

Lone Working

What is lone or vulnerable working?

There are many definitions for a lone worker exist in a variety of guises but may, essentially, be described as:

“Any member of staff who is separated by a significant physical distance from his or her colleagues all, or part, of the time.”

However, vulnerable workers may not always be lone workers so it is important to also make provision for those members of staff who are not “separated by a significant physical distance” but, due to their working environment, can be vulnerable workers.

The Health and Safety Executive suggest that the following list is indicative of the job types that are deemed to have lone working implications either in whole or in part.

a) People in fixed establishments where:

- Only one person works on the premises, e.g. in small workshops, petrol stations, kiosks, shops and also home workers;
- People work separately from others, e.g. in factories, warehouses, some research and training establishments, leisure centres or fairgrounds;
- People work outside normal hours, e.g. cleaners, security, special production, maintenance or repair staff, etc.

b) Mobile workers away from their fixed base:

- On construction, plant installation, maintenance and cleaning work, electrical repairs, painting and decorating, vehicle recovery, etc.;
- Agricultural and forestry workers;
- Service workers, e.g. postal staff, social workers, home support workers, pest control workers, drivers, engineers, architects, surveyors, tenancy support workers, housing officers, environmental health officers and similar professionals visiting domestic and commercial premises.



The law requires the Council to identify all significant risks associated with work activities. This is achieved through the risk assessment process. Employees are required to assist their

employer in undertaking such assessments and it will be helpful if you let your line manager know of any concerns you have in relation to your work.

Your line manager will arrange for an assessment to be undertaken and it will examine a range of factors to include early morning/late evening work, sudden illness, interviewing and the likelihood of aggressive or violent behaviour.

General Principles about Staying Safe

It is important that you follow the specific guidance you are issued in relation to the working activities and locations you undertake. The following is offered as generic guidance and should not be viewed as an exhaustive list.

Nearly half (49%) of people have been made to feel uncomfortable by the behaviour of someone they've come into contact with while working alone

On the Road – Public and Private Transport

It's important when travelling to plan ahead, so that you know where you're going, can keep relaxed about your next step, and arrive at your appointment at the expected time. It's also a good idea to let someone know where you're going and when you expect to be back; a simple step that many of us can often forget also consider the following:

- When you're using public transport, try to have your money or ticket to hand when you need it, so you're not fumbling around with your wallet or purse in public;
- If you end up in a train carriage with just you and one other person or group and you don't feel comfortable, don't be embarrassed to move to another seat or carriage. The same applies if you feel that someone's behaviour is threatening in any way, like uncomfortable stares or putting their feet up on the seats next to you;
- If you are driving and have to park in an area that appears secluded then make sure that no personal possessions are visible from the outside of the car – even if they're of little value, it's best to put everything in the boot or take it with you. Look out for street lamps and junctions and park nearby so that the car can be seen easily.

Walking

Walking through an area that you're not familiar with – particularly during periods of darkness can be slightly intimidating. Some simple rules that will help minimise any risk are to keep items like your mobile phone or MP3 player in your pocket or bag, and stick to streets with good lighting and lots of people, whenever possible. You should also:

- Avoid passing stationary cars with their engines running and people sitting in them;
- Walk facing oncoming traffic to avoid kerb crawlers and, if a vehicle pulls up suddenly alongside you, turn and walk in the other direction – you can turn much faster than a car;
- Keep your mind on your surroundings – remember if you're wearing a personal stereo for example, you might not hear trouble approaching;
- If you think someone is following you then try crossing the road to check that they are following, more than once if necessary. If they are still behind you, head for somewhere that you know is going to be busy, and where you'll be able to get some help if you need to. If you're heading back to an empty home/office, try to change your plans and go to a friend's house or somewhere public like a pub or garage, where you can be with other people;

- If there's a group of people nearby who are being rowdy and seem quite threatening then move away to avoid the situation if possible – for example, cross the road or take a short detour;
- If you think that someone else's safety might be in danger, look for a safe place to stop and then call the police.

Home and Customer Visits

Most people will, at some point in their working life, have to meet someone new in an unfamiliar setting. Additionally, for some Council services it's necessary to make house calls or visit other people's offices on a regular basis. Consider the following suggestions:

If you receive unwanted or inappropriate personal attention then, if possible, move away from the person demonstrating the behaviour. If this is not possible consider:

- If you're alone in someone's home or office and don't know the person you're with but feel confident enough, an assertive 'take your hands off me' or a very clear 'no' may make the person stop. If there are other people around, this might also alert them to what's going on;
- If you know the person showing you unwanted attention, it's important that you appear to be in control of the situation. Remember, you have a right to say 'no', and that 'no' means 'no';
- If you have an alert tool, activate this as soon as you feel uncomfortable to raise the alarm;
- It's a good idea to have a 'code word' with your friends and colleagues. That way, if you have a problem with someone you meet, you can make an excuse to call one of your contacts and let them know that you need help, without alerting the person you're with;
- If none of the above is successful and you still feel uncomfortable, leave the premises and report what happened to your line manager – that way, if another visit needs to take place for any reason, colleagues will not visit alone and will be prepared.



Council Guidance

A number of guidance documents and training courses are available.

Available Resources

- IS2 – Employee Leaflet on Violence in the Workplace
- IS4 – Violence and Aggression Poster (1)
- IS5 – Violence and Aggression Poster (2)
- IS29 – Safety for Reception Desk Staff
- IS33 – Interview Rooms
- IS34 – Visiting Clients' Homes
- IS35 – Visiting Uninhabited Accommodation

AS14 – Violence in the Workplace
AS28 – Lone and Vulnerable Workers

Safety & Wellbeing team healthandsafety@northlan.gov.uk