

## Visiting Uninhabited Housing Properties

This information sheet is aimed at employees undertaking visits to uninhabited properties (for example, abandoned, void or fire damaged properties) as part of their duties. It is not intended to replace any formal training that may be identified through the risk assessment process.

***If at any time during a visit you feel endangered or 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 their 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 properties 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, reprogramme 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 two way 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.

Ensure any torches, electrical testers etc. that you require during your visit 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.

### **On arrival at the Property**

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 where applicable, park approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a car length from the vehicle in front to ease departure, park in well lit 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 yourself 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 Property**

On arrival at the property, check for anyone on or near the premises acting suspiciously or groups that may present a risk to yourself, 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 and, if applicable, is the access route well lit.

Check the exterior of the property for any signs of unauthorised access, vandalism or fire that may have affected the structural stability of the property, or parts of the property. If you have any doubts, seek advice from your supervisor.

## **In the Property**

When opening the door, assess whether it is suitable to enter the premises, examples of unsuitable situations may be evidence of persons being on the premises, possibly under the influence of alcohol or drugs or damage to the property that may make it unsafe to enter. If in any doubt, drive away and return at another time or with an accompanying officer.

On entering the property, undertake a quick inspection for damaged or rotten flooring or floor coverings that may present a slip / trip hazard, or any other damage that may present a hazard, for example loose doors or ceiling tiles etc. Care should also be taken whilst moving through the property to check for evidence of other dangers such as hypodermic syringes, exposed electrical cables, damaged gas fittings, infestation etc.

Whilst in the property, care should be taken where blood, bodily fluids or faeces are discovered. No contact should be made with these items and your supervisor should be contacted to arrange for the property to be cleaned, prior to any other work being undertaken.

In fire damaged properties check for signs of damage that may affect the stability of floors, stairs or the structure and seek specialist advice where appropriate. At all times, move with extreme care until the exact condition of the property is known as damage may have been caused by the fire or as part of the fire fighting operation.

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. A confined space permit may be required in such circumstances and this should be incorporated in the risk assessment.

If visiting whilst contractors are at work in the property, be aware that tools, equipment or materials may be lying around the property, or floors, steps etc. may not be complete due to repairs being undertaken. Always advise contractors personnel that you are in the property and ask if there are any special precautions you require to take or dangers you require to be aware of. Always advise when you are leaving the property.

## **Leaving the Property**

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.

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.

## **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)