Lone Working Framework

Health and Safety Guidance for Managers and Staff

1. Introduction

This guidance is the overarching framework document with regards to lone working. It should be read in conjunction with Bradford Councils Health and Safety at Work Policy and other departmental or service specific polices and processes relating to lone working or safe working practices.

Bradford Council understands that in many of its services lone working is a key feature of work activities. Council managers have a legal responsibility to ensure that risks for staff working alone are effectively assessed and managed. This responsibility extends to contractors, volunteers and self employed persons who are carrying out work on behalf of the Council.

Staff have a responsibility to take reasonable care of themselves and anyone else who may be affected by their work.

It is not against the law to work alone and in many cases it is safe to do so. However, health and safety legislation places legal duties on employers to carefully consider and deal with any health and safety risks posed by working alone.

- Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974

- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

This guidance applies to all managers and staff who may be working alone, at any time, in any of the situations described in section **3. Definition**.

2. Purpose

This guidance document is designed to:

- Alert managers and staff to the risks presented by lone working.
- Identify the various elements to safely manage lone working and describe process to minimise risks.
- Give managers and staff a framework for managing potentially risky situations.
  It is not intended to unnecessarily raise anxiety of managers and staff.

3. Definition

Within this guidance, 'lone working' refers to situations where staff, in the course of their duties, work alone, or are physically isolated from colleagues, or without close or direct management supervision, or without access to immediate assistance.

There may be situations where a number of staff work in a building, but due its design and layout, some may be in isolated areas working alone.

Considering the variety of working activities carried out in Bradford Council, the following examples are likely to feature lone working **(note this is not an exhaustive list)**

- Staff working outside office hours and/or alone due to flexible working patterns

- Home workers

- Maintenance working (various)

- Visiting home or Commercial premises

- Care working

- Cleaning

- Parks and landscape working

- Security, including CCTV
- Wardens / Neighbourhood Services
- Caretaking
- Peripatetic work
- Community based working
- Professional advisory/inspection services

- Social working and support staff
- ICT support teams
- Volunteer work (e.g. Elections)
- Delivery drivers
- Construction/Demolition

4. Planning

All work activities involving lone working must be suitably planned to ensure the proposed work can be carried out in reasonable safety. This includes assessing the risks applicable to the task and implementing suitable controls. Ad-hoc or unauthorised lone working should be avoided.

Line managers are responsible to agreeing and facilitating lone working arrangements and, importantly, organising and setting the limits of the work in accordance with the known operating conditions and risks.

Those involved in lone working must be fully briefed of the task, the related risks, the agreed control measures and the limitations to that work.
Lines of communication need to be established i.e. checking in/out, fall back and the emergency arrangements. Staff movements and their expected starting, finishing or return times should be known and suitable methods of contact to be agreed.

5. Risk Assessment

Managers are legally required to identify the hazards arising from working tasks and activities, assess the foreseeable risks involved, and implement measures to avoid, eliminate or control those risks.

A risk assessment is simply a careful examination of what work, activity, premise, workplace, groups or individuals could cause harm. It is a process that helps managers make decisions that are informed, rational and structured to manage the risks, and take action that is proportionate to the risks identified.

For a risk assessment process to be successful, managers need to consult with staff to find out what they consider to be the hazards and risks of working alone. It is important to talk to staff as they are a valuable source of information. Their input will help to ensure that all relevant hazards are identified and appropriate controls chosen.

The existing Bradford Council risk assessment template and guidance is a useful reference and should be used to formally record the risk assessments.

The risk assessment process should consider the following as a minimum.

- The context – nature of the task, any special circumstances
- The environment – location, security, access, weather conditions
- Equipment to be used
- The individual(s) concerned – indicators of potential or actual risk,

- Person carrying out the task, including any medical conditions, young, old, new or pregnant
- History – any previous incidents in similar situations
- Lack of, or no, training and instruction
- Emergencies (ill health, accident, incident, violence, equipment failure etc)
- Any other special circumstances
- Supervision and Monitoring
- Review.

Section 11. Appendices identifies hazards, risks and controls that may be associated to lone working.

There is no legal requirement to conduct a specific, separate risk assessment for lone workers. Lone working hazards and risks can be included as part of other general and/or specific risk assessments (e.g. included as part of a Violence & Aggression risk assessment), but the assessment process outlined above should be followed.

Emergency procedures should be established, put in place and staff informed, instructed and given training.

When a lone worker works at another employer's workplace, consult with that employer to identify any risks and the required control measures.

What if a lone worker is working from home? Managers have the same responsibility for the safety and health of staff who work from home as for any other staff. This means providing supervision, education and training, as well as implementing enough control measures to protect the homeworker.

The findings of the risk assessment should be shared with all staff involved in the lone working, so they are aware of the risks and the precautions they need to take to do the job safely. The information should be used to create suitable safe working arrangements (see section **6. Safe Working Arrangements**).

Where there is any reasonable doubt about the safety of a lone worker, consideration should be given to stopping or withdrawing from the task, sending a second worker or making other arrangements to complete the task.

Some lone workers will be working in situations where they are expected to undertake 'on the spot' assessments whilst working alone, making operational decisions based on risks which cannot necessarily be foreseen. This is not a substitute for a comprehensive written risk assessment by the manager.

When a risk assessment identifies circumstances where a lone worker may have to undertake such risk assessments, they must:

- Receive training on how to make that assessment;
- Consider the range of possible control measures and what action to take;
- Get support for their decisions.

6. Safe Working Arrangements

Once the risk assessment is complete, the identified control measures are used to create safe working instructions or a safe system of work. This allows those involved to fully understand what is expected and importantly, any limitations, roles and responsibilities, equipment needed, training, supervision, emergencies and review. These processes help, support and safeguard managers, and staff, and create an auditable trail.

7. Training

Training is particularly important where there is limited supervision to control, guide and help in situations of uncertainty. It is necessary to enable lone workers to become competent in the task when they are not able to seek assistance from more experienced colleagues. It acts as an aide to cope with unexpected situations, or where they may experience violence and aggression. Anyone working alone needs to be sufficiently experienced and understand the risks and precautions.

Managing risk requires managers to set the limits of what can and cannot be done while working alone, eliminating any ad-hoc decision making by the lone worker. They need to make sure that staff are competent to deal with the requirements of the task or activities and are able to recognise when to seek advice from elsewhere, e.g. from a supervisor or line manager.

8. Supervision

Although lone workers cannot be subject to constant supervision, managers still have a duty to ensure their health and safety at work. Supervision can help staff to understand the risks associated with their work and the necessary safety precautions that must be followed. Supervisors can provide guidance in situations of uncertainty and act as a point of contact.

The extent of supervision required is a managerial decision based on the findings of the risk assessment process, and the ability of the lone worker to identify and handle health & safety issues. The higher the risk, the greater the level of supervision required. Those new to a job, undergoing training, doing a job that presents special risks, or dealing with new situations, may need to be accompanied in the initial stages.

9. Monitoring and Review

Managers need to ensure that procedures exist to monitor their lone workers. An effective method of communication is important (and there's a wide range of systems & devices available). Include the use of periodical visits/observations; pre-arranged meetings; use of phones, radios, e-mail; auto warning devices; start and finish calls to base or an agreed contact.

It's important to establish a robust system to log/record when a lone worker has safely returned to their work base or home once their work is completed. There must also be a procedure for when the lone worker doesn't return when expected and cannot be contacted. Communicate the procedure, and its importance to ensure their safety, to all staff & test regularly.

Risk assessments and safe working procedures should be reviewed

- On a regular basis
- Where there is significant change
- Following an incident
- If it is believed to be no longer valid.

This is to ensure the risk assessment is applicable to the task, it is valid and the safe system of work reflects how the task or activity is carried out.

Where individuals have concerns or issues regarding any aspect of lone working, they must bring them to the attention of their manager in the first instance.

10. Support

Lone working can have adverse health consequences for workers e.g. musculoskeletal disorders, tiredness and fatigue, issues associated with poor or irregular eating habits. Lone working can negatively impact on their work-related stress levels and mental health, e.g. being away from managers and colleagues could mean good support is more difficult to achieve and can lead to work-related stress. Putting procedures in place that allow direct contact between the lone worker, their manager and colleagues can help. Managing work-related stress relies on understanding what is 'normal behaviour' for an employee, and recognising abnormal behaviour or symptoms at an early point. If contact is poor, staff may feel disconnected, isolated or abandoned, which can affect their performance and potentially their stress levels or mental health.

Manager should:
- Agree how to keep in touch with lone workers, have regular meetings, and provide other opportunities to share concerns
- Include lone workers in social events and work or team updates;
- Ensure lone workers are included in any consultation on changes – they may have unique implications for them;
- Make sure lone workers are included in any training that is required.

Managers have a role in providing support to staff with mental health issues, whether work is causing the issue or aggravating it. Work-related mental health issues must be assessed and included in the written risk assessment. Where a risk is identified, managers must take steps to remove it, or reduce it as far as reasonably practicable.
If a lone worker has a pre-existing mental health condition, managers may need to make reasonable adjustments to their work or workplace. This may require additional interventions, including those required by the Equality Act 2010. (see work-related mental health advice on HSE's website at http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mental-health.htm)

Any form of violence & aggression against workers is unacceptable and may affect their psychological as well as their physical health. Lone working does not automatically imply a higher risk of violence & aggression, but it does make workers more vulnerable. The lack of nearby support from a colleague means that lone workers may be less able to prevent an incident from occurring.
Some of the key violence & aggression risks include
- Working in locations where there is a known high risk of violence;
- Late evening or early morning work when there are fewer people around;
- When workers hold positions of authority over customers or clients;

- Alcohol and drug use by clients or members of the public that lone workers have contact with;
- Carrying money and/or valuable equipment.

Training in personal safety, which may include conflict resolution, can help a lone worker recognise situations where they may be at risk and to take appropriate steps to avoid or manage the risk. Other measures to consider include modification or design of the work environment, if appropriate, to avoid workers being isolated, and providing devices designed to raise the alarm in an emergency which can be operated manually or automatically, e.g. phones or radios.

It's important for managers to support any worker who has been subject to an abusive or violent incident. Help and advice can be obtained from the Employee Health & Wellbeing Team. Violence & aggression incidents must be properly recorded and investigated, following the [Councils Accident & Incident Reporting & Recording Procedure](#).

11. Appendices

Hazards

This list is not exhaustive and it should be used to provoke thoughts and discussion regarding what hazards may be present in the lone worker activities.

- Access to and exit from the work area or site or premise
- Use of machinery and equipment – can it be safely used/operated by one person
- Possible failure of equipment or machinery
- Manual handling of persons or objects. Can all plant, substances and goods be safely handled
- Working at height or depth
- Working in a confined or enclosed space
- Lack of training or authorisation
- Staff not following training and agreed instruction
- Not sharing appropriate data regarding persons, groups, areas etc.
- Holding, carrying and using sensitive data
- Is there chance of violent behaviour (persons/animals)
- Are individuals especially at risk due to their gender, disability, ethnicity etc.
- Potential safeguarding issues
- Are new, young, trainee workers at particular risk due to their lack of experience
- Physical fitness of individuals to carry out the tasks alone
- Medical suitability of an employee (managers can seek advice from Employee Health & Wellbeing)
- Cash handling
- Do any of the foreseeable emergencies (e.g. fire, illness, mental health issues, accident) cause significant risk if the person is on their own
- Working out of hours or extended hours

- Weather conditions

- Driving for work and road risks

- Actions or activities of members of the public, or other third parties

- Unknown line management and reporting lines

- Is the work in rural or isolated area

- Is the work in someone else's home or premise

- Does the worker have adequate & reliable means of communication and a way to call for help

Risk Controls

The following list identifies common controls for the hazards associated to lone working. This is not an exhaustive list.

- Safe working procedures

- Suitable level of supervision or other support, established prior to starting work

- Lone working by management authorisation only

- Establish an emergency plan applicable to task

- Use of known data regarding clients, service users and third parties, for any potential risks and shared appropriately

- Set limits for 'when to withdraw' or 'not to proceed' applicable to task

- Establish triggers when it is appropriate to work with a partner on the task

- Ensure systems are in place to deal with sudden illness, accident or emergency

- Training – how to use equipment, manual handling, de-escalation of violence and aggression, communication equipment, personal safety and toolbox talks

- Use of lifting equipment or other mechanical handling and lifting devices

- Communications - make best use of static and mobile technology, trackers, body cameras, CCTV, mobile phones, radios

- Audible personal alarms

- Establish working procedure for appointment logging and monitoring

- Staff informing colleagues where they are going and how long they will be, e.g. a buddy system

- Local management arrangements for out of hours working

- Manager/staff ringing/texting lone worker at agreed intervals

- Staff ringing/texting back in after completion of last visit. Procedure for when lone worker does not make contact

- Knowing the emergency arrangements when in an unfamiliar building or premise

- Varying travel routes

- Use cashless technologies

- Staff visiting in pairs, with the police, or with lead agencies

- Meeting clients, service users at different or neutral venues

- Not wearing uniform/identification badge as it may create risk

- Support and de-brief processes for all parties post incident, or when dealing with emotive situations

12. Links to other documents

- Health and Safety at Work Policy

- Risk Assessment and Risk Management Guidance

- Risk Assessment Form

- Departmental and Service documents relating to lone working