

**BRACKNELL FOREST COUNCIL'S
LONE WORKING POLICY**

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BRACKNELL FOREST COUNCIL'S LONE WORKING POLICY FRAMEWORK CODE OF PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

The aim of this policy is to outline the Council's responsibilities towards staff working alone by:

- Defining what "lone working" is
- Taking action to reduce risk to lone workers
- Ensuring that all employees are aware of their responsibility to use Council systems introduced to assist lone workers.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all Bracknell Forest Council employees, including temporary workers and individuals undertaking casual work.

Detailed guidelines and working practices consistent with this framework may exist within departments particularly where lone working is common, and these should also be followed. In addition, this policy should be read in conjunction with guidance from the Health and Safety Advisers Provided in the following link:

<https://schools.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/lone-working.pdf>

DEFINITION

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines lone workers as those "who work by themselves without close or direct supervision". They may include:

People working separately from others in a building

People who work outside "normal" hours

People who work away from their fixed base without colleagues, e.g. visiting people in their homes

People who work at home

The definition can cover employees in situations with varying degrees and types of risk. It is important to identify the hazards of the work and assess the risks involved before applying appropriate measures. This policy will refer to high risk and low risk activities.

Some employees may spend most of their working lives working with others, but find themselves working alone occasionally, for example, when working late. Others will work alone on a daily basis. This policy will refer to frequent lone workers and occasional lone workers.

POTENTIAL HAZARDS OF LONE WORKING

People who work alone will of course face the same risks in their work as others doing similar tasks. However, additionally they may encounter the following:

- Accidents or sudden illnesses may happen when there is no-one to summon help or first aid
- Violence or the threat of violence or abuse
- Fire
- Attempting tasks which cannot safely be done by one person alone, eg heavy lifting, or use of certain equipment
- Lack of safe way in or out of a building (e.g. danger of being accidentally locked in)

Steps can be taken to reduce the risks of all of these events.

The perception of these hazards or the actual risks may be different for different people. For example inexperienced workers may underestimate the risks of an activity; some workers may feel particularly vulnerable to violence away from the workplace or after dark; or a medical condition may make it unsafe for an individual to work alone.

The Manager must consider these factors when doing risk assessments. If there are lone workers within an area the manager must take appropriate steps to reduce the risk, particularly for frequent lone workers or lone workers engaged in high risk activities. They should consider:

- Does the workplace present any special risk to a lone worker?
- Can all the equipment, substances and goods used on the premises be safely handled by one person? Is any manual handling involved safe for a single person?
- Is there a risk of violence or the threat of violence? Is the nature of a visit or the person being visited likely to increase the risk? Will the employee be alone in a dark or remote location?

MEASURES TO REDUCE THE RISK OF LONE WORKING

Supervision

Lone workers are by definition not under constant supervision. However, supervisors can ensure, through the initial induction process, that the employees understand the risks associated with their work and the relevant safety precautions. They can put into place arrangements for the individual to contact a supervisor if they need additional guidance. Occasional site visits may be appropriate, particularly if there are high risk activities. Employees new to a job or undergoing training may need to be accompanied initially. Regular contact by phone may be appropriate. The manager should assess what level of supervision is required.

Reporting back

A system should be in place to ensure that a lone worker returns to their base or their home at the completion of a task away from the normal workplace. For high risk or frequent lone workers, the Manager may stipulate that the employee must use the Council's emergency system Forestcare to achieve this. The system involves lodging details of whereabouts and the expected duration of the visit so that if the

employee has not reported in or cancelled the call by the expected hour, a call will automatically be triggered to check the employee is safe. Training on the use of the system will be given where appropriate, and managers should ensure that employees use the system if instructed to do so. Further guidance on the system is available from Forestcare Control Centre: 01344 786599

For occasional lone workers or low risk lone workers, the use of the full Forestcare system may not be appropriate. In these cases, managers may wish to implement an alternative method of ensuring the lone worker returns safely from a lone visit away from the workplace. This may be as simple as telling a colleague where they are going and when they are expected back; arranging to ring the office at the conclusion of a visit or call; issuing a mobile phone to enable the office to contact the employee if the employee's return is overdue. Use of diary systems or noticeboards to indicate whereabouts will perhaps form part of this system. However, the system should ensure that the return of the worker or a call from them is actively expected and waited for, and that action is taken to contact them if they do not return or the call is not made. All employees involved share a responsibility to maintain such informal processes for safe lone working.

Managers should also consider the members of staff who meet with customers or clients on a one to one basis on council premises. Whilst they are not alone in the building, they may be alone with the client in a place where other colleagues cannot see them. Managers should consider systems for ensuring that they have emerged safely from such a meeting and systems for raising an alarm if necessary (eg panic alarms).

Forestcare operate a 'Lifeline' alarm system. The system is connected to the phone line and a red button can be worn around the wrist or placed out of sight under a desk etc. It will work anywhere in the building and by pushing the button it will ensure assistance is quickly provided. Further guidance on the system is available in the following link: <https://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/forestcare>

Accidents and emergencies

Lone workers should be capable of responding correctly to emergencies. This should include being made aware of special arrangements for out of hours incidents. First aid may be available from building officers, or it may be prudent for an individual frequently working away from the base to carry a basic first aid kit if there is a foreseeable risk of injury. It is also necessary for employee working alone in a building or part of a building to let the building security know they are there, so they can be accounted for in case of fire.

Tasks not suitable for lone working

Risk assessment will identify the hazards of work. When risk assessment shows that it is not possible for the work to be done safely by a lone worker, arrangements for providing help or back up should be put in place, or the work reassigned to another worker or done in hours when the worker is not alone. For example, a worker who arrives before other colleagues may be instructed not to attempt heavy manual lifting until other colleagues arrive to assist.

Violence at work

A separate detailed policy on violence at work details ways to identify the risks of violence and suggests methods to reduce the risk. The Alert system provides a

method of sharing information about properties where potentially dangerous situations have previously been noted, so that appropriate measures can be taken. Employees who undertake home visits must use this system to check addresses they are due to visit so they can take advice on how to reduce the risk (e.g. not visiting alone, meeting the person at another location). Employees must ensure that violent incidents are reported to ensure that the risk can be communicated to employees in other areas of the Council who may visit the same address for an unconnected reason. Full details of the Alert system are available in the following link: <https://bfcouncil.sharepoint.com/SitePages/Bracknell-Alert.aspx>

The risk of violence may not be directly related to a particular property. It may be associated with environmental issues like working alone outside after dark, or a situation may arise where there was no previous history of incidents. Employees likely to be lone workers in such situations should be trained in dealing with difficult people, in ways to recognise a risk and in behaviours which may reduce the risk (up to and including terminating the visit.) See also the Council's policy on Violence/Abuse at Work <https://bfcouncil.sharepoint.com/SitePages/Violence-at-work.aspx>

Guidance from the Corporate Health and Safety Advisers is also available in the following link: <https://schools.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/violence-at-work.pdf>

CONCLUSION

Establishing safe working for lone workers is no different from organising the safety of other employees, but the risk assessment must take account of any extra risk factors. Managers must ensure that they have not only introduced measures to reduce any risk but must also ensure that they have communicated their expectations to lone workers and trained them appropriately. All employees, including lone workers, are responsible for following safe systems of work and all employees can take simple steps to reduce the risks associated with their normal working life.