

## **G15 APPENDIX 3 –EMPLOYEE GUIDANCE**

### **POEL18 VIOLENCE AT WORK - EMPLOYEE GUIDELINES**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Violence at work is defined as any incident in which employees are physically or verbally abused, threatened or intimidated or where their property or personal belongings, or both, are damaged in circumstances arising out of the course of employment. The County Council recognises that in your work you may meet people (either within the workplace or outside) who are potentially aggressive or violent. Many recorded incidents of aggression involve threats, harassment, bullying or serious verbal abuse and damage to property or personal belongings - unfortunately some involve actual physical assault.

The County Council aims to provide a working environment that limits the potential for violence, aggressive behaviour and harassment. It also provides support procedures for employees who are subjected to aggressive or violent behaviour at work.

The purpose of this leaflet is to:

- outline the County Council's policy for dealing with aggressive or violent situations
- provide advice on how to identify potentially antagonistic situations
- show you how to avoid violent incidents
- tell you what action to take if such an incident occurs
- provide information about the support and guidance available to you

(More information on harassment is given in [Grievance and Dignity at Work Policy](#))

#### **POLICY**

The County Council's policy is that its employees will not be expected to tolerate violence or abuse in the work place.

The County Council will make arrangements to avoid situations that could lead to violent incidents and to minimise the likelihood of occurrence and effect on employees where this cannot be achieved. Implementation of the policy is by:

- identifying situations that could lead to violence at work
- assessing the risks
- avoiding situations that could lead to violence wherever practical
- minimising the likelihood of violence at work (e.g. through physical separation, increased staffing levels, awareness training, violent incident recording and information sharing systems)
- informing customers that the County Council has a 'zero tolerance' approach to violence at work, e.g. through posters, customer service leaflets and warning letters where a threat has been made.

- treating employees who have been subjected to violence at work sensitively and compassionately
- providing assistance such as personal support and advice

Your manager is responsible for assessing and minimising the risk of violence at work, and its effect on employees. You will be given details of the arrangements in your work area as part of your induction or ongoing training.

## **AVOIDING VIOLENCE AT WORK**

Although violence at work can occur at any time and in any place, the average person's chances of being involved in a violent incident are low. The risk can be reduced by making sure that you are familiar with this advice and any additional advice given to you by your manager.

You have a responsibility never to put yourself, your colleagues, customers or members of the public at unnecessary risk.

Your manager will assess, with your help, the level of training you need.

'Talk' yourself out of problems; placate rather than provoke customers or colleagues who are focusing their aggression on you. This may include abusive phone calls, for example advise the caller that you are terminating the conversation if abuse persists.

Try and stay relaxed and keep tension under control. Your feelings can aggravate any hostile situation if you are stressed or afraid.

Do not give your home telephone number or address to customers. Avoid after-hours meetings.

People react differently to situations and what may seem to you as a simple incident may have a debilitating effect on others. Help others where possible who may not have the confidence to deal with these situations.

Be aware that some people have medical conditions that may make them appear aggressive.

Some people are sensitive about such things as their name. Giving someone a nickname rather than using their given name can be seen as an act of aggression. Equally you need to recognise some signs and gestures commonly used have different meanings to others and can be seen as threatening.

Respect other people's personal territory. Entering someone's home can be seen as an invasion of privacy and seem very threatening. Even taking a pen from a colleague's desk can appear aggressive.

Keep your distance: each of us has personal space which we defend when we feel it is being invaded.

Be aware of a possible danger from your own clothing or hair should there be a sudden physical approach e.g. remove tie or wear a clip on, remove scarves, long earrings and other jewellery, such as chains and tie back long hair.

Do not get into a lift with anyone who makes you feel uneasy. When in doubt use the stairs. Also get out if the only destination is the basement (unless that is where you intend to go, e.g. for the car park). Basements can be dangerous.

Where possible, arrange for potentially difficult persons to visit you at your workplace, rather than going to their homes or establishments.

Leave the office or interview room door open when meeting with potentially difficult persons and ensure you inform colleagues of the situation.

If your work entails going to people's homes, remember that the person you are visiting should ask for your credentials. Have these ready and introduce yourself, say why you have come and, if appropriate, how long you wish to stay. Do not enter a house at all if the person you have hoped to see is not there.

When you have to go out of the office for any length of time, always leave details, ideally in writing, of your expected movements; where you are going to initially, where you are going on to, and the time you expect to be back.

Assess the potential risks of situations whether driving or on foot; for example avoid dangerous short cuts, walk facing the traffic on the street side of the pavements, take taxis if necessary after dark, check your vehicle for reliability before setting off, lock doors if appropriate.

Phone the office if ever there is anything you are dubious about.

Phone in to a 'base' number if you change your plans. Always report what you are doing.

## **DEALING WITH VIOLENCE AT WORK**

Your own fear is a better indicator of something threatening than looking for signs of anxiety in others. Fear is information for you to use. Therefore, if the hair at the back of your neck stands on end, stop and assess. It may be just a natural reaction to change or the unknown.

When you are frightened ask yourself:

- Is this person's anger/hostility direct at me, the organisation, or themselves? Is it a form of distress?
- Am I in danger? If you think you are, leave and get help immediately.
- Am I the best person to deal with the threat? If you find particular situations difficult, perhaps someone else could handle it more effectively. This is a positive step; not a cop-out.

Never underestimate the threat.

Do not respond aggressively. This will increase the chance of confrontation.

Stay calm; speak gently, slowly and clearly. Do not argue or be enticed into further argument (this will not be easy as aggression does incite anger in others).

Do not hide behind your authority, status or jargon. Tell them who you are, ask the person's name, and discuss what you want him or her to do.

Try to talk things through as reasonable adults, in order to defuse the situation but remember your first duty is to yourself.

Avoid an aggressive stance - crossed arms, hands on hips, a wagging finger or a raised arm will challenge and confront.

Keep your distance and never put a hand on someone who is angry.

A person on the brink of physical aggression has three possible choices: to attack, retreat or compromise. You need to guide them towards the second or third. Encourage the person to move ... to the toilet ... for a walk ... to see a colleague. Offer a compromise such as talking through the problem, or divert the aggression into such actions as banging on a table or tearing up paper.

If the threat of violence is imminent, avoid potentially dangerous locations such as tops of stairs, restricted spaces or places where equipment 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. Keep face on as you leave.

Never remain alone with an actively violent person. Be prepared to move very quickly.

If you manage to calm the situation down, gradually re-establish contact. Take care with your words and actions, making a cautious approach. A cup of tea for each of you may cushion the aftershock.

The use of force in self-defence is allowed only in certain circumstances. If you are attacked you have three options: Flight, Compromise or Defence. It is safer for you to choose the first two:-

- Flight: Get away as fast as you can. Do not stop to think - Act. Preferably run towards a place where you know there will be people.
- Compromise: If you cannot get away, yell, scream, grab your personal alarm if you have one and set it off by your aggressor's ear and then throw it out of reach. You should then move away as quickly as you can. Carrying an attack alarm is an aid to your confidence.
- Defence: If you have to defend yourself, you may use an amount of force which is sufficient to stop the attack or to prevent yourself being injured. It should be no greater.

Do not walk deliberately into trouble to test your abilities. In any violent physical contact, everyone will be hurt. Beware of being so confident that you do not take care.

Remember meeting aggression with aggression can add to the confrontation. Your primary aim should always be to get away. It helps if you know your environment, so always be aware, alert and avoid trouble.

## **REPORTING INCIDENTS AND ABSENCES**

If you experience or expect the unacceptable behaviour in the workplace or connected to your work, whether verbal abuse, threats, bullying or actual assault, you should report this immediately to your manager. This will enable the matter to be investigated and action to be taken. One of the most important reasons for reporting incidents or near misses is to enable information to be given to others who may face similar situations. Your manager or supervisor will be able to advise on the procedure for reporting these incidents. (See [PO3](#))

If necessary the police will be called and prosecution action taken.

If you are on sick leave and believe that your absence is because of a violent or distressing incident at work (or outside but related to work) you must notify your nominated manager (for sick pay purposes) immediately

## **GENERAL SUPPORT**

Following a violent or distressing incident you may experience feelings of guilt, anger, fear, shock or stress. Such feelings are a perfectly natural reaction.

The County Council recognises the traumatic effects of violence and is committed to providing full support if you find yourself in such a situation.

If you are involved in a violent or distressing incident (including harassment, bullying or extreme verbal abuse) you should take every opportunity to express and share your feelings about the incident. (Separate advice on harassment can be found in [Grievance and Dignity at Work Policy](#).)

Colleagues who are not directly involved in the incident are often able to offer objective support. You may also wish to discuss the matter with your manager, or with a trained counsellor.

Your attention is also drawn to the help and advice on legal and other issues, as well as general counselling, offered by recognised trade unions to their members. The trained counsellors in the Employee Support and Counselling Service can also help.

In some cases your family may become involved, and in many instances they will be affected in some way by the incident. The County Council will provide advice and support to them, where it is considered appropriate.

## **LEGAL ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE**

In some circumstances it may be necessary to report an incident to the police. If you do have to attend a police station during working hours to give a written statement, provided the appropriate manager authorises that this absence is because of a work-related incident, you will be given time off with pay. You may be accompanied by your trade union representative or any other person of your choice. If that person is employed by the County Council, their absence will also be paid. The same arrangements will also apply if you are required to attend court.

As your employer the County Council is responsible for deciding whether or not to report an incident to the police. You also have the personal right to report a matter to the police.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Failure to report an incident could result in loss of your rights to appropriate benefits. Similarly, failure to report an incident to the police could result in loss of your right to claim compensation from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board.

## **BENEFITS AND COMPENSATION**

Your manager will be able to give you detailed information about the benefits and compensation available if you are injured as a result of violence at work. Set out below is a brief outline:

You may be entitled to certain benefits under your conditions of service, such as superannuation provisions. These will vary according to your circumstances and conditions of service.

In addition, you may be able to make a claim under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, for payment of compensation if you have been physically or mentally injured as a result of a crime of violence.

In order to make a claim, you should have been a victim of a crime of violence, or injured in some other way covered by the scheme. In addition, unless there are good reasons, you should have:

- reported the injury personally to the police, or to another acceptable authority, as soon as possible after the incident happened
- made an application within the statutory period
- Completed a [PO3](#) if injured at work

A dependent relative or a victim of a crime who has since died may make a claim.

Application forms and full details of the scope, conditions and administrative process of this scheme are available from:

Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority  
Alexander Bain House  
Atlantic Quay  
15 York Street  
Glasgow  
G2 8JQ

Tel. 0300 003 3601

In certain circumstances medical expenses relating to a claim may be reimbursed at the discretion of the County Council.