriate sections on the intranet].

Executive Summary

It is vital that we treat the threat of violence seriously; the safety and morale of our workforce depends strongly on how well they feel their personal safety is protected.

Staff should not have to work in fear of assault whether verbal or physical. To work effectively, staff need to feel safe and supported.

The Council's definition of violence at work is:

'Any incident about which an employee feels that they have been abused, threatened or assaulted by a person with whom they have come into contact in circumstances arising out of or in the course of his or her employment'.

This includes:

- **Physical attack** – this includes any sexual, religious or racially motivated assault, whether visible injury occurs or not. It also includes taking away a person's liberty, by keeping them in a room or blocking their exit,
- **Verbal abuse** – when an employee feels that a threat has been made against his or her person. This includes sexual, religious or racial harassment, intimidation, name calling, insults, mimicry, or innuendoes whether by telephone, e-mail or face to face.
- **Animal attack** – where an animal is used as a threat or tool of violence, for example when someone sets a dog on an employee
- **Attack against property** when property is damaged as a means of intimidating an employee.

Employees, especially those who are employed in front line services, can be exposed to risks of physical and/or verbal threats or abuse. They often find themselves dealing with distressed, anxious customers who are experiencing a range of problems or with angry people who object to the actions of the council.

Actual physical assaults or verbal threats against employees can affect individuals in different ways. They can result in personal injury, damage to personal property, or psychological damage, such as anxiety and stress. Also, the work of the council may be affected for example if employees are absent due to violent incidents. The aim of this document is to ensure that violence against staff is tackled, and to provide guidance to managers and employees to prevent or reduce the risk of violence, train staff to recognise and handle potentially violent situations, minimise the effects of violence if it does occur, and support staff who have been subjected to violence.

Responsibilities

DU Directors

DU Directors are responsible for ensuring that;

- Procedures are in place to ensure that the risk of violence and abuse is assessed and prevented or controlled, and that monitoring takes place to ensure the effectiveness of procedures in place
- the requirements of this policy are implemented in their delivery units through local procedures, specifically detailing the type of risks their employees are likely to face, and the responsibilities of managers to deal with violence at work incidents,
- all employees who may be at risk are familiar with procedures to prevent, reduce and deal with violence at work,
- internal reporting and recording procedures are implemented in the service,
- incidents are investigated and trends are recorded and analysed, and details are provided to relevant health and safety committees,
- the service shares any relevant information on known 'high risk persons' (observing the principles of Data Protection legislation),

- appropriate consultation is undertaken with employees and employees' representatives regarding known risks, control measures, and any amendments to this policy,
- service managers are aware of their role, are capable of providing support to staff at risk and are able to identify individual training needs,
- adequate training is provided for employees who are exposed to risk,
- training is provided to all employees, including managers to deal appropriately with any incidents of violence

Managers

Appendix E - Violence at Work – A Guide for Managers provides the framework for the procedures to be followed by managers to assist in:

- a) Reducing the risk of violence at work incidents
- b) The procedures to be adopted following an incident

Managers must ensure that:

- risk assessments are in place, and kept up to date,
- all employees are aware of this policy and the local procedures to be adopted,
- all employees receive sufficient training to enable them to undertake their duties with the minimum of risk,
- employees report all violence at work incidents on the appropriate forms,
- all violent incidents are reported/recorded/investigated and where necessary involve the assistance of Legal Services, Police, Health and Safety Team or counsellors as may be appropriate,
- as necessary, violence at work issues are discussed at team meetings and employees are encouraged to participate in reviewing risk assessments,
- new starters receive induction on dealing with violence situations where the risk has been identified as significant.

Employees

The information contained in Appendix F – Violence at Work – a Guide for Employees contains general check-lists and guidance for employees who may be faced with potential violence in the course of their duties. These check-lists are in no way exhaustive and should be amended by the Service to ensure job specific risks are assessed. In addition employees must;

- co-operate with their manager by complying with the requirements of corporate and local violence at work procedures,
- where training has been identified, attend the course(s) to which they have been nominated,
- report to their manager all incidents of violence at work regardless of how minor,

- liaise with their managers on working procedures and suggest any improvements, which they feel could reduce the risk of incidents occurring.

Training

Training is a key element in protecting against violent incidents, and it must be considered as a first step in any risk assessment for violence at work. All front line staff should receive training on how to defuse confrontations and be advised on action that should be taken to ensure their own and other's safety

Reporting and Recording Procedures

It is essential that violent incidents are reported and recorded. This will allow managers to deal with incidents as they occur, appreciate the scope and size of the problem, and to decide on the best way to deal with it, and to share information about violent service users with other parts of the council.

Violent incidents should be reported on the councils on-line accident reporting system (VHSMS) following the same procedure as reporting any other accident or incident. It is important to remember that the individual employee's opinion of the incident may be key to the judgement of whether an incident should be reported and what action is necessary.

In cases of telephone abuse a record of the incident should be placed on the telephone abuse monitor record (Appendix G). also, refer to Appendix E – Violence at Work – A Guide for Managers.

In the case of major incidents, the Health and Safety Team will assist in the investigation process, using a major incident form.

Support Available for Employees

All reports of violence or threats of violence against employees must be taken seriously by managers. Procedures should be in place to ensure that victims of violent assault or threats receive appropriate support and reassurance following an incident.

Immediate support and reassurance should come from the line manager or from colleagues. However in more serious cases it may be necessary to obtain quickly the advice of additional support services such as:-

- Employee Assistance Service
- Health and Safety Team
- Occupational Health service
- Human Resources
- Trade Union Representatives
- Victim Support

Action to be taken Against Perpetrators of Violence at Work

Where a member of staff has been the subject of threats or assault, the manager will consider a written notice or letter to the perpetrator, taking into account the following;

- the type and frequency of incidents,
- knowledge of previous incidents committed by the individual - including information supplied via other Delivery units/agencies,
- the degree of potential risk to the health and safety of staff and other persons,
- the perpetrator's response to verbal warnings,
- the quality of service received by the perpetrator and the legitimacy of any complaint or grievance,
- the perpetrator's personal circumstances e.g. ill health, mental health problems, known personal situation
- the likelihood of resolving the misconduct through interview or other less confrontational response.

This is not an exhaustive list but is indicative of the areas to be considered in individual cases and circumstances.

Notification Procedures

Following investigation and consideration of the above if it is reasonable to do so, a first warning letter may be issued within 48 hours of the incident. Consultation has produced suggested versions of the warning letters to be forwarded to perpetrators. An individual personalised version must be prepared whenever it is proposed to use them.

Notice of Unacceptable Conduct (Refer to Appendix A – example copy)

This notice is intended to draw the perpetrator's attention to the council's serious concerns over their misconduct. It also emphasises the council's position in not tolerating abusive, violent or threatening behaviour towards its employees. This notice may be given directly to the perpetrator in reception or at interview in order to reinforce verbal explanations given by the officer. The notice may also be placed on general display. It may be appropriate for use in less serious cases or where there is substantial mitigation for the perpetrator's conduct. It is not a personal letter and requires no follow up action.

First Warning Letter (Refer to Appendix B - example copy)

Following enquiries into an incident this letter should be sent by a divisional manager/ Service Head to the perpetrator within 48 hours. The contents of this letter are self-explanatory and the Notice of Unacceptable Behaviour should also be enclosed. It is not appropriate to keep this letter on a general access file due to confidentiality of information and should be retained securely.

The Final Warning Letter (Refer to Appendix C - example copy)

This letter signed by the Service Head would normally follow the first warning letter. Again, this should be self-explanatory. The same procedures as outline in section 2 above should be followed on issue of this letter.

Violence at Work – Exceptional Circumstances

An appropriate letter should be composed to reflect the circumstances of the incident. However the letter should refer to times, dates, places and any previous warnings and outline the proposed course of action.

Information Exchange – File Records

It is important that information about potentially violent clients is recorded and shared with other delivery units that may be at risk. The requirements of the Data Protection Act must be followed in keeping this information, and it is usually necessary to inform a client that they have been placed on the council's register of potentially violent clients. This duty may be excused if it is considered that informing the client may in itself trigger violence, but these reasons would have to be specific and recorded in case the decision is ever challenged. For more information, see appendix J. When considering to exchange information, Services should consider reported cases on their individual circumstances and whether previous incidents were a 'one off' and unlikely to present further risks to employees. Reference should be made to the listing in 6.1

Appropriate filing procedures should be implemented to identify individuals who are subject to formal warnings or service withdrawals. Additional risk 'warning or hazard indicators' may also be placed on file with colour codes or abbreviations where appropriate e.g.;

- not to be interviewed /visited alone –NVA,
- potential risk to men – PRM,
- potential risk to women – PRW,
- risk of physical aggression – RPA,
- refer to manager – RM.

The council also has a duty to inform contractors of known risks and this would include knowledge of potential 'high risk persons' with whom the contractor may come into contact during the contract work. It is the responsibility of each Service to ensure that appropriate information is passed on to contractors.

Prosecuting

The council is committed to giving support to any member of staff who is assaulted in the course of their duties. A member of the public who assaults an employee in the course of their work is liable to prosecution by the Police, the council or by the member of staff concerned.

- Managers are strongly encouraged to report all violent incidents involving physical assault to the police. The police are responsible for deciding whether the incident warrants prosecution of the perpetrator.
- If the police decide not to pursue a prosecution, the reasons for this should be made clear to the council and the employee. In such cases, the council may decide to take a different view and initiate a prosecution. The relevant Service Head in consultation with the Legal service must decide whether or not this is appropriate, considering the following criteria:

- The employee was assaulted or harassed because of their employment (including out of hours incidents which arise from work activities)
 - The police and the CPS have decided not to prosecute.
 - There is reasonable prospect of success and no likely conflict of interests between the council and the employee.
 - The action is likely to have a beneficial effect on the victim's recovery from the incident
 - Legal action is likely to promote or protect the interests of the inhabitants of the Borough and council employees.
- If the police or council decide to take action, Delivery unit management has the responsibility for ensuring that employees receive all the assistance they require. This would include time off with pay, (in order to give evidence in court etc) for the employee concerned and for any colleagues who witnessed the incident.
 - Where legal action by the police or council is not to be taken, assistance for employees to obtain legal and financial help is available subject to the following criteria:
 - A written request for help is made by the employee or their representative if the employee is incapacitated.
 - The Service Head concerned being satisfied that the circumstances of the case justify the provision of such support.
 - The employee concerned being able to engage a solicitor and that solicitor being satisfied as to the evidence available in support of such litigation.
 - The limit in any one case being £1000 plus VAT. This may be increased in special circumstances.

Investigation

Where requests for support have been received it is crucial for Service Heads to thoroughly investigate the case as quickly as possible to determine whether the council is in a position to offer support and to ensure that support is not offered where there has been related misconduct on the part of the employee.

Conflict of Interest

During the course of a council prosecution facts may come to light, which reveal a possible conflict of interests between the council and the employee. Each case will be considered on its own merits to decide if action should be taken.

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NOTICE OF UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR

The purpose of this notice is to explain the council's position on unacceptable behaviour by members of the public attending its offices.

The council sympathises with customers who are facing serious and stressful problems. We undertake to investigate your queries or concerns quickly and to reply to complaints from our customers about the services we provide.

But the council is not prepared to tolerate

- abusive or threatening behaviour
- other kinds of aggressive and insulting behaviour such as racist, religious or sexist comments about staff or other customers
- persistent swearing, obscene or insulting language
- drunkenness and/or unruly behaviour
- alcohol or drug consumption in our office
- vandalism of council property, including graffiti

WARNING: The council may refuse to provide any service, or may provide only limited services if customers are violent or aggressive to our staff or other customers. Such services may be withdrawn without warning in the event of very serious misconduct or if there is risk to staff or other customers. The council may also issue legal proceedings in such cases.

APPENDIX B – (First warning letter)

Dear

I am writing to tell you that I have received a report that your behaviour was unacceptable when you attended this Department on _____

The report says that on that date you

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I am writing to warn you that the council does not tolerate this kind of behaviour. I enclose a statement of the council's position. Please make sure that you do not repeat such behaviour.

If you have anything to tell about the incident please feel free to write to me.

Yours sincerely

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APPENDIX C – (Final warning letter)

Dear

I am writing to tell you that I have received a report that your behaviour was unacceptable when you attended this Department on _____

The report says that on that date you

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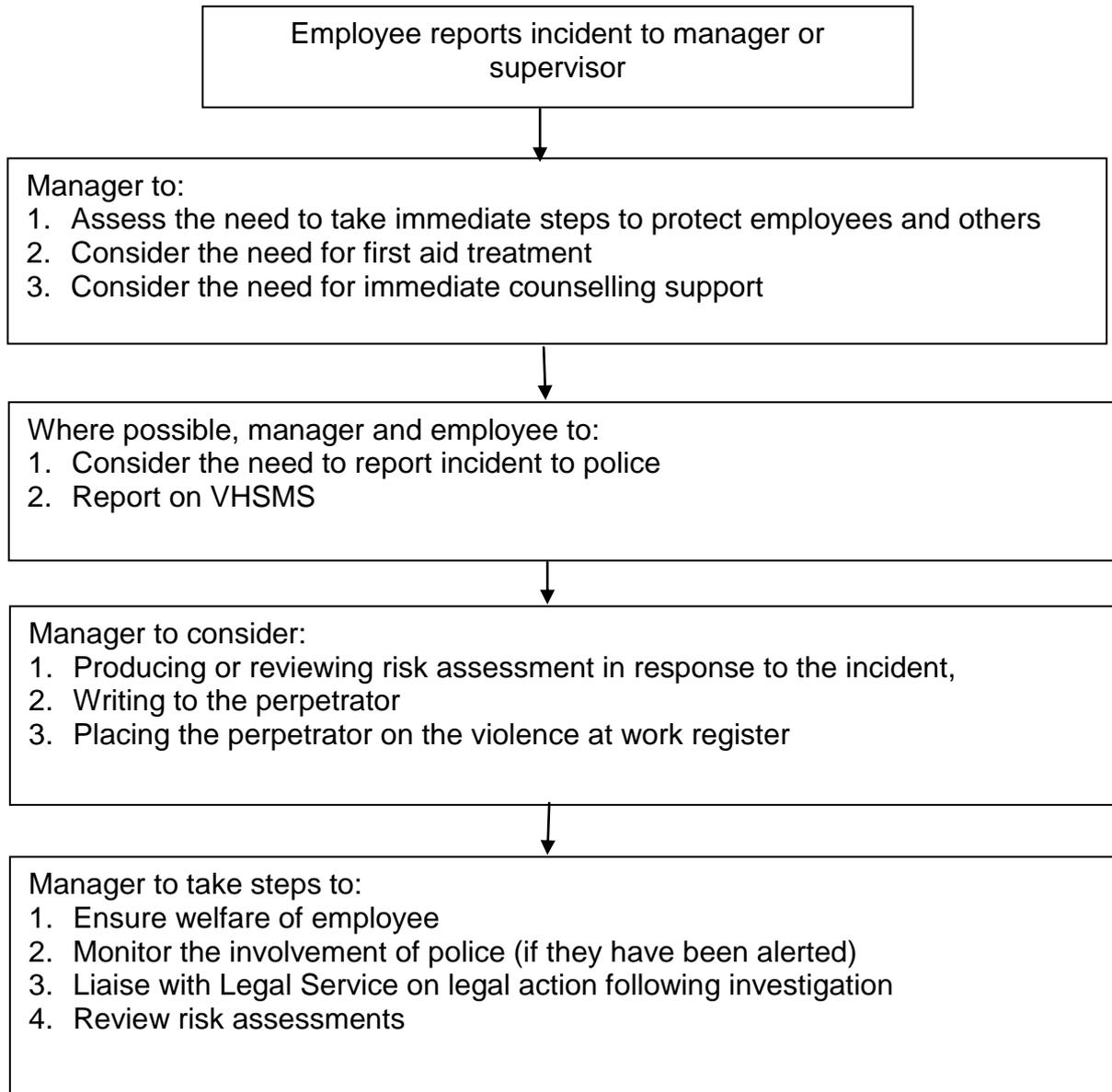
I am concerned that it has been necessary to write to you again about your behaviour.

I must warn you that if you repeat such behaviour, the council may no longer visit you at home or interview you in person or may stop providing you with its service altogether without further notice.

If you have anything to tell me about your behaviour, please contact me in writing.

Yours sincerely

**LONDON BOROUGH OF BARNET
VIOLENCE AT WORK
INCIDENT REPORTING PROCEDURE**



Further Action

Manager to consider:

1. Welfare of employee – referral to Occupational Health or other counsellors
2. Involvement of police – prosecution
3. Forwarding warning letters to perpetrators
4. Legal action following investigation
5. Advising employee of legal action that can be taken
6. Review risk assessment and current operating procedures and revise as appropriate.

VIOLENCE AT WORK
A GUIDE FOR MANAGERS

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7.0 Further Information

1.0 Introduction

This document provides a framework for Service management to implement the requirements of the Corporate Violence at Work Policy including guidance in the following areas:-

- Identifying those employees who may be exposed to violent incidents at work.
- Preventing or reducing the risk of violence at work.
- Procedures to be followed in the event of an incident.

Council Statement of Intent

The London Borough of Barnet aims to achieve high levels of health and safety in all of its undertakings. It is committed to reducing risk to employees.

We do not expect, nor will we tolerate, physical attacks or verbal abuse of our employees. We will provide training and support to our staff and take reasonable steps to avoid violence towards our staff at work. We will also, where appropriate, support our employees by taking action if a violent or abusive incident occurs.

The council recognises that it has an obligation to strive to eliminate the danger posed by threats of violence at work.

The Council will;

- endeavour to minimise the risk to employees from potentially violent or threatening behaviour,
- provide training facilities for employees who may have to face violence at work,
- not tolerate verbal or physical harassment of its employees, assaults upon employees or their property by clients or other members of the public,
- where violence occurs against an employee and where an assailant can be identified, issue a formal letter to the person concerned, warning that legal action may be taken,
- if requested, provide within the restrictions outlined in this arrangement legal advice and financial support to victims of violence at work. (This also applies to incidents occurring out of work hours, which have arisen from work related activities),
- record and investigate all incidents of violence at work and take any remedial action that may be necessary,
- where reasonably practicable provide welfare and counselling facilities for victims of incidents or threats of violence at work.

The Council's Definition of 'Violence at Work':

'Any incident which an employee perceives that they have been unacceptably abused, threatened or assaulted by a person with whom they have come into

contact in circumstances arising out of or in the course of his or her employment’.

- This would include;
- physical attack – whether visible injury occurs or not, this will include any sexual or racially motivated attack,
- animal attack – i.e. where an animal is used as a threat or tool of violence,
- verbal abuse – when an employee feels that an unacceptable threat has been made against his or her person. This will include sexual or racial harassment, intimidation, name calling, insults mimicry, innuendoes whether by telephone or if in direct contact,
- attack against property – as a means of intimidating an employee.

2.0 General Responsibilities

Services managers are responsible for:-

- a) Reducing the risks of violent incidents involving their employees
- b) Implementing the procedures to be adopted following an incident

The Corporate Health, Safety and Welfare Policy states that managers must ensure that;

- all employees are aware of the policy and the local procedures to be adopted,
- risk assessments are undertaken by competent persons,
- all employees receive sufficient training to enable them to undertake their duties with the minimum of risk,
- employees report all violence at work incidents on the appropriate forms,
- ensure verbal abuse monitor records are completed where necessary to record the frequency of verbal threats/abuse either in person or by telephone,
- all violence at work incidents are reported/recorded/investigated and where necessary involve the assistance of Legal Services, Police, the Occupational Health Team/Health and Safety Team, Welfare Counsellors,
- violence at work issues are discussed at team meetings and employees are encouraged to participate in reviewing risk assessments,
- new starters are issued with appropriate information, instruction and training regarding the possibility of violence at work occurring during the course of their duties.

3.0 Identifying Employees at Risk

Managers/supervisors have a responsibility to identify whether or not there is the possibility for violence at work incidents occurring to members of their staff. Those employees who are considered to be most at risk are those who either:

- deal with the public,
- work in isolation,
- handle money, or
- deal with difficult client groups.

Within the London Borough of Barnet these employees have been classified into the following groups;

- off site workers e.g. Refuse workers, Grounds Maintenance staff, Parking Patrol officers, Fraud Officers, Environmental Health Officers, Cash Collection Officers, Mobile Library Staff,
- social services e.g. Day Centre Staff, Social Workers, Registration Staff, Sheltered Accommodation Wardens, Caretakers,
- education e.g. School Staff, Under 8's, Youth Service, Caretakers,
- counter staff e.g. Librarians/information point staff, Cashiers, Receptionists, Housing office counter staff, Benefit Counter Staff,
- telephone enquiry staff e.g. Council Switchboard, Customer Care, Benefits Officers.

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list but serves to illustrate the wide range of service providers who may be at risk.

4.0 Risk Assessment

Once managers have identified areas of risk, a violence at work risk assessment must be undertaken by a competent person and consider the following elements;-

- Identify Hazards

E.g. the possibility of:

Physical attack, including sexual, religious or racial attack

Animal attack – where animals are used as a threat or tool of violence

Verbal Abuse – where an employee feels that an unacceptable threat has been made against his or her person. This will include sexual, religious or racial harassment, intimidation, name calling, insults, mimicry, innuendoes whether by telephone or if in direct contact. Such incidents should not be disregarded as verbal threats have often been made prior to actual serious physical assaults. Cumulative effects of verbal abuse on staff should also be considered, as long-term exposure to even low-level verbal abuse can result in emotional problems and stress.

- Identify Those at Risk

Assessors should consider the listing in 3.0.

- Existing Controls (including information available)

The Assessor should consider the adequacy of existing controls such as:

- Current procedures/working practices
 - Regular discussions with staff on day to day levels of exposure to violence at work
 - Violence at work policy. Including Appendix F Violence at Work – A Guide for Employees
 - Local (Delivery unit/site/job specific) violence at work procedures
 - Security and Layout of premises
 - Staff Training – competency of staff to deal with potential violence situations
 - Reporting procedure
 - Provision of personal alarms/mobile telephones
 - Liaison with the Police
- Monitor And Review

Managers should ensure that the effectiveness of the risk assessments is monitored and reviewed as appropriate. (any risk assessment should be reviewed annually, or when there is reason to believe it is no longer valid, for example, after an incident).

The risk assessment represents the official record for the procedures to be followed to prevent or reduce the risks identified from violence at work incidents. The following guidance and information will assist in completing the risk assessment which should be recorded on the appropriate forms and reviewed at least annually or following an incident.

5.0 Control Measures

5.1 Environmental Design/Security of Buildings

Research has shown that the way in which clients and members of the public are received has a bearing on their behaviour. Staff should be suitably trained in interpersonal skills and so that they feel confident in how to deal with potentially difficult situations.

In addition the appearance and physical environment of buildings should be designed and secured according to the level of potential risk and to the needs of the service. Practical measures to improve security could include;

- restricted or monitored access include clear entry signage,
- staff should be aware of security and should challenge unidentified individuals where appropriate,
- identity badges should be worn and displayed by all employees in council premises or on council business,

- where appropriate visitors signing in/out procedures should be implemented and all visitors issued with visitors badges,
- safe egress from the building should be available at all times,
- vision Panels, spy holes, closed circuit TV or intercom systems to be provided where appropriate/practicable and as identified through the risk assessment controls. Where controlled entry systems are in place, which require a number code to gain access, the code should be changed on a regular basis and should only be disclosed to relevant staff,
- lighting outside the building and in car-parks should be adequate to allow staff to enter and leave council premises safely at all times,
- avoid situations where employees are working alone in isolated offices or buildings. If this is necessary a special assessment of the risk will be required and measures implemented to minimise any risks,
- shift workers and staff working late should be encouraged to leave the building in groups, wherever possible.

Improvements to Reception Areas and Interview Rooms

- Managers should aim to design reception and interview areas in an attempt to create a more friendly environment. Whilst appreciating the constraints of limited finance managers should consider:-

Interview rooms

- easy access, interview rooms not to be isolated, vision panels to be fitted to doors where necessary
- staff should be seated between the client and the door to ensure that an escape route is available
- panic buttons to be fitted in accessible positions so that the alarm can be raised without the knowledge of the client. There must be clear procedures of what to do if the panic alarm is sounded.
- panic systems to be connected to flashing light beacons in adjacent areas to alert other staff where necessary/practicable
- Regular checks and pre-arranged interruptions to be made by supervisors where potentially violent clients are being interviewed

Reception Areas

- good lighting
- inviting atmosphere
- suitable reading material
- play space and toys where appropriate
- interesting and informative display boards
- removal of objects which could be used as missiles
- screens, to provide some privacy for clients

Training on interviewing procedures should include practical measures for staff to follow such as:-

- ensuring all staff to be aware of alarm systems and procedures to be followed, hold 'violence drills'
- consider inviting a third person into the interview
- offer refreshments
- stay calm, do not engage in an argument, try to remain quiet, polite and objective
- avoid aggressive gestures or body language
- allow the individual space to regain their composure, e.g. leave the room for a moment, but do not give the impression that they are being ignored
- suggest another appointment date where the issue can be discussed more thoroughly

Waiting time should be kept to a minimum. Having to wait a long time reduces people's levels of tolerance and raises the risk of violent behaviour. Where there is an unavoidable delay, the reason should be explained to the person waiting and an apology given especially where an appointment has been arranged.

5.2 Visits away from Council Workplaces/Lone working

This may be the most difficult area to ensure staff safety. Most of the measures suggested are directed at improving prevention by detecting risks as early as possible and implementing appropriate procedures.

The following check-list should be used by Managers to devise area specific check-lists for those members of staff who work away from council buildings and are alone e.g. social workers, welfare officers, enforcement officers, caretakers, wardens etc.

Are Staff who visit/work alone:

- trained in strategies for the recognition and prevention of violence or dealing with difficult situations?
- briefed about the area where they are to work and the risks involved?
- aware of attitudes, traits, and mannerisms which may annoy clients, unauthorised visitors etc?
- given all available information about the client/possibility of violence from all relevant agencies?

Have they:

- understood the importance of previewing cases?
- left an itinerary with colleagues, or informed others on site of work schedule if working in an isolated area?
- made plans to keep in contact with colleagues, or friends and relatives when working late or off site? i.e. through a telephoning in system
- the means to contact the manager – even when the switchboard may not be in use?
- an understanding of the reporting and recording of incidents procedure including contacting the police or other persons where necessary e.g. caretaker - following a break in.

Do they:

- use the forms provided when required?
- appreciate their responsibilities for their own safety (see guidance to employees)?
- participate in the preparation of the risk assessment for off-site visits or lone working.

Refer to Appendix F – Violence at Work – A guide for Employees - information in producing check-lists for employees.

When working alone it may be necessary to consider the provision of portable communications equipment such as mobile phones, radios or pager systems to enable regular contact to be made in isolated areas or to summon assistance/first aid if required.

Other equipment to be considered could include personal attack alarms, etc. Managers should risk assess the situations where employees are working alone or off-site and provide all relevant safety equipment free of charge.

5.3 Verbal Assaults – Threatening Behaviour

Whilst accepting the need for reporting violent incidents leading to injuries, there is often scepticism about the need to record verbal threats or abuse if no injury occurs.

In certain isolated cases verbal threats have been made prior to serious injuries or fatalities occurring. In addition cumulative effects of repeated or serious verbal abuse can cause anxiety.

Verbal abuse should not be disregarded but reported so that trends can be identified and any necessary action taken.

6.0 Dealing with Violent Incidents – Reporting and Follow up Procedures

6.1 Reporting Incidents

When an employee becomes a victim of what they perceive to be an incident of violence, they must report the incident immediately to their supervisor or senior member of staff. Although it is the employee's perception, which is emphasised in the Council's definition of violence, managers/supervisors have a role here in supporting employees who may be reluctant to report incidents. All such incidents must be investigated thoroughly by line management and the London Borough of Barnet Accident/Incident form completed and submitted as soon as possible. Services are required to ensure that copies are forwarded to the Health and Safety Team and Insurance section

6.2 Calling the Police/Emergency Services

In cases of severe disturbance, violent physical assault, potential violence or serious damage to Council property the relevant emergency services should be called i.e. Police/Ambulance/Fire Service.

DU Directors have authority to close buildings if a serious incident occurs. Managers may also ban or suspend violent clients from using facilities. This should be done in a reasonable manner to prevent retaliation, and to ensure that we still deliver a service as well as possible.

Managers and strongly advised to report all violent incidents to the police, and they should consult with the employees involved in the incident to gather evidence before

this. It must be remembered that a prompt call to the police may lead to quicker action against the aggressor or help in any subsequent claim.

6.3 Procedure for Dealing with Physical Assaults on Employees

Employees who have suffered a physical assault should receive full support from management to include:-

- access to medical attention/first aid if the victim is injured or is in shock.
- reassurance, staff should not presume a failure on the employee's part when such an incident occurs. Managers should adopt a sensitive approach, and assess whether the employee is in a fit state immediately following the incident to briefly outline what happened. Any questioning or obtaining of information at this stage should be carried out in a non-judgemental manner. If it is not possible to interview immediately, the manager should talk through the incident as soon as possible after the incident. Colleagues, welfare officers or safety representatives may also provide moral support.

Note: In cases of Sexual Assault any request for confidentiality from the victim must be observed in any reports to other parts of the council.

- a discussion should take place as to whether or not the employee should go home. When an employee does wish to go home he/she should be asked whether they would like someone to accompany them and/or to ensure that a friend or relative will be at home. Transport should be provided where appropriate. The victim may need time off work following an incident and this should be offered where necessary.
- if the employee concerned does not wish to leave work, they may need to be relieved of certain duties for a while.
- it may be necessary at this stage to offer counselling through the Occupational Health service
- after the event, it may be appropriate to call a meeting of all relevant staff (including colleagues who may have witnessed the incident) to discuss what can be learned from the incident and what changes could be made to prevent a recurrence. The Risk Assessment and working procedures should be reviewed and revised at this stage.
- as a result of debriefing the employee it should be ascertained whether or not the victim wishes action to be taken against the assailant by; the police, the Council, their trade union or by the individual. Reference should be made to the Corporate Arrangement section - Council Support for Employees.
- managers should determine whether the police are to take action against the assailant. Where this is not the case the employee should be informed as to the reasons why and advised by management on other steps to be taken (see Council Support for Employees)

6.4 Verbal Assaults and Threatening Behaviour

Reporting Verbal Abuse

The reluctance to report an incident on-line each time verbal abuse occurs by telephone is understandable and therefore a simplified reporting system has been produced. This will enable managers to monitor the type and frequency of verbal abuse being experienced by their staff on the telephone. (Reference should be made to Appendix I for the Telephone Verbal Abuse Monitoring Record form).

It is important that where other verbal abuse occurs (i.e. in direct contact) Service managers ensure that records are kept using VHSMS. Regular discussions should be held at staff meetings to monitor the frequency and seriousness of the abuse, and to implement changes to working procedures. Staff should be encouraged to bring serious or repeated threats to the immediate attention of their manager/supervisor.

Where verbal assaults or threatening behaviour are considered serious, staff should be advised on the action to be taken e.g. in withdrawing from the situation, summoning assistance or contacting the police etc.

Staff should receive training and guidance on how to deal with difficult situations and how to communicate with members of the public within the Quality Service Guarantees, without risking their own safety or health.

Reference should be made to Appendix F – Violence at Work – a Guide for Employees which includes a guide for staff in dealing with verbal abuse whether on the telephone or if in direct contact with the public.

7.0 Further Information

Health and Safety Executive

Preventing violence to staff - ISBN-0-11-885467-4

Violence at Work (free booklet) - IND (G) 69L (REV)

Violence to Staff: A basis for assessment and prevention – HMSO, ISBN 0-11-883887 3

HSC Health Services Advisory Committee

Violence to staff in the Health Services – ISBN 0-11-883917-9

HSC Education Service Advisory Committee

Violence to staff in the Education Sector – ISBN 0-11-885558-1

HSC/E publications available through good bookshops or HSE publications 01787 881165

Victim Support Scheme – a national charity who provide, through a network of local schemes, support, practical help and advice to victims of crime, the service is confidential and free. Address: Victim Support, National Office, Cranmer House, 39 Brixton Road, London SW9 6DZ

Association of Directors of Social Services

Guidelines and recommendations to employers on violence against employees (1987)

Library Association

Violence in Libraries published 1987

UNISON

Violence at Work - A Guide to Risk Prevention.

VIOLENCE AT WORK
A GUIDE FOR EMPLOYEES

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1.0 Introduction

This guide has been produced to help staff who are at risk of being subjected to violence or aggression at work.

The document can be amended by Services to incorporate specific needs in their area of service delivery.

All staff should be aware of the following information:

1. The Corporate Health, Safety and Welfare Policy Arrangement No. 9 Violence at Work, including all appendices.
2. Any Local Procedures relating to the Prevention of Violence at Work
3. Risk Assessments for Violence at Work
4. The availability of training and the need to attend training
5. Previous information on potential 'High Risk' service users.

2.0 General Policy Statement

The London Borough of Barnet is responsible for the provision of a safe and healthy working environment for its employees. The council recognises that it has an obligation to strive to eliminate the danger posed by threats of violence at work.

The Council will;

- endeavour to minimise the risk to employees from potentially violent or threatening behaviour.
- provide training facilities for employees who may have to face violence at work.
- not tolerate verbal or physical harassment of its employees, assaults upon employees or their property by clients or other members of the public.
- where violence occurs against an employee and where an assailant can be identified, issue a formal letter to the person concerned, warning that legal action may be taken.
- if requested, seek where possible to provide legal advice and financial support to victims of violence at work.
- record and investigate all incidents of violence at work and take any remedial action that may be necessary.
- provide welfare and counselling facilities for victims of incidents or threats of violence at work.

The Council's Definition of 'Violence at Work':

'Any incident which an employee feels that they have been abused, threatened or assaulted by a person with whom they have come into contact in circumstances arising out of or in the course of his or her employment'.

This includes;

- Physical attack – whether visible injury occurs or not, this will include any sexual or racially motivated attack.
- Animal attack – i.e. where an animal is used as a threat or tool of violence.
- Verbal abuse – when an employee feels that an unacceptable threat has been made against his or her person. This will include sexual or racial harassment, intimidation, name calling, insults mimicry, innuendoes whether by telephone or if in direct contact.
- Attack against property – as a means of intimidating an employee.

3.0 Support

The council has an obligation to support employees who have suffered or perceive they may suffer violence-related incidents in the course of their employment or incidents occurring out of hours which arise from work activities. As well direct/immediate support from line management and colleagues, employees should be aware of any other relevant sources of advice or support such as:

- Employee Assistance Service
- Human Resources
- Occupational Health Unit
- Health and Safety Team
- Trade Union Representatives
- Other External Agencies

4.0 Prevention Of Violence And Aggression

'GOLDEN RULES'

4.1 Be Aware

- Trust your intuition
- If you feel scared or uneasy, do not ignore the warning
- Act on it

4.2 Be Alert

- Walk tall, keep your head up
- Be aware of your surroundings
- Know where you are going and how to get there
- LOOK CONFIDENT

4.3 Record your Movements

When going out from the work place

- (i) Leave details of your movements and when you expect to be back (use an in/out board, Diary/mobile phone number or the accepted means within your section of knowing where you are)
- (ii) If you change your plans let your workplace colleagues know.
- (iii) Assess the potential risk of a situation.

4.4 Avoid Risk

If it seems at all dubious, call back to base first, to check. Avoid dangerous short cuts. (See also sections on Reducing Risk Situations and Dealing with an Incident)

4.2 Take Action when in Danger

Meeting aggression with aggression usually leads to confrontation. Defend yourself only if really necessary. Your aim should always be to get away. Staff with responsibilities for others in their care should follow their in-house procedures.

4.6 Always Report an Incident

Always report an incident even if it seems trivial. You or your colleagues could be put at risk if you do not report it.

4.7 After the incident, consider the following:

- Could the situation have been handled better?
- Would additional training have helped?
- If you feel you require additional training, ask your manager

ABOVE ALL USE YOUR IN-HOUSE PROCEDURES
THEY HAVE BEEN SET UP FOR YOU!

5.0 Reducing Risk Situations

5.1 High Risk situations may include:

- (a) Making decisions or taking actions that do not match the wishes of the service user.
- (b) Making decisions or taking actions that result in a major change for the service user.
- (c) Working with service users who may;
 - have a history of violence
 - who have made threats before
 - who have no apparent inhibitions against acting out in a violent/inappropriate manner. (Check with the nominated officer who holds the violent incident information file for your section or house files etc)
- (d) Working with service users who are experiencing personal frustrations or fears

5.2 Lone working/Home Visits

- (a) If you are worried, discuss with your manager to decide whether the visit should go ahead at all.
- (b) Do not visit alone if there is a suspicion of possible trouble or uncertainty about the situation.
- (c) Consider if the visit is really necessary? Where possible, could the client be invited to an office for appointment?
- (d) Carry your personal alarm, if you have one
- (e) Use the in/out board procedure, diary or similar formal system to show where you are expected to be, at what time and when you will return to the office.
- (f) Check back with your manager/designated colleague if you are not coming back to the office after a visit.
- (g) If you do not have a mobile phone, carry change or a phone card and the telephone number of colleagues and family etc.
- (h) Arrange visits for day light hours whenever possible.

5.3 Interviews and Meetings

If you know in advance that a caller may be aggressive or violent then plan before they arrive.

- (i) Inform the reception staff, senior manager and any others who should know
- (ii) Plan what should be dealt with when they arrive
- (iii) Plan who will see them, where the interview will take place and who will take action.

Never underestimate a threat, but do not respond aggressively. This will increase the chance of confrontation. Instead, try to:

- (i) Stay calm, speak gently, slowly and clearly.
- (ii) Consider inviting a third person into an interview.
- (iii) Do not be enticed into an argument.
- (iv) Offer refreshments if available.
- (v) Do not hide behind your authority, status or jargon.
- (vi) Tell the person who you are, ask their name and discuss what they expect of you or what you want him or her to do. Show you have listened to what they have to say and repeat key points they have made.
- (vii) Allow the individual space to regain their composure.
- (viii) Try to defuse the situation by talking things through as reasonable adults while remembering your first duty is to yourself.
- (ix) Avoid an aggressive stance. Crossed arms, hands on hips, a wagging finger or a raised arm will challenge and confront.
- (x) Say 'I'm sorry that you are upset' or similar to defuse a situation
- (xi) Sit down rather than stand but sit near the exit/escape route.

6.0 Dealing With An Incident

It is essential that staff who may be exposed to risk are trained to recognise the signs of impending trouble and if possible to try and defuse a potential violent situation. Staff will need to assess the situation and decide the best response.

This may be to:

- (i) Call assistance - do not be afraid to call the police.
- (ii) 'Get up and go' – this may often be seen as the best policy but this is not a blanket recommendation.

Staff are not expected to 'stand their ground' in violent or potentially violent situations.

If Violence appears to be imminent,

- Assess the situation to reduce the risk.
- Avoid dangerous locations such as the tops of staircases, restricted spaces or places where there is equipment that could be used as a weapon.
- Keep your eye on potential escape routes.
- Keep yourself between the aggressor and the door and, if possible, behind a barrier such as a desk.
- Never turn your back. Be prepared to leave a dangerous situation by moving slowly backwards.
- If you cannot get away scream, shout 'Fire' or 'Help' and make as much noise as you can to attract attention.
- Use your personal alarm if you have one.
- If you manage to calm the situation, re-establish contact cautiously
- In certain situations it might be appropriate to remove the 'audience' e.g. if the individual is encouraged to be disruptive by their presence
- Use office/interview room alarm.
- If violence is seen as highly possible/imminent make sure that a colleague/colleagues are posted close by and able to react if signalled (by phone/alarm/voice etc) Call for the assistance of the police if necessary.

Telephone Abuse/Threats

If you receive a telephone call and you are subjected to unacceptable language or behaviour to a degree that you feel personally threatened then;

- Politely ask the person to stop
- Warn the person that you will terminate the conversation if the behaviour continues
- Terminate the communication if the behaviour continues.
- Inform your manager that you have had to terminate a call.
- Complete the Telephone Verbal Abuse Monitor Record or report it on-line using the VHSMS depending on the perceived seriousness of the threat.

7.0 Reporting An Incident

It is vital that violent incidents are reported and recorded, so that we can take steps to tackle the problem, and prevent it from happening again.

- (a) The on-line accident reporting form should be completed as soon as possible after physical or verbal incidents. If you need to add more detail than the space allows, attach an additional piece of paper.
- (b) The Telephone Verbal Abuse Monitor Record may be used where staff are subject to frequent verbal abuse on the telephone. This is to ensure all incidents are recorded and appropriate action taken by management.

Once the report forms have been completed your line manager or supervisor should investigate the incident and determine if any measures can be taken to reduce the risk of such incidents happening again. The Health and Safety Team will also monitor that the incident has been investigated and that appropriate remedial action has been taken.

VIOLENCE AT WORK – TELEPHONE VERBAL ABUSE MONITOR
(TO BE COMPLETED FOR ALL CASES OF TELEPHONE ABUSE/THREATS)

EMPLOYEE NAME	MANAGER/ SUPERVISOR NAME	DATE	LOCATION REFERENCE	*TYPE OF ABUSE (TICK BOX)					HAS AN INCIDENT REPORT BEEN COMPLETED	
				THREAT	RACIAL	SEXUAL	RELIGIOUS	GENERAL	YES	NO

*IN CASES OF SERIOUS VERBAL ABUSE THE INCIDENT MUST ALSO BE REPORTED USING THE LONDON BOROUGH OF BARNET ACCIDENT/INCIDENT FORM (ON-LINE ACCIDENT REPORTING SYSEM)

COPIES OF THIS FORM SHOULD BE FORWARDED TO