

# Health & Safety Section

## Corporate Policy on Workplace Aggression and Violence



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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Perth & Kinross Council recognises that there is growing concern about the problem of violence and aggression to employees who work in direct contact with the public. The Council further recognises that the nature of the services it provides places particular groups of employees at potential risk from service users. While accepting the need to continue to improve service provision to all sections of the community, the Council and the trade unions agree that all reasonably practicable steps should be taken to identify and minimise the risk of violence to employees.

- 1.2 This policy on violence and aggression to employees at work identifies and promotes practices, which seek to minimise these potential risks. It is recognised that services will have specific concerns relevant to the activities of particular groups of employees who come into contact with the public in the course of their work.
- 1.3 These guidelines are intended to help managers and employees to deal pro-actively with issues of violence and aggression. The emphasis is placed on the use of personal and professional skills, and on taking all possible steps to protect employees in situations where physical or verbally expressed aggression is likely to arise.
- 1.4 Recognising that violence and aggression can occur through no fault of employees, these guidelines and the training associated with them are designed to give people confidence in the management of this potential problem.

## **2. WHAT IS VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION?**

- 2.1 Violence and aggression is defined as:

“Any incident, in which an employee is verbally abused, threatened or assaulted by a client, a member of the public or a fellow employee in circumstances relating to their employment”.

[Health and Safety Executive]

- 2.2 Anyone at work can be a victim of violence and aggression as well as harassment or bullying during the course of their employment. Even potential violence and aggression can lead to stress-related problems.
- 2.3 Reducing the risks to personal safety reduces fear, encourages confidence and enables employees to stay in control.
- 2.4 Perth & Kinross Council recognises that it has a legal responsibility to

ensure the safety and health of all its employees so far is reasonably practicable including assessment, prevention and control of the risks from violence and aggression at work.

- 2.5 In seeking to apply the above definition, some situations, such as physical assault and explicit threats are easily identified as violence, whilst others, such as verbal abuse, are more difficult to assess. It is also recognised that an individuals' perception and tolerance level will be different: something which causes distress to one person may simply annoy another; and what is threatening to one may be disregarded by another. It is important, therefore, to retain a sense of perspective, whilst at the same time ensuring incidents are not trivialised.

### **3. STATEMENTS OF PRINCIPLE**

- 3.1 The personal safety of each member of staff is of primary importance and the Council will endeavour to ensure that suitable arrangements are in place, which aims to reduce the risk of violence at work. This will include staffing levels and working practices appropriate to the particular operational area.

- 3.2 Actual or threatened assaults on employees of Perth & Kinross Council are unacceptable and the Council will support employees who, during the course of their duties, are:

- Assaulted or threatened;
- Subjected to sexual or racial harassment;
- Subjected to extreme and/or systematic verbal abuse.

- 3.3 All violence must be treated seriously. No member of the Council's staff should feel guilty, inadequate or unprofessional because they are subjected to violence, aggression or harassment.

- 3.4 The Council acknowledges that certain duties may carry additional risks to employees. These duties include:

- work with service users who have a known record of violence or aggressive behaviour;
- initial contacts with members of the public where no background information exists;
- employees visiting service users away from the workplace, particularly while alone or outside normal hours of duty;
- members of staff who carry cash, valuables or medication.

- 3.5 Managers will ensure that all possible steps are taken to minimise these risks.

- 3.6 All incidents will be investigated, normally by the employee's immediate line manager.

3.7 The reporting of incidents of violence or aggression is important and employees who are subjected to such incidents must complete the Council's Incident Report form within 48 hours of the incident.

3.8 Employees who experience a violent or aggressive incident will have the opportunity to talk about the incident with colleagues and managers. Professional counselling will be provided where necessary.

#### **4. HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK**

4.1 The legal framework which underpins these guidelines, is that of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 ("the Act") and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

4.2 The Act sets out the statutory requirements for ensuring, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of employees or any other person who could be affected by the work of the employer. In particular, Section 2 imposes duties on the employer, which include the provision of:

- safe places of work;
- safe systems of work; and
- information, instruction, training and supervision.

4.3 In turn, the Council and the trade unions recognise that it is the duty of all employees to take reasonable care to ensure their own health and safety and that of other people who may be affected by their acts or omissions at work (Section 7 of the Act).

4.4 Executive Directors of each service will seek to achieve the aims and objectives of this policy by ensuring that a risk management approach is adopted for the prevention and control of risks to which employees are exposed whilst at work. The management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 underpins this approach, placing a statutory duty on the employer to carry out suitable and sufficient risk assessments that aim to identify, assess and control risks to employees at work.

4.5 The risk assessment should aim to identify achievable controls in order to ensure safe systems of work. The assessment should concentrate on the following areas:

- the work environment;
- staffing levels and working practices;
- information available, e.g. on individual clients;
- employee induction, supervision and training;
- procedures for preventing or reducing the risk of violence and aggression, e.g. security, planning, communication, response

- strategies etc;
- procedures following an incident, i.e. reporting, investigation and employee support.

## **5. ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR MANAGING RISK**

PKC will not accept potentially violent or aggressive situations. Although the Council has a duty to provide a service, this must not be to the detriment of staff. It must be noted that each service should use this corporate Aggression and violence policy to develop their own policies which must reflect their specific services needs i.e. identify various levels of training needs within the service.

### **5.1 Executive Directors**

- 5.1.1 As part of their responsibility for the management of health and safety, Executive Directors must:
  - 5.1.2 develop, with their managers, an appropriate procedure for preventing and managing violence and aggression using the risk assessment process;
  - 5.1.3 communicate effectively all procedures to employees, agency staff and volunteers;
  - 5.1.4 develop staff awareness via induction of new staff, supervision and regular staff meetings;
  - 5.1.5 ensure access to, and provide appropriate level of training for employees in procedures for the recognition, avoidance and management of potentially violent situations;
  - 5.1.6 structure the organisation so that, where necessary, sufficient support from colleagues is available, should the need arise in potentially violent situations;
  - 5.1.7 give careful and sensitive consideration to every expression of concern by employees - the threat of violence and aggression should not be taken lightly;
  - 5.1.8 investigate all incidents promptly and thoroughly and implement any necessary remedial measures;
  - 5.1.9 ensure all employees are aware of their responsibility in reporting such incidents and the relevant Health and Safety recording paperwork is completed;
  - 5.1.10 monitor violence and aggression forms quarterly and review service violence and aggression incidents annually.
  - 5.1.11 Executive Directors are instructed to produce detailed local guidance based on the principles contained in this policy document, to be

issued to all employees within the service concerned.

## **5.2 Other Managers**

- 5.2.1 As part of their responsibility for the management of health and safety, other managers must:
- 5.2.2 ensure that the potential for violence is identified and assessed and must put in place suitable arrangements which aim to reduce the risks to the lowest level reasonably practicable;
- 5.2.3 ensure that all violent incidents are reported in line with the Service's Incident Reporting procedure and, where appropriate, to the police;
- 5.2.4 investigate all incidents with the aim of identifying the factors which may have contributed to the event and report to senior management with recommendations on any action required to minimise the risk of recurrence;
- 5.2.5 ensure that all employees are aware of corporate and service policies, procedures, guidelines and instructions for minimising the risk of violence.

## **5.3 Employees**

- 5.3.1 All employees must recognise that safety at work is a shared responsibility, shared between employer and employee. There is a general duty to co-operate with management and not to deliberately put themselves or others in danger. Specifically, employees:
- 5.3.2 must familiarise themselves with service policies and procedures, guidelines and instructions;
- 5.3.3 must report and record all incidents of violence, threatened violence or aggression to their line managers immediately;
- 5.3.4 must participate in training courses.

## **6. PREVENTATIVE MEASURES AND SPECIFIC GUIDANCE**

### **6.1 Council Premises**

- 6.1.1 The design of council premises will affect the way in which service users behave. The Council acknowledges the need to provide public areas with easy access, good lighting and an inviting atmosphere. However, the need for physical protection for employees in certain situations must also be addressed. Therefore, managers need to consider the following measures when assessing the potential for violence and aggression.

- 6.1.2 Uncontrolled access to buildings can expose employees to risk from

unauthorised visitors. The number of public entry points into a building may therefore need to, be restricted to one. This action must not interfere with fire exits.

- 6.1.3 Signs providing instruction, direction and identification of the reception area or where visitors should report, must be properly positioned, clear and unambiguous. Also appropriate signs should be installed where appropriate eg "Threatening or abusive behaviour will not be tolerated".
- 6.1.4 Buildings which do not have a reception area with controlled internal doors to restrict unauthorised entry, should consider operating a door entry system. The type of system will depend on the building, for example, this could simply be the use of a Yale-type door lock and a doorbell to which a member of staff responds or a telecom door entry system, operated by office staff.
- 6.1.5 Doors to restricted areas, usually within offices should be kept secure from unauthorised entry. Where this is not possible, visitors must be provided with a visitor's badge.
- 6.1.6 Reception areas and waiting rooms should have good lighting and be as pleasant as possible. Every effort should be made to provide toys and a play space, which are safe for children. An alarm system should be installed at reception for summoning assistance. Managers must ensure that suitable response procedures are developed and implemented. There should be easy access to toilets. Notice boards should be interesting, informative and kept to date.
- 6.1.7 Waiting time should be kept to a minimum. Where there is a delay, the reason must be explained to the person waiting.
- 6.1.8 Interview Rooms may need an operational alarm system. Such alarms can be either fixed or portable, depending on the actual workplace. The selection and location of these systems should be discussed with safety representatives.
- 6.1.9 Consideration should be given to a viewing panel in the room door to allow external monitoring.
- 6.1.10 Items located within each room should not present an opportunity to be used as a weapon.
- 6.1.11 It is the responsibility of the manager responsible for each workplace to ensure that a local system for summoning support is devised and to ensure that all employees are given information relating to these arrangements.
- 6.1.12 Security arrangements must be kept under regular review by the manager responsible for each building, in order to highlight any



change in working practice that may be needed to provide a secure working environment.

- 6.1.13 There must be adequate external lighting, for example in car parking areas.
- 6.1.14 It is acknowledged that some employees, for example caretakers and cleaning staff, work on their own in office or other premises. In these circumstances, managers must ensure that suitable arrangements are in place for ensuring and monitoring their safety. This includes channels of communication and emergency procedures.

## **6.2 Visiting Service Users away from the Workplace**

- 6.2.1 Managers are required to ensure that arrangements are developed and implemented for ensuring, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety of employees who undertake visits away from the workplace. This includes a system for recording and monitoring the details of location address, time and expected time of return when working away from the workplace or visiting clients. In this respect, the line manager or senior staff member on duty has the responsibility for monitoring whether the member of staff has returned or not. If they do not return to the office or call in as arranged the line manager or senior member of staff on duty must ensure that contact is made with the employee.
- 6.2.2 Employees must inform and discuss with the line manager or senior staff member on duty any arrangement to visit a client about whom there exists a known history of violence or aggression. The line manager or senior staff member on duty will assess whether it is safe for the employee to visit or whether the visit should be supported or accompanied.
- 6.2.3 Employees must not go unaccompanied to a situation where they are likely to be at personal risk. It is the responsibility of management to ensure that a proper risk assessment is completed and that suitable measures are in place.

## **7. INFORMATION AND TRAINING**

- 7.1 Violent and aggressive behaviour by service users or members of the public cannot always be predicted. In most instances knowledge and understanding of the situation will help employees who need to have the confidence to manage the situation and minimise the impact on those involved. Information and training provides a vital means by which employees can be equipped to deal with particular problems which confront them.
- 7.2 Dealing with violence and aggression is not uncommon for public service employees. One of the first principles is that training must be

based on experiences and identified needs. For this reason, the monitoring arrangements will provide an essential source of information from which training requirements may accurately be identified over time.

- 7.3 Training should seek to remove the notion of fault from the victim of violence and aggression. It should enable employees to develop their interpersonal skills, as it is on these that the employee must primarily depend on preventing violence and aggression.

## **8. REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS (INCIDENT FORM)**

- 8.1 It is essential that the council responds effectively to instances of violence and aggressive behaviour against employees in the course of their work. It is therefore important that such incidents are reported to management. Without information about specific incidents, it is not possible to develop a methodical analysis, nor is it likely that effective strategies will be found.

- 8.2 The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases, and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR) defines an “accident” to include acts of violence to people at work. Therefore, for the purpose of simplifying the reporting arrangements, Perth & Kinross Council will refer to an accident or act of violence, including sexual or racial harassment, as an ‘incident at work’.

- 8.3 All incidents at work must be reported to the individual’s immediate supervisor / line manager, as soon as possible after the event. Managers must ensure that employees are aware of their responsibility to report incidents of violence and aggression. The manager will ensure that an Incident Report Form is completed and submitted to the Service Health and Safety Liaison Officer.

## **9. INVESTIGATION**

- 9.1 Each incident reported will be dealt with on its own merits by the line manager. An investigation must be carried out as soon as possible after the event to establish the factors that contributed to the incident and to determine what immediate and longer-term action should be taken to prevent recurrence. A written report will be produced at the end of each investigation and submitted to line manager and Health and Safety division.

- 9.2 Debriefing employees who are involved in an incident can help to establish what happened. However, during this process, care must be taken not to concentrate on an employee’s performance, as this could add to the emotional stress of the situation.

- 9.3 It is important to ensure that the effect on an individual’s emotional state is considered and, where necessary, the employee should be

offered professional counselling.

- 9.4 Research on violence and aggression to employees shows that those who have been attacked can mistakenly feel that they have failed professionally and so may not report an incident in which they have been involved. Under-reporting can cause a serious deficiency in the gathering of necessary information and makes it less likely that anything will be done to improve the situation. It leaves the victim to cope with the aftermath alone.

## **10. MONITORING ARRANGEMENTS**

- 10.1 It is of fundamental importance that the compilation and introduction of guidelines on violence and aggression at work is not seen as an end in itself. The subject of violence and aggression will receive ongoing consideration within Perth & Kinross Council through lessons learnt and changes to procedure and practice where necessary.

## **11. REVIEW**

- 11.1 Corporate Services are responsible for the annual review of this Violence and Aggression policy. Services must monitor all recorded results quarterly, thus ensuring accurate and effective corporate results.