

PUBLIC

Violence at Work Corporate Policy and Guidance

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Links and Dependencies
Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations.
DCC Lone Working Policy and Guidance/Stress Policy.
DCC Incident Reporting Guidance

1. Introduction

Derbyshire County Council has a legal duty under the Health and Safety at Work Act and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of their employees. This duty includes protecting employees' physical and mental wellbeing from violence at work.

Work related violence can be defined as any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to work. This can include verbal abuse or threats as well as physical attacks.

2. Policy Statement

Derbyshire County Council believes its employees have the right to work in a safe environment and will not tolerate behaviour which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

The Council will therefore undertake to reduce to the lowest level reasonably practical, the risk to health and safety of its employees and members of the public from incidents of violence connected with work activities by implementing the following measures:-

- Keeping under review all work places and work activities that may expose employees to incidents of violence.
- Where risks of incidents of violence are identified, undertaking a risk assessment and implementing safe systems of work and practical preventative measures where required.
- Providing adequate information, instruction and training to employees who may be exposed to incidents of violence.
- Encouraging employees to report all incidents of violence.
- Investigating all incidents of violence towards employees as appropriate.
- Providing full support to any employee who is the victim of violence including prosecution of offender should that be appropriate.
- Reviewing the policy and guidelines through monitoring and auditing at suitable intervals.

3. Implementation

Within departments each Strategic Director shall have responsibility to ensure that arrangements and provisions are made to implement this policy.

The trade union appointed safety representative, where one is appointed to cover particular premises, will be provided with relevant information concerning this policy.

Through the control measures identified in the general guidance, the Council will monitor the effectiveness of this policy and take all reasonable steps to continually reduce the level of violence to employees.

4. General Guidance

On average there are over 500 incidents involving physical or verbal abuse to DCC employees per year. These include physical and verbal attacks by service users and external parties.

There are a number of policies and procedures already in place within the Council which help to reduce the risk to employees from physical and verbal abuse. These include:

- Lone Working/Personal Safety
- Risk Assessment
- Harassment
- Stress
- Discipline

Violence against any employee in the course of their employment is both legally and morally unacceptable. The effect of prolonged or repeated exposure to the threat of these incidents can have a detrimental impact upon the health and wellbeing of the individual.

Even where there is no physical injury, an incident can still generate considerable emotional stress. Threats may indicate a risk of actual injury, while malicious damage to an employee's property can cause distress and fear of future physical attack. People have different perceptions about the behaviour which they find threatening or offensive. Something which causes distress to one person may simply annoy another; and what one finds threatening may be shrugged off by others. It is important that each reported incident is taken seriously.

- **General Advice**

- **Think** of your safety – assess potential risk situations. Although the chances of a physical attack are statistically low there is the tendency to believe that it will ‘never happen to you’.
- **Act** on warning signs immediately (for example, feeling threatened, unnerved or upset).
- **Walk away** from situations which you feel may become out of hand.
- **Do not** resort to aggression.
- **Discuss** any fears with colleagues or your Line Manager. Do not try to hide them in fear of being seen as ‘weak’.
- **Attend** a personal safety training course which deals with aggression, communication and de-escalation techniques and assertiveness. These techniques will help to diffuse potentially violent and abusive situations.
- **Avoid** aggressive actions likely to challenge and confront anyone. Lack of aggression may help to identify and avoid potentially violent confrontations.

- **Types of Violence**

Most incidents of assault which occur at work are those inflicted by service users and members of the public on Council employees.

There are a number of areas in particular in which employees may potentially be exposed to violence:-

- Whilst working alone or away from a workplace.
- Whilst handling money or valuables.
- Whilst providing care to service users in their own home.
- Whilst carrying out inspections or enforcement duties.
- Whilst working with individuals who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Whilst working with individuals with mental health problems.
- Whilst undertaking location independent working (LIW).

- **Visits or Meetings away from the Office**

- Leave a specific record of all places to be visited and how long the visits will take including an estimated return time. Leave a telephone number if possible so that contact may be made.
- Any changes to the itinerary should be logged on the original record.
- Initial contact meetings should be held at the office. In situations where this is not possible, the authenticity of the person(s) must be verified before a visit is arranged.
- Do not enter areas which feel threatening.
- Provision of personal alarms or communication devices should be considered, dependent upon the degree of potential risk.
- When undertaking external visits, proof of identity must be carried and displayed.
- Ensure that someone in the office knows the visit details and times of arrival and departure, within that visit.
- Arrange to telephone the office at pre-set times.

- **Working Alone in an Establishment**

- Where possible, lock entry doors but ensure that there is still safe access and exits in the event of an emergency.
- Unexpected callers must always have their credentials checked before being permitted to enter the establishment.
- There should be suitable means to summon help in the event of an emergency.

- **Handling Money or Valuables**

- Special arrangements should be made for handling and carrying money. Refer to the departmental arrangements.
- In situations where cash is taken to a bank the routes and times should be varied wherever possible.
- Cash must not be left on view. Surplus throughout the day should be stored away in a safe place.
- Arrange the work area so that there are easy escape routes if required.
- In situations where safety feels threatened, help should be sought immediately.
- There should be a suitable means to summon help in the event of an emergency.

- **Whilst providing care to Service Users in their own home**

- Ensure an individual care plan and risk assessment has been undertaken.
- Check previous care history including reports of violence/behavioural issues.
- Implement a system to assist employees to identify potential threats/behaviour issues related to individuals.
- Report any abusive violent behaviour immediately to your line manager who should review the care plan/risk assessment.

5. Managers' Guidelines

- **General Responsibility**

As a manager you have a responsibility for the health and safety of your staff and you should take appropriate action to monitor and reduce where reasonably practicable, the exposure of your staff to potentially violent incidents by:

- assessing the work activities and workplaces in relation to violence at work;
- taking measures to minimise the risks by implementing appropriate control measures;
- monitoring your employees for signs and symptoms of physical or verbal assault;
- offering support to employees who suffer a violent/traumatic incident whilst at work.

- **Procedures to be followed when a violent incident has occurred**

- The complainant and the alleged perpetrator must be separated and calmed until the Police arrive.
- If medical attention or first aid is required it should be sought immediately.
- The Manager in charge of the establishment where the assault occurred should be informed of the incident.
- The Manager or person assaulted should take the details of any witnesses present, including names and addresses where possible. The witnesses should be asked to provide a full account of the incident.

- Once documented, the account should be signed by the witness and the person taking the details.
- In cases where legal proceedings may be involved the person assaulted should be referred to Legal Services. They should also be made aware of the support and assistance available through the Council's Counselling Services. (The person assaulted has the right to refuse counselling or legal services if they so wish).
- The Manager must investigate the incident, obtaining specialist advice as required to ensure that suitable control measures are introduced as part of the risk assessment process to prevent reoccurrence wherever possible.
- The Manager or nominated person must ensure that the Council's electronic Incident Report form is completed. This is available on Dnet.

6. Employee Guidelines

• General Responsibilities

You or your colleagues may be exposed to violence/abuse at work. It is important that you are able to recognise factors in the workplace which may expose you to violence and abuse. It is also important that you can recognise the signs and symptoms brought on by both physical and verbal violence in yourself or others around you in order to be able to take appropriate action.

Legally you have a duty under Section 7 of the Health and Safety at Work Act and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations to take reasonable care of your own health and safety and that of others who may be affected by your acts or omissions whilst at work.

Your manager or a designated competent person is required to undertake a risk assessment of all activities to identify significant risks within the working environment, this includes risk of violence. If you think you are exposed to potentially violent situations then discuss these with your line manager or your trade union safety representative, if one is available.

It is important that all incidents of violence are reported to your Line Manager. In many cases, incidents of assault may occur away from the Council's premises and it is important that these are reported to your Line Manager or Safety Representative, however trivial the incident may seem.

It must be understood that an incident of say, verbal abuse, may seem trivial to you but to another employee it may feel threatening, therefore by reporting the incident you are protecting others as well as yourself from a possible re-occurrence.

- **Sources of Help**

Your first point of contact for further advice and assistance would be your line manager, trade union representative or departmental Health and Safety Section.

Other sources of help include:

Occupational Health, County Hall, Matlock (Inc. Counselling Services)
Legal Services.
HR (bullying/harassment policies, etc.).
Trade Union Representative.
DCC's Incident Reporting Guidance.

Acceptable Behaviour Towards our Employees

Derbyshire County Council aims to provide quality services to the people of Derbyshire.

We are committed to treating you with respect and courtesy when using our services.

Please treat our employees with the same respect and courtesy as you would expect from us.

Our employees have the right to work in a safe environment and will not tolerate behaviour which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

In such instances we will take firm and effective

