Lone working and personal safety guidance

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 sets out a duty of care on employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare of employees whilst at work. Further legislation states that every employer shall make a suitable and sufficient assessment of the 'foreseeable' risks that employees might face in the course of their duties.

This document provides guidance on the health and safety arrangements to be considered to eliminate/reduce the risk of harm to individuals in the workplace, undertaking work activities or lone working.

KCC recognises the public service environment is often seen as a target due to our role, function and activities, and a 5-year security strategy has been implemented to improve protective security. Premises that present the greatest risk will be prioritised and assessed, to improve the way it provides safe and secure environments for all who work and visit its buildings and sites. For further information see the 'KCC Security Strategy' the organisation's baseline security guidance.

Lone working

The purpose of this guidance is to ensure systems are devised and implemented to support the commitment made by the council to protect employees who are required to work by themselves for significant periods of time. It also provides an overview that sits alongside directorate practices and enables managers, in partnership with their staff, to be aware of their responsibilities to reduce and manage risks.

Lone workers should not be placed at any more risk than other members of staff and the managers are required to assess and address any risks.

Common issues associated with lone working are:

o   increased vulnerability to violence and abuse
o   accidents/incidents where the consequences are worse if there is no immediate assistance or rescue
o   accidents/incidents that result from lone working e.g. lifting something or operating machinery
o   long term health issues resulting from isolation, lack of supervision, knowledge or training.

Responsibilities

Managers should be aware of the potential risks associated with lone working and carry out risk assessments to minimise those risks. In order to fulfil its statutory responsibilities, the Council places specific duties on all managers.

Managers should:

- o assess and manage the risks to staff by ensuring that risk assessments are carried out, reviewed regularly, and shared with employees who are potentially at risk
- o undertake individual risk assessments when working activities deviate from normal practice
- o attend relevant and appropriate training
- o provide safe places, implement procedures and safe systems of work into practice which are designed to eliminate or reduce the risks associated with working alone
- o write specific guidance for their own team/establishment, and ensure employees adhere to safe systems of work
- o ensure staff groups and individuals identified as being at risk are given appropriate information, instruction and training;
- o review and improve working conditions, practices and procedures
- o ensure appropriate personal safety equipment is available and monitored to ensure it is in a state of good repair and working order e.g. mobile phones, panic alarms, torches
- o ensure appropriate support is given to staff involved in any incident
- o report and investigate any accidents/incidents caused as a result of lone working using KCC's online reporting system (for guidance see 'accident/incident reporting, investigation, RIDDOR and frequently asked questions' on Knet)
- o manage the effectiveness of preventative measures through the analysis of accident/incident reporting and investigations.

Employees are required to:

- o take reasonable care of themselves and others affected by their actions
- o familiarise themselves with the lone worker risk assessments in place for activities they are involved in
- o take part in training designed to meet the requirements of this procedure
- o follow all information, instruction and training provided, and apply the safe systems of work designed for safe working in their service/team
- o report all accidents/incidents which may have occurred whilst lone working using KCC's online reporting system
- o report all incidents that may affect the health and safety of themselves or others and ask for guidance as appropriate
- o maintain any personal safety equipment provided to ensure it is in a good working condition, and only use for the purpose for which it is intended.

Risk assessment

The process of conducting a risk assessment for lone working is no different to that followed when assessing any other activity; the important point is to carry out the assessment in the following way:

- o identify the hazards associated with the work and carrying it out unaccompanied
- o determine who may be at risk, how and why
- o assess the risk associated with the work and decide on safe working arrangements to control the risks
- o record the findings of the assessment
- o implement the safe working procedure
- o monitor and review the safe working procedure.

Who is at risk?

Employees that are contracted to work alone as part of their duties are at risk. Working alone may be an everyday occurrence or it may arise occasionally. This guidance does not attempt to identify all the situations in which employees may be at risk of working alone, instead it concentrates on describing the arrangements that can be put in place to eliminate or manage the risk.

Considerations for managing the risk of lone working

People:

- o are there people at increased risk e.g. young, pregnant or disabled workers?
- o will the worker be visiting a service user or environment which may be volatile?
- o do workers have any medical conditions that make lone working unsuitable? (consider how both routine work and foreseeable emergencies may impose additional physical and mental stresses on the lone worker)
- o if the lone worker's first language is not English, are suitable arrangements in place to ensure clear communication, especially in an emergency?
- o has sufficient training been undertaken to ensure the lone worker's safety? (getting this right will equip those at risk with the right knowledge and skills to ensure their safety and avoid high risk situations)
- o has the lone worker been provided with adequate information about the risks involved with the tasks and the precautions to be taken?
- o has the worker enough experience?
- o can suitable levels of supervision be provided?
- o what happens if the lone worker becomes ill, has an accident or there is an emergency requiring first aid? How will they report health and safety incidents?

- o is there a clear way to raise the alarm if they are in trouble?
- o are there sufficient supervision/management arrangements in place?

Work environment:

There are numerous situations where people may be working on their own; the following are examples but there may be other circumstances that may apply:

- o Workers in offices/establishments where:

  - one person is working in/on the premises e.g. in a library, office or first person in/last person out
  - during normal working hours at a remote location or within the normal workplace
  - people work separately from others e.g. caretakers, stewards, inspectors
  - people work outside normal hours e.g. cleaners, residential/night/maintenance/out of hours or on-call employees, managers, community wardens.

  Examples:

  - lone workers include people who work early or late, at night or at weekends, or who lock up buildings on their own at the end of the day e.g. area offices, libraries or schools

  - isolated from other staff within a building e.g. reception staff, professionals in interview rooms with client/service users, and who may experience difficulties in obtaining assistance dealing with incidents such as abusive or intimidating behaviour and violence

  - working outside normal work hours, or staff working in the community and/or carrying out home visits, and who may experience additional difficulties in obtaining assistance dealing with incidents e.g. abusive or intimidating behaviour, or vehicle breakdowns.

- o Mobile workers working away from their fixed base:

  - visiting domestic premises e.g. social workers, care managers, service providers
  - visiting other workplaces e.g. employees attending meetings, working on properties belonging to other agencies
  - travelling in the course of business e.g. to other premises, escorting service users.

- Workers working in hazardous environments**:**

  - caretakers, handy persons, maintenance employees, technicians, waste management employees.

Identify the hazard and effect

The basic principle to be applied in relation to all risk assessments is to identify the hazards and to assess the associated risks by taking into account:

- the degree of isolation of the employee
- the type of work activity
- the working environment
- experience, age and capabilities (including health) of individual workers
- the supervision and support system that you have in place.

The workplace:

- does the workplace present any special risks to a person working alone?
- is there safe access and egress?
- is the workplace in a known 'high risk' area?
- is the workplace isolated?
- are there adequate communication systems?
- is there adequate lighting?
- is the site/workplace in a good state of repair?
- are there any additional hazards associated with the time or with the day of the week?

In an emergency:

- can help be accessed by the employee?
- are adequate first aid facilities available?
- is there a need to train the lone worker in first aid?

Consider the task:

- are there any special risks to a person working alone?
- is travelling a requirement of the task?
- is there a risk of violence?
- can any manual handling be done safely by the lone worker?
- can all plant and equipment be safely handled and used by the lone worker?
- does the task involve the handling of money or valuables?
- are there any hazardous substances associated with the task?
- does the task involve breaking bad news?

- o   does the task involve changing/withdrawing a service?
- o   does the task involve working with electrical appliances?
- o   are there any lifting and carrying risks?
- o   can one person handle any necessary temporary access equipment e.g. portable ladders?
- o   can one person handle all the necessary machinery, goods or objects?
- o   are there any machines or equipment that cannot be operated safely by one person?
- o   are any chemicals or hazardous substances used that may pose a risk to the lone worker?
- o   is there a risk of violence? (factors that increase the risk of work-related violence are people who handle money, deal with complaints, interact with the public, provide care, advice or information and work unsociable hours)
- o   are personal security devices, panic alarms or communication devices needed; is there a procedure to use them and are they tested/maintained regularly?

Control measures

Where lone working has been identified as a potential risk to employees, generic control measures must be identified and followed to ensure that the risk is managed.

When a situation or activity arises where generic control measures are considered to be insufficient, it is the duty of managers and supervisors to identify additional control measures which need to be applied for the completion of the task.

It will not always be possible to eliminate all risk; it is the responsibility of the manager or supervisor to determine whether the level of risk remaining is acceptable.

Ideally, employees should be encouraged to participate in any risk assessment and be satisfied that any control measures are adequate; outcomes must be shared with the employee that is involved in carrying out or managing that specific activity.

Record the assessment

Where specific risk assessments are deemed necessary, they should be recorded using the KCC five steps to risk assessment template and refer to the team's health and safety risk register.

Implement safe working arrangements

The risk assessment will have identified the physical controls, systems of work, training and supervision necessary to ensure the safety of the lone worker. If all these arrangements are not already in place, they will need to be implemented in a structured way before lone working can be permitted to commence. An action plan with target dates for completion of outstanding work is often the most appropriate way of ensuring that the necessary arrangements are put in place effectively.

Monitor and review safe working arrangements

Once safe working arrangements have been implemented, they need to be regularly monitored and reviewed to ensure they remain effective. Monitoring the way in which people are working is a routine day-to-day management function. Lone workers must be actively encouraged to report incidents which could affect their safety, to allow a proper review of the adequacy of the working arrangements.

All risk assessments should be reviewed at least once a year or whenever there is reason to believe that the existing assessment is no longer valid. A record should be made of every review carried out.

Monitoring and managing employee whereabouts

These guidelines set out the standards that should be applied for the monitoring of employee's whereabouts. It also provides examples of procedures that could be devised to ensure that the location of employees is known; and employees who fail to return to the office or log off duty can be identified. An agreed response must be in place for situations where employees cannot be accounted for.

The following sets out the key requirements that must be in place in business units where employees work alone:

- o a register of individual employee's details must be maintained for individual business units
- o a procedure must be in place which collates details of employee's whereabouts and activities on a daily basis. This procedure must ensure that the information is disseminated to the relevant manager(s) and supervisor(s)
- o in the event that a lone worker cannot be located or fails to book off duty within a set timeframe, a suitably robust and tested protocol must clearly outline the actions to be taken.

Personal safety

KCC gives full support to employees who are threatened or assaulted during the course of their working activities. There are times when employees are in contact with people who are unhappy or unable to control their behaviour. For further information see KCC's Dignity and Respect at Work Policy, Prevention and Management of Violence Policy and Guidance, and the above information on lone working.

What is violence?

KCC uses the Health and Safety Executive's definition of work-related violence to identify those incidents that represent unacceptable behaviour by staff, service users or members of the public. The definition is 'any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work.' This includes:

- o physical assault
- o harassment, verbal aggression or abuse; face-to-face or by telephone, email, text, or social media
- o threats of violence to staff or their families
- o attacks by animals incited by their owners or keepers.

General advice and guidance

Always trust your instincts, get away immediately if you feel threatened or uncomfortable. Before putting yourself in any situation ask yourself if there was a problem, who would know, would they know where to find you, how would you call for help, and how long would it take for help to arrive?

- o read and discuss, with your line manager, procedures and guidance concerning what should be done in the event of violence to ensure you feel safe in your work
- o people are more important than property, listening and talking are the crucial tools needed try to be calm, confident and objective, and always maintain respect for all people involved
- o keep out of arguments, do not lose your temper and be aware of your own feelings and physical changes
- o do not respond to verbal abuse or take it personally
- o if a client/customer or a member of the public threatens you with violence, or if you suspect there is a risk of violence, report this to your line manager as soon as possible
- o when violence is directed at you, try to withdraw from the situation and summon help; do not attempt to control a violent situation alone unless there is no alternative, consider whether you should call the police
- o only use reasonable force to protect yourself and use physical restraint as a last resort
- o as soon as the incident or emergency is in hand contact your line manager and complete an accident/incident HS157 form via KCC's online reporting system.

For further information see 'travelling for work' and the 'safe use of mobile phones' guidance available on Knet.

If any or all your working day involves working alone

- o let other people know who you are meeting, when and where, so that someone is looking after your welfare
- o keep calendars up to date with meeting details including address
- o set up a "buddy" system where they contact someone everyday with an itinerary
- o be careful not to tell anyone that you are alone in the workplace, this applies to people who telephone or e-mail you, as well as to visitors.