VIOLENCE AT WORK

HEALTH AND SAFETY

POLICY ARRANGEMENTS

This document is a statement of Policy of Haringey Council. It outlines the Council's intentions regarding violence at work, in particular taking into account the requirements of **The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations** and **The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrence Regulations**.

The Council aims to promote positive policies regarding health and safety concerns at work. Each employee, regardless of status, is responsible for strictly adhering to the Council's policies and procedures that are identified in documentation held at designated Council establishments.

In carrying out its responsibility, the Council will recognise that it will be necessary to bear in mind that there may be certain employees who may share characteristics which may render them more vulnerable than others and for whom special accounts may need to be taken when carrying out risk assessment and making safety provisions. This additional vulnerability may be because of their age, disability, gender including gender reassignment, or their ethnicity or because of their religion and belief or non belief or because of their sexuality.

This Policy is supported by an in-depth violence at work guidance document which is available on Harinet or hard copy.

The Policy will be kept under constant review and amended when necessary.

<u>Note:</u> Council Services must develop service procedures to comply with this policy.

PREPARED BY	Corporate Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team
AUTHORISED BY	Siobhan Sharpe, Occupational Health, Safety & Wellbeing Manager
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Introduction

Haringey Council does not accept that it is part of any employees duty to be subjected to verbal abuse, threats or physical assault and if or when such abuse is experienced, will provide such support and guidance as is necessary for the employee to ensure that the effect of such abuse is minimised.

The Health and Safety Executive's definition of work related violence is:-

"any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work".

This includes abuse or harassment based on race, gender, sexuality, disability and religion. It can also take the form of bullying.

Employees dealing directly with members of the public, service users, clients, pupils etc. may face aggressive or violent behaviour. They may suffer non-physical abuse, threats or even physical assaults. Violent incidents include those leading to death, major injuries or minor injuries. Even where there is no physical injury, employees can still suffer fear, anxiety and emotional stress as threats may indicate a risk of actual injury. Malicious damage to an employee's property can also cause distress and fear of future physical attack. People will have different perceptions about behaviour they find threatening or offensive, or which causes distress rather than simple annoyance.

Where an employee is the victim of verbal abuse, threats or physical assault by a fellow employee, disciplinary action will be taken against the offender(s). The victim will receive such personal support counselling and guidance as is necessary to minimise the effects of such abuse.

Policy

The Council in providing services to the community expects that members of the public will treat its employees with courtesy and respect, and equally expects employees to show courtesy and respect to members of the public.

It should be made clear to all clients, customers and service users of Council facilities and services that violent or aggressive behaviour will not be tolerated and that any assaults on Council employees will lead to a Police investigation and possible criminal proceedings. It is important that this information can be easily understood by anyone whose first language is not English or who has any form of disability.

Employees are encouraged to report incidents of violent behaviour to which they have been subjected, to their manager/supervisor who will discuss/investigate the incident and, where possible, take action to prevent a recurrence. The action taken or the action proposed should be recorded.

Violent incidents are reportable under RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations). Therefore, where an employee is absent for more than three days, receives a fatal or major injury as a result of a violent incident, the Council's Incident Reporting Procedure should be followed.

It is the policy of Haringey Council that the following points will be made clear to all employees through appropriate training:-

- All staff will be made aware of the importance and necessity of reporting every violent incident;

- All staff will be made aware of the procedures and arrangements for reporting violent incidents related to their work;

- All staff should be clear that reporting an incident is no slight on themselves, their Service or any service user;

- All staff should be made aware that good reporting assists in identifying training needs, the need to change work practices and the effects of changes in work practices.

Policy Objectives

- To increase staff awareness of violence issues;
- To ensure the accurate reporting of all violent incidents;
- To provide practical advice to staff on prevention and management of aggressive or violent behaviour;
- To ensure that staff exposed to violence and aggression receive appropriate support and training;
- To reduce the number of injuries by staff involved in violent and aggressive incidents.

Definitions

Aggression –   Any form of behaviour that harms someone else either physically or psychologically against their wishes. This definition includes bullying and harassment. It also includes damage to property such as breaking windows or throwing of furniture.

Violence –   An act where there is physical or actual harm.

Attack definitions are listed to make clear the types of acts or behaviours that should be reported in every instance:-

Verbal Abuse   This should include any verbal abuse or unacceptable behaviour either face to face or by telephone or e-mail.

Verbal Threats   This should include any threat to the member of staffs person, property, livelihood or family.

Spitting   This should include any instance where the staff members spat at directly whether or not he or she is hit.

Physical Unarmed   This includes any aggressive stance in which the member of staff feels threatened or undermined.

Physical Armed   This includes any item used as a weapon or missile.

Other   Any other type of verbal or physical abuse not covered above.

People will have different perceptions about behaviour they find threatening or offensive, or which causes distress rather than simple annoyance.

Debriefing

Following every violent incident an appropriate debriefing interview should be conducted by the manager / supervisor as appropriate to:-

- To demonstrate support for the staff member;
- To facilitate learning from the experience;
- To assist the development of good practice;
- To advise of assistance of Trade Union; and
- To ensure that staff members are aware of the independent professional counselling services available from Haringey Council Occupational Health Service.

All members of staff have rights to report any incident in which they have been involved to the Police. They are entitled to expect the positive support and backing of the Council should they wish to exercise this right. All managers and supervisors must therefore clearly understand their responsibility to assist in reporting the matter and, if requested, to do so on behalf of the staff member affected.

Risk Assessment

The potential for and the extent of violence to Council employees must be considered as part of the risk assessment process for all Council work processes and functions.

Depending on the work activity and jobs carried out by a Service, the nature and extent of violence will vary. Work settings may also create potential for violence to occur, so it may be necessary to carry out soundings and perhaps a survey among staff to find out where potential problems may lie. If a survey is to be undertaken the team will need to obtain information from people at all levels within the Service, and should discuss with employees representatives, such as safety and trade union representatives, what data should be collected and how best this can be done.

Information gathering of this kind should help focus attention on areas where potential for violence is greatest, so that resources are directed to where they are most needed. As part of the information gathering exercise, it may be worthwhile liaising with colleagues in other Services who have dealings with the same clients. Sharing information in this way can assist in identifying potentially violent/aggressive clients.

Where violence is recognised as a potential hazard to an individual or group of Council employees then the risk should be evaluated by checking the existing arrangements and deciding if the control measures already in place are adequate or should more be done?

Factors that can be influenced, include:-

a) the level and type of training and information provided;
b) the environment in which the work takes place;
c) the design of the job, work practices and patterns.

These factors should be considered alongside any information gathered from the affected groups of employees and should be reviewed in the light of any reported incidents. This will ensure that any required changes or amendments will be incorporated into work practices immediately and be communicated to all relevant personnel within the Service.

To be effective, measures for dealing with violence at work need to be based on proper analysis of the problems being encountered within the Service and full consideration of the alternative strategies available. There are no "ready made" solutions and it is likely to take time, careful planning, and a combination of remedies to achieve the objectives.

Control measures to be considered are:-

Physical aspects

- easily identifiable and accessible reception areas which allow staff to receive visitors and thus help reduce unauthorised visitors wandering around a building;
- providing a counter between staff and public;
- providing wider counters and raised floors on staff side;
- prominently displayed information posters or notices stating Council policy;
- installing controlled entry systems;
- limiting the number of entrances to premises;
- locks on doors;
- use of identity cards by staff;
- installing video cameras and/or panic alarm systems;
- layout of interview rooms that afford employees a quick means of escape in the event a violent incident;
- provision of security staff;
- provision of alarms in reception areas and interview rooms.

<u>Work Practices and Patterns</u>

Particular activities or jobs within a Service can create the potential for violence. Some staff may need to visit people in their homes. This may involve travelling to known trouble areas or evening visits. The person may be anxious or aggressive and could act violently or in a threatening manner. Sometimes specific activities can be altered so that they are carried out in ways that can lessen those risks. Where activities or jobs cannot be altered or adapted, specific control measures may be appropriate to help reduce risks.

Examples of these are:-

- staff to work in teams with trainees under supervision;

- to deploy security personnel;

- staff to leave an itinerary of visits with a responsible person;

- staff to report periodically to base or to a responsible person;

- staff to work in groups to complete specific tasks;

- staff to work in pairs in known areas where violent incidents occur;

- supervisor or manager in conjunction with the staff member to conduct interviews with known/suspected violent customers/clients;

- checking client/customer records before a visit/interview to see whether the person or even someone in the household is known to be potentially violent;

- incorporate Council violence policy into contact documents, service agreements etc;

- recording as appropriate the presence of animals in the house and ensuring that they are secured prior to visit;

- written procedures for the use and maintenance of panic buttons at receptions and interview rooms;

- written procedures for cash handling;

- carrying a personal alarm;

- carrying a mobile phone.

As already indicated, single solutions used in isolation e.g. panic buttons may not provide total protection against violence. A preventative strategy whereby several methods, such as those discussed previously, are incorporated together to develop a more effective long term solution should be introduced.

Reporting Incidents

A formal system for reporting and recording incidents is needed to:-

a) devise appropriate preventative strategies and control measures; and
b) monitor whether these strategies are effective.

Good reporting and recording systems are essential for identifying places and work activities where violence can be a problem.

Death, Major Injury and incidents causing more than 3 consecutive day absence

Under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations, incidents resulting in Death, or Major Injury or absence from work for more than 3 consecutive days as a result of physical violence at work must be reported on the Council Incident Report Form.

Other Violent Incidents

All other violent incidents which do not result in death, major injury or more than 3 consecutive days absence must also be reported e.g. non-physical abuse, threats, physical assault etc. This type of violent incident should also be reported on the Council Incident Report Form.

Violent incidents should be discussed in detail with the employee(s) concerned and where possible action taken to prevent a recurrence. The action taken or proposed must be recorded. It is essential that all conclusions and actions taken by management following an incident are formally reported back to the employee involved.

When the Council Incident Report Form is completed as a result of a violent incident then a copy of the report form must be sent to the Corporate Health and Safety Team.

For a variety of reasons some employees may be reluctant to report incidents of aggressive behaviour, which make them feel threatened or worried. They may for instance feel that accepting abuse is part of the job. Services will need a record of all incidents to build up a complete picture of the problem. Employees must be encouraged by Services to report all incidents promptly and fully.

Where appropriate Services may develop their own recording formats for violent incidents to detail all relevant information particular to their activities. This is of particular relevance where the activities may include instances of violence between client / client, pupil / pupil, client / other etc. Where this is the case then a Council incident form must also be filled in where there is an act of physical violence to a Council employee.

Training

Training should be provided for all levels of staff who may face violence in their work. As a "blanket" training package is unlikely to be successful, the content of training courses should be geared towards groups of staff, the risks they face and their particular needs. Each Service should identify their specific needs with regard to training through their own risk assessment process. No one training package will provide all the required knowledge and skills for each staff member and it is likely that some Council staff will require to be provided with range of training courses to deal with different situations foreseeable in their work activities e.g. advice on when physical restraint is appropriate, acceptable methods of restraint and legal considerations and sensitivity to service users who may have disabilities or whose first language is not English.

All Council employees should receive basic training either through their own training sections or an external provider to ensure that the following information is formally presented to each employee:-

- familiarisation with the Council policy and Service procedure;
- causes of violent and aggressive behaviour;
- warning and danger signs;
- communication/inter-personal skills;
- techniques for preventing and avoiding violence, calming aggressive people;
- assertiveness training;
- Service risk assessments and available control measures;
- Importance of formally reporting every incident.

Further specific training for Council staff related to their work activities should be carried out in accordance to the requirements of the Service risk assessments. Details of the appropriate courses and their providers should be recorded in the risk assessment document.