Lone Working

Children's Services Operations Practice Guidance

January 2022

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Introduction

As stated in its [Health and Safety Policy](#) Buckinghamshire Council recognises its duties and accepts its responsibilities for the health, safety and welfare of its employees and of other people who may be affected by its activities. The County Council will, as far as is reasonably practicable, ensure the safety of staff who sometimes work alone, or work in situations where they are vulnerable, by minimising the risks that they face and putting in place appropriate measures to improve their safety.

1. **Purpose**

   The purpose of this guidance is to:

   - Alert staff to the risks presented by lone working

   - Identify individual and corporate responsibilities

   - Describe procedures to support the minimisation of risks associated with lone working

   - Contribute to the Council's compliance with Health & Safety legislation

   - Foster a consistent approach to lone working across Children's Services

2. Scope

2.1 This guidance applies to the identification and management of the risks associated with lone working and all teams within Children's Services are required to have in place local arrangements that comply with this policy.

2.2 The guidance applies to all Children's Services staff, including permanent and temporary workers, agency staff, students and those on work placement.

3. Definitions

3.1 Lone Working

Lone working can be described as any situation or location in which someone works without a colleague nearby, or when someone is working out of sight or earshot of another colleague.

Lone working can take place when people are:

- Working as individuals at a fixed site but are separated from others e.g. working alone in buildings or interviewing a service user alone in a separate room.

- Working in a remote location, including outdoors.

- Working alone away from base e.g. home visiting, often involving contact with the public.

- Working outside normal working hours, e.g. alone in isolated buildings or working alone in the community.

- Travelling alone as part of their work e.g. travelling to meetings or travelling to the home of a service user; and working on other employers' premises or working from home.

Many lone workers will encounter more than one of these situations and each may present a different hazard. In addition, staff who work alone face the same hazards in their daily work as other workers; however, for lone workers, the risk of harm is often greater. The main hazards facing lone workers are violence and aggression, and lack of access to assistance in the event of an emergency.

3.2 Risk Assessment

The HSE defines Risk Assessment as the process of systematic examination of a task, job or process that you carry out at work for the purpose of identifying the significant hazards, the risk of someone being harmed, and deciding what further control measures you must take to reduce the risk to an acceptable level.

3.3 Normal Working Hours and Out-of-Hours

Normal working hours at Walton Street Office are 8am to 7pm, at High Wycombe Old Library are 8am to 6pm (5.30pm on Fridays), and at Amersham are 7am to 7pm, (6.30pm on Fridays). Out-of-hours is therefore any time not within these hours.

3.4 Buddy Systems

Buddy systems are arrangements put in place within teams to record when people are lone working. The expected duration and outcomes are agreed so that if these are not as expected, protocols can be instigated to check the worker is safe and initiate emergency procedures if necessary.

3.5 Personal Safety & Lone Working Devices

A lone working device provides various means of tracking and recording workers movements, so as to be able to raise an alarm should the worker be in potential danger.

4. Roles & Responsibilities

The **Corporate Director** is responsible for ensuring that appropriate systems and measures are in place.

Senior Managers must ensure that all staff are aware of and comply with the Lone Working guidance.

Line managers must ensure that**:**

- Guidance is applied to all staff they are responsible for – including full and part-time staff as well as sessional/casual staff, temporary staff and students.

- All lone workers are identified, based on recognised definitions (as set out in **3. Definitions**).

- They complete the managers Health & Safety Training, provided by the BCC Health & Safety Team.

- All relevant policies, procedures and guidance are provided to lone working staff and that those staff have completed the Personal Safety Awareness Training available at: [Personal Safety Awareness Training](#)

- Where possible and appropriate, a risk assessment is conducted with the worker to ensure that all risks from lone working are identified and that control measures have been introduced to appropriately protect staff by removing, minimising or mitigating the risks before staff enter a lone working situation.

- Measures identified in the risk assessment to reduce risk are put in place and where appropriate, methods/technology are made available to increase the safety of lone workers (e.g. lone working devices, team 'buddy systems').

- There is a team protocol in place outlining the steps that will be taken in the event of an emergency.

- Regular reviews are undertaken of hazards and associated risks to ensure measures are effective and continue to meet the requirements of lone workers.

- Where an incident has occurred involving a lone worker, it is reported in accordance with [Buckinghamshire Accident/Incident Recording Policy](#)

Lone working staff should ensure that they:

- Do all they can to ensure their own safety and that of their colleagues, in line with current health and safety legislation.

- Seek advice from their line manager and follow guidance, procedures and instruction to avoid putting themselves or their colleagues at risk.

- Ensure that their planned whereabouts is up-to-date and easily obtainable via their online calendar – this must include all appointment times, clear and accurate location and session details.

- Maintain awareness and be alert to changing situations and increased risks.

- Ensure they make use of all technology provided for their own personal safety, and ensure that they attend training in the use of the technology and associated support services.

- Report all incidents even where they consider it to be a minor incident, including 'near misses' to enable appropriate follow up action to be taken.

5. Risk Assessment

5.1 General Approach to Risk Assessment

Risk assessments are a vital part of health and safety, and particularly for lone workers. General guidelines are provided below, but it is important for staff and managers to approach risk assessment, and lone working itself, with a common sense approach. Always think in practical terms, consider what could happen, what is likely to happen, and what can be done to reduce the chance of it happening, and in the event it does, the impact.

5.2 Risk Assessment Advice and Procedures

All Council staff should have a 'job-based' risk assessment in place. This should be completed by the individual and their manager. It should be reviewed on an annual basis dated and signed by both parties. This should be kept along with other personnel/supervision records.

In addition to this, an 'activity-based' risk assessment should be completed if there are specific activities that require a more detailed assessment.
Risk assessment advice and a generic template, which can be adapted as required can be found at:

https://internal.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/my-council/policies-strategies-frameworks/health-safety/risk-assessment-guide/

6. Operational Risks

6.1 Safety in the Community

Home Visits

Staff should not assume that having a mobile phone and a back-up plan is a sufficient safeguard in itself. The first priority is to consider what can be done in order to reduce any risk that exists by carrying out a risk assessment in line with BC Health and Safety Policies and Procedures (as above).

When planning home visits the following should be considered:

- Is a home visit really necessary? Could the person be interviewed at the office or alternative location?

- Can someone else be present such as a co-worker etc.? Is there a possibility of the service user's relative or friend being present which may add to the risk? Try to check this out beforehand.

- Take into account what is known about the person. Any history of aggressive behaviour should entail a discussion with the line manager as to the best way of approaching a visit. Refer to the client case file which should outline any potential issues. If in doubt – the preference should always be to interview them from a work base.

- Make sure that your manager or colleagues know how to contact you – keep your online directory up to date.

- Make sure that your next of kin emergency contact details online are up to date.

- Every team must establish their own effective contact/tracking arrangements and procedures in place if an emergency arises.

- All members of staff have a responsibility to comply with local arrangements established to protect their personal safety.

- Always take a mobile phone, ensuring it is appropriately charged.

- Do not enter a person's home if they appear to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol or ill etc., unless you have another colleague with you and you both deem it safe to enter. Always approach these situations with caution.

- When visiting an unknown building familiarise yourself with the layout and exit routes and sit near them if possible. Be aware of potential weapons within the vicinity.

- Request dogs and other potentially dangerous pets are kept out of the room.

- If the person you are visiting/anyone else present starts to get abusive/aggressive behaviour follow the actions set out in the risk assessment you have carried out prior to the visit.

<u>Travelling by car</u>

When travelling by car always consider the following:

- Always keep windows closed and doors locked when driving alone, particularly at night and in isolated areas.

- Do not give lifts to strangers e.g. a hitchhiker, or accept lifts from a stranger if you breakdown or have an accident.

- If you see an incident or someone tries to flag you down, think first. Is it genuine? How would you best help? It might be safer and also more helpful and practicable to report what you have seen using your mobile phone.

- If you believe you are being followed, keep calm and continue driving to a busy place e.g. garage, police station etc. where help could be available. If necessary, draw attention to yourself by sounding your horn.

- If other drivers or vehicle occupants try to attract attention e.g. indicating a fault with your vehicle, ignore them and avoid eye contact.

- If a car pulls in front of you and causes you to stop NEVER turn off the engine. If the driver or passenger approaches, reverse as far as is safely possible and ensure doors and windows are locked. If necessary draw attention to yourself e.g. by sounding the horn.

- When parking in daylight always try to imagine what the place would be like at night.

- When parking at night, park near a streetlight and as close to the service user's home as possible.

- Always lock away any valuables out of sight in the boot.

- When returning to the car, always have the door key ready. It is better not to stand by the car searching for the key.

<u>Travelling on foot or public transport</u>

When travelling on foot or public transport always consider the following:

- Think ahead, be alert and be aware of your surroundings.

- Try to use busy well-lit roads and avoid poorly lit or quiet underpasses.

- Avoid carrying valuables (i.e. excessive amounts of cash or expensive jewellery).

- Always sit near the bus driver or stay downstairs. If possible, wait for the bus at a busy stop that is well lit, or a bus stop close to an area of activity- for example, a garage or a late shop.

- Have the fare ready, separate from other money or valuables.

- Try to avoid having hands full with heavy bags.

Out of Hours working

When working out of hours always consider the following:

- Think about the weather conditions, and how long you may be out.

- Ensure you know how to reach your destination before you leave.

- Ensure that in winter you have appropriate warm clothing or spare clothing in your car. Think about keeping a blanket in your car in case of emergencies.

- Ensure you have de-icing equipment/spray in case of freezing weather, and a shovel, if necessary.

- Ensure that you always have sufficient drink and snacks or food available, as your call out may last longer than anticipated.

- Ensure that you wear appropriate and comfortable clothing, and footwear that you will be able to move quickly in.

- Carry a first aid kit with you, and any medication you may regularly require.

- Ensure you inform a family member, emergency contact of where you will be going and who to contact if you do not return.

- It's advisable that you have adequate car breakdown cover.

6.2 Safety in the Office

Although lone workers are often working out in the community, there can be times when staff are working on their own in County Council buildings. This can include early starters, late leavers, staff that have to interact with service users or members of the public without colleagues nearby.

Security

Aylesbury – Walton Street Office.

The Security Control Room is located behind Reception

The Security team are on duty:
Monday to Friday   7am to 9pm
Saturday   8am to 6pm
Sunday   Closed

Wycombe – Wycombe Old Library

The Security Control Room is located behind Reception

The Security team are on duty:
Monday to Thursday   8am to 6pm
Friday   8am to 5.30pm
Weekend   Closed

Amersham – King George V House

There is no Security presence currently at Amersham

Late evening working

If you need to work after 7pm Monday to Friday at Walton Street Office let Security know on Ext. 2035. You need to leave by 8pm - after this the building needs to be secured and alarmed. There is currently no facility to work after 7pm in Wycombe or Amersham.

Weekend access Walton Street complex

Saturday access is from 8.15am to 3.30pm. Staff must sign in with Security and have their swipe cards with them. Managers should call Security on Ext. 2035 and give as much notice and detail as possible. A confirmation email is required

by Security before noon on the preceding Friday, this should state names, location, extension numbers and times of work for each person. Email address will need to be provided.

Personal Safety devices

A personal panic alarm known as the 'Man Down Alarm' is available for meetings when the question of personal safety arises. The 'Man Down Alarm' is issued by the Security team on request.

Contacts

Security Control Room   01296 383799 or 07950385797
Emergency   777
Emergency from mobile   01296 387777
Facilities Management (FM) email address:
candlminorworks@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

The main risks to staff lone working in Buckinghamshire Council buildings include:

- Managing accidents and incidents and lack of assistance in case of emergency.

- Handling of heavy loads.

- Use of work equipment.

- Use of electrical equipment.

- Working with Display Screen Equipment.

- Violence and aggression from service users or member of the public.

6.3 Working at other bases

Where a lone worker is working at another employer's workplace, that employer should inform the lone worker of any risks and the control measures that should be taken. In these settings, it is as important to establish likely risks and control measures, as it would be if you were seeing a person in their own home. When

conducting meetings/interviews in any unfamiliar setting, staff should familiarise themselves with the security features such as, panic cords and exit routes.

If there are concerns about personal safety, consideration should be given to asking another staff member to sit in, undertake the interview where it can be observed by other staff, or rearrange the interview.

If conducting an interview, please ensure another staff member knows where you are, with whom and what time the interview should conclude. An interview should not take place unless there are other members of staff present.

6.4 Agile Working

Potential hazards that may arise include:

- Handling of heavy loads.

- Use of work equipment.

- Use of electrical equipment.

- Working with Display Screen Equipment.

- Violence and aggression. The potential exists for a home worker to be the victim of violence in their own home as a consequence of their work activities.

- Effective arrangements for communicating with home workers must be established.

- Stress arising through the lack of regular contact or opportunity for a debrief following a challenging incident.

6.5 Safety Technology

Following a risk assessment it may be appropriate to offer staff equipment to help keep them safe. Appropriate training should be provided to support the use of this equipment.

Although technology is not a solution to all problems posed by lone working, it can be a helpful tool to keep staff safe. It is not a substitute for good safety planning.

These items include:

- Solo Protect Lone Working Devices (see details below)

- Internal alert systems such as fixed panic alarms which maybe present with in the room.

- Personal Safety or Lone Working devices – Man Down Alarm (a panic alarm issued by security on request and Mobile phones where allocated*).

- Torches

- In the event that safety technology is identified as being required there must be a schedule of checks to ensure that it is fit for purpose and is working as required.

*Following the outcome of a risk assessment, where mobile phones are required as part of the risk management strategy, staff should be provided with an appropriate BCC mobile phone and avoid all use, wherever possible, of their personal mobiles for work-related activities.

SoloProtect Lone Working Devices

Buckinghamshire Council currently procure devices and associated services from SoloProtect Ltd.

The devices are in the form of a security card holder that can be worn on a lanyard with the security card in front. The main features are:

- Devices are connected to SoloProtect's online portal and alert receiving centre
- Devices contain roaming sim cards which allow for two-way conversations with alert receiving operatives
- Red alert and man down/incapacity alert
- GPS location
- Amber alerts (voicemail message to provide details of risk)

All lone-workers should consider the use of these devices, which provide monitoring and assistance in the event of workers being in danger.

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