

## Visiting Client's Homes / Premises

This information sheet aims to give some basic advice to those employees undertaking visits to client's homes / premises as part of their duties.

Prior to all visits, it should be assessed whether the visit is really necessary, and if a home visit may be avoided. The preference would be to have the client attend an interview at a council office.

***If at any time during a visit you feel threatened, leave the scene and report your concerns to your supervisor who will advise you of the appropriate action to be taken.***

## Violence at Work

It is a regrettable fact of working life that threats, and acts of physical violence to employees, by others, do sometimes occur.

Violence can be defined as 'any incident in which an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted by a member of the public in circumstances arising out of the course of his or her employment. This will include not only physical attacks, but threats and fear of violence, verbal abuse, racial, religious and sexual harassment, or humiliating behaviour, likely to undermine self-confidence and cause employees to suffer anxiety or stress related disorders'.

If **you** feel particularly threatened or intimidated in your own working environment then you should discuss this with your immediate supervisor who can arrange to review the risk assessment of those elements of your job in which you feel threatened.

Report any incident in which you feel that you have been subjected to violence however trivial it may seem.

There are a number of ways in which you can reduce the potential danger of situations developing beyond your control, and training courses are available to assist you to learn, or develop these skills. Ask your supervisor to consider this if you feel that it would be relevant to your situation.

## Prior to leaving the office

Prepare a visit list of all client's / premises to be visited, indicating an expected "return to office" time, and pass to the designated supervisor, prior to leaving the office.

Ensure the designated supervisor has a description of your current vehicle, including the make, model, colour and registration number. Where possible, avoid the use of expensive or "flash" vehicles.

Review the visit list for any addresses where difficulties may be expected and seek the assistance of an accompanying officer or advice from your supervisor, if required.

If you are working in an area unfamiliar to yourself, ensure you have a suitable map in the car and are aware of the quickest route to a main road or place of safety.

If undertaking visits outwith normal working hours, ensure that a supervisor / trusted colleague / emergency controller is aware of your intended visits, and what time you intend to return home. Always arrange to contact that person following your return from such a visit and have an agreed phrase to indicate you are home safely and not in any danger.

If a known difficult address is to be visited, and assistance is not available, reprogram the visit for a more suitable time, or when assistance will be available. If none of these options is available, ensure you have the use of a radio or mobile phone from your supervisor.

Ensure any communications equipment to be used is working, and in the case of mobile phones, that your supervisor knows the number of the phone you are using.

Ensure any personal alarms to be taken have sufficient battery power for the period of use, and are working.

Assess whether the clothing you are wearing is appropriate for the type of visits to be undertaken. Clothing should be comfortable, widely acceptable and not likely to cause offence or arousal. Avoid wearing flashy jewellery or designer clothing where possible. Shoes and clothing should be suitable in case you require to move quickly should the need arise.

All these considerations form part of the required risk assessment process and the significant findings of such an assessment must be recorded

### **On arrival at the Client's home / premises**

Park your vehicle in a suitable location for a swift departure, in case this is required. Examples would include parking in the direction of intended departure, facing away from dead end's if applicable, park approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a car length from the vehicle in front to ease departure, park in well light areas if it is dark or likely to be dark on your return. Your vehicle should be able to depart the parking space in one swift move in a forward gear if correctly parked.

Look around the area for anyone acting suspiciously or groups that may present a risk to you or your vehicle, if in doubt, drive away and return at another time or with an accompanying officer.

Do not take any items or valuables from the vehicle that you do not need for the specific visit (for example, only take files relevant to the particular address / client).

Ensure that no valuables are left on display in your vehicle; put any valuables in the boot or otherwise out of sight.

### **Before entering the Client's home / premises**

On arrival at the client's home / premises, check for anyone on or near the premises acting suspiciously or groups that may present a risk to you, if in doubt, drive away and return at another time or with an accompanying officer.

Check that any access route is in good condition, for example, are there large potholes or loose slabs that may present a slip / trip hazard, if applicable, and is the access route well lit.

Check any garden areas for dogs that may present a problem, for example, are there warning notices, are there well-worn paths around perimeter fences etc. that may have been created by large dogs etc. If you have any doubts, seek an alternative access route or check for problems with a neighbour.

### **In the Clients home / premises**

When the client answers the door, assess whether it is suitable to enter the premises, examples of unsuitable situations may be a large number of people in the premises, evidence of the occupant being under the influence of alcohol or drugs or inappropriately dressed occupants.

On entering the premises, undertake a quick inspection for damaged flooring or floor coverings that may present a slip / trip hazard, or any other property damage that may present a hazard, damage to the property in the form of punch or kick marks may indicate a risk of violence. Care should also be taken to check for other persons in the premises that you did not know of or are not expecting, especially where a long corridor exists between the room you are heading for and the exit door.

Whilst in any room with the client, always attempt to stay on the room door side of the client to prevent any attempt to block your exit route. Where this is not possible, always chose a location as close as possible to the room door, where you have a view of the door, never sit in a location with your back to the door so that you cannot see if anyone else enters the room behind you.

Never enter any void space such as a loft or solum where it may be possible for you to become trapped by a door being closed and secured behind you. If undertaking a visit of this type, always ensure you are accompanied by another officer.

If during a visit, the atmosphere becomes tense, confrontational or you feel there is a risk to yourself being in those premises, make an excuse and leave the premises as quickly as is safe to do, examples of excuses may be, having to check something with a supervisor / manager, having to check files / records for further information or having to return to the office to make calculations.

### **Leaving the client's home / premises**

When leaving the premises, do so as swiftly as possible, do not stop to note down comments outside the premises or in your vehicle, drive away and then make the notes.

Be aware of people following you from the address, if you feel at risk go by the busiest possible route to a busy location and attempt to gain assistance, preferably from a police officer.

Always return to your office or where that is not practicable, phone to advise that you are safe prior to going for lunch, or going home for the evening, someone may be wondering where you are.

If you encounter any hostility or threats during the visit, report this to your supervisor, it will mean that the next officer to visit the property is aware of the potential for hostility and be prepared.

## **Incident Reporting**

'Accident' is defined in legislation as including "an act of non consensual physical violence done to a person at work".

All accidents and incidents (not just violence) must be reported to your Supervisor who will complete an Incident Report Form (HSF1) or a Violent Incident Report Form (HSF2) with you. The information will be added to the Council's incident database (CIRIS) and you will receive a printed copy of the record.

Social Security legislation requires that all workplace accidents are properly recorded by the employee or his/her representative, using either of the report forms above will satisfy the requirements of this legislation.

More information and advice on this matter can be obtained from **Safety & Wellbeing team** [healthandsafety@northlan.gov.uk](mailto:healthandsafety@northlan.gov.uk)