

Violence/Abuse at Work Policy

Document Control

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Revision due	The service aims to review policies and procedures every two years to ensure documents are up to date		
Owning Service	Human Resources		

Approvals (if required)

Date Employment Committee gave authorisation for changes (where necessary)

Change History

Version	Date	Description	Changes made by
2.0	September 2022	Updates to name of organisations/bodies. Reference to new policies - Equality and Dignity at Work Policy. Added statement about Cyberbullying. Links to guidance/policy added for ease of reference. Transferred to new template.	Liz Cooper
1.0	June 2010	Original policy	

Contents

1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
2	EQUALITY	1
3	PURPOSE.....	1
4	PRINCIPLES.....	1
4.1	Members of the Public	1
4.2	Employees	2
5	SCOPE.....	2
6	DEVELOPING LOCAL GUIDANCE	2
7	ASSESSING AND REDUCING THE RISK – ACTIONS FOR LINE MANAGERS	3
7.1	Assessing the risk.....	3
7.2	Evaluating the risk and considering preventative measures.....	3
8	REPORTING INCIDENTS	4
9	DEALING WITH MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC.....	5

VIOLENCE/ABUSE AT WORK POLICY

1 INTRODUCTION

Employees of Bracknell Forest Council, like all those who deal directly with the public, may face aggressive or violent physical behaviour, sexist, racist, or other forms of verbal abuse. This behaviour will not be tolerated, and the Council will support employees in their dealings with this type of behaviour. Employees should take reasonable precautions to avoid putting themselves at risk and should inform their manager of any incidents so that they can give appropriate guidance and support and share information with others. Violent or abusive behaviour must be treated seriously and always reported.

Whilst this document is based on the premise of good employment practices, the advice should be read in conjunction with *Section 2 (12)* of the [Health and Safety Manual](#).

The Council acknowledges its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Act Guidance. In relation to the way in which it approaches violence towards staff which is perceived as being racially motivated. This policy takes those responsibilities into account when dealing with such incidents.

2 EQUALITY

At Bracknell Forest Council we are committed to encouraging equality, diversity, and inclusion among our workforce, and eliminating unlawful discrimination. We want everyone that works for us to feel that their individuality is respected, and their unique contributions are valued.

The aim is for our workforce to be truly representative of all sections of society and our customers, and for each employee to feel respected and able to give their best.

The Council, in providing goods and/or services and/or facilities, is also committed against unlawful discrimination of customers or the public.

3 PURPOSE

The Council has a duty under the Health and Safety at Work Act to minimise the risk of violence to all employees. This policy provides the guidance to achieve this.

4 PRINCIPLES

4.1 Members of the Public

Violence includes not only physical attack, but also threatening behaviour, verbal abuse and behaviour calculated to cause hurt or distress. The Council will ensure that any issues related to gender, ethnicity, disability, nationality, religion, age or other diversity issues are swiftly dealt with. Employees encountering violence or

abuse in the course of their duties, will be fully supported by the Council in all actions which fall short of pursuing private litigation.

This will also include Cyberbullying which is the process of using the internet, social media or mobile phones to intentionally intimidate, harass, offend or cause distress to someone.

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 places a general duty on every employer to ensure as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety, and welfare at work of all employees. Managers therefore have a responsibility to assess the risk of violence to their staff and to ensure reasonable preventive measures are in place.

Successful strategies for preventing violence at work require local input from each department which reflects the specific nature of its task, local conditions, and circumstances. Departments should therefore implement specific operating procedures within the enabling framework of this policy and code of practice. Those operating procedures should be appropriate to the degree and type of risk of violence to which employees may be exposed.

Information about people or premises associated with a violent incident should be shared with colleagues across the Council if they are seen to present a continuing risk to employees. Alert is the Council's database of such people and premises and allows such information to be shared. Employees who visit addresses across the Borough must make a check against this database as a routine part of planning the visit; if there is a recorded risk they will be advised accordingly. The Council's Health and Safety Team can provide information on the Alert system.

4.2 Employees

It is also the case that the violent incident may involve another employee rather than a member of the public. If this is so then this policy will still apply, with the investigation for the Violent/Abusive Incident Report form serving as part of an investigation within the Disciplinary Procedure and as evidence at any subsequent Hearing. However, employees should also be aware that the Council's Equality and Dignity at Work Policy [Equality and Dignity At Work Policy.pdf](#) provides an alternative procedure for dealing with harassment (particularly if the violent incident is not a one-off incident and a wider set of behaviour needs to be addressed).

The Council will provide support to any employee subjected to violence/abuse and take all reasonable steps to protect from future incidents and intimidation in the workplace. This may involve consideration under separate Council procedures including Disciplinary and/or temporary redeployment arrangements.

5 SCOPE

This procedure applies to all employees including agency and casual workers of Bracknell Forest Council with the exception of:

- School based staff (see separate School policy).

6 RISK ASSESSING AND DEVELOPING LOCAL GUIDANCE

The Code of Practice set out below is of a very general nature, and the level of risk and the best ways to minimise it will be very different in different work areas. Specific risk factors include:

- Off-site visits
- working closely with adults or children who may have behavioral problems
- working alone, or in one-to-one meetings with clients/customers
- travelling between locations
- handling cash, where this may make them vulnerable to violence connected with the attempted theft of the cash
- dealing with issues which impact on a client's family or home which prompt strong reactions from members of the public.

Each department dealing with members of the public will have different situations to face, and some may have detailed guidance about what to expect and how to respond to those situations. Managers should ensure that any such local guidance is readily available to employees.

Each employee will have a different perception of the type and degree of risk they face. Managers should ensure they are listening to the concerns of front-line staff and reacting appropriately. Employees should also receive training appropriate to the level of risk of violence and the type of situation they are likely to encounter. Managers may consult Organisational Development Team for advice about the availability of appropriate training courses.

Each location will have specific safety and security issues. Enhanced physical security is not always the answer as the environment can be exacerbated. Any measures introduced should be appropriate to the assessed risk and periodically reviewed to see what impact they have had on violent incidents and the fear of violence.

7 ASSESSING AND REDUCING THE RISK – ACTIONS FOR LINE MANAGERS

7.1 Assessing the risk

Managers must assess the risk of violence against employees and take any necessary steps to reduce that risk. Assessing the risk of violence will involve talking with employees about their experiences. Risk may be increased if the employee works alone or visits people in their homes but is not confined to these situations; any face-to-face contact with the public may carry a potential risk.

7.2 Evaluating the risk and considering preventative measures

Once the risk has been evaluated, managers will be required to check existing precautions and decide if they are adequate.

The [Lone Working Policy](#) and the [Health and Safety Manual](#) gives advice on this issue, but examples of possible areas to consider include:

- the environment in which people using Council services wait to be seen and are seen. The lighting, furniture arrangements, exits, and visibility are all significant factors - the provision of alarms, wider counters, CCTV, or service windows may be useful in areas of high risk.
- ensuring the incidents are reported and as necessary recorded on the Alert database. Further detailed information regarding its operation can be found here [Bracknell Alert \(sharepoint.com\)](#)
- ensuring that employees are routinely consulting Alert before visits. Appropriate measures should be taken where a risk factor is indicated.
- what systems exist to let colleagues know where employees are going and when they are expected back.
- Consideration whether some visits should not be undertaken alone
- Ensuring employees are aware how off-site visits may be conducted to minimise risk
- Ensuring an employee who is making off-site visits involving a significant degree of risk have a mobile phone to summon assistance more easily, or have a regular checking-in procedure
- Ensuring employees at particular risk attend appropriate training, on the issues of violence at work on how to spot the early signs of aggression, and how to avoid it or cope with it
- where alarms are installed, they should be regularly checked, and an appropriate response procedure should be in place.
- consider displaying a notice in public areas e.g., adjacent to reception desks and entrances of Council occupied buildings. The notice is designed to act as a deterrent in preventing incidents as it will send a clear message that unacceptable behaviour will not be tolerated and that information about an individual may be shared between Council departments.

8 Reporting incidents

If an employee encounters violence or the threat of violence, then they should discuss the incident with their supervisor or manager*. The manager should establish what has happened as soon as reasonably possible once the employee feels able to discuss. Remember that the employee may be distressed, and it is important to ensure that they are being listened to for their own sake, as well as to obtain the details which are the basis of the formal report.

(*should there be any circumstances where an employee feels unable to discuss their experiences with their line manager, they may contact either their line managers manager or a member of the HR Team.)

If the employee is injured or shocked then the manager should first arrange appropriate practical support, such as medical attention or first aid, organising a lift home, arranging to contact a friend or relative, or offering to arrange counselling support through the [Employee Assistance Programme \(sharepoint.com\)](#). It should be determined if the police have been called, and if not, to call them if required/appropriate.

Employees should report violent incidents even if they indicate they were not distressed by them or felt able to cope. The next employee to encounter similar

circumstances may not be so well equipped to handle the situation, may be more inexperienced, or may encounter a more extreme situation; reporting an incident gives the next employee the information they need to be prepared for the next visit.

As soon as practically possible, the manager should visit the place where the assault took place, and carry out a detailed investigation (including, wherever possible, interviews with the alleged perpetrators). Witnesses should be asked to record the incident in writing at the earliest possible time.

The manager and employee should work together on filling in the Violent/Abusive Incident Report Form, which they will both sign. The procedure and the Violent/Abusive Incident Report (VIR) Form are available via the following link: [Health and safety manual and policy \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

Managers should note that any incident which results in an absence of more than three days, or any incident which results in a major injury, will also require them to complete a form F2508 reporting it to the Health and Safety Executive. See following link: [Report an accident or incident \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

Managers should also note that, where an incident is reported which may relate to any Discriminatory issue (including sex and race), provision exists to refer the matter to the appropriate statutory body, e.g., The Equality and Human Rights Commission.

The VIR form also calls for the manager to note any action which can be taken to prevent recurrence of such an incident. The form will be passed to the Director of the Department concerned. The "Alert" online form should be completed to input the relevant information onto the "Alert" system where the Manager has indicated this is appropriate. This is then reported to the Health and Safety Advisor for monitoring/health and safety purposes and, if the incident is perceived as relating to racial issues, to the Head of Community Engagement and Equalities (for monitoring purposes). Managers and Directors should jointly ensure that any appropriate preventive measures are put in place. Details of the procedure can be this link: [Bracknell Alert \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

Departments may construct their own additional procedures surrounding the use and distribution of the VIR form, and in relation to actions proposed and taken therefore, provided that the corporate requirements set out in this document and in the Health, Safety and Welfare Manual are met. Some departments may have other regulations or reporting requirements to meet, and it is of course anticipated that any additional actions, forms, or procedures specific to a given department will be incorporated into their own operating procedures.

The departmental Health and Safety groups will regularly receive details of the violent/abusive Incident reports received and take actions as required.

9 DEALING WITH MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Violent and aggressive behaviour is clearly inexcusable, but the risk of such

behaviour being encountered may be increased if a member of the public finds their contact with the Council's representatives does not meet the expected customer standards. Even if the outcome of their contact with the Council may lead to upset or some form of enforcement, the way in which the individual is dealt with can influence the nature of their response. "Members of the Public" is meant as a broad category which may also include clients, pupils or their parents, suppliers etc. Employees may find it useful to consider the following:

- How long does the individual have to wait for a response? Is the individual told how long they are likely to have to wait, and informed if there is any further delay?
- Is the availability of employees with relevant knowledge sufficient to ensure that an emergency/situation can be dealt with without undue delay?
- Will the individual feel that he or she has been listened to?
- If it is necessary to refuse a request or take an unwelcome action, has the action been explained to the individual?
- Could the individual interpret the employee's body language or speech as threatening, and could that threat be reduced by, for example, sitting down or speaking calmly?
- If visiting the member of the public at home, have they been told who the employee is, been shown their identification card, and are they aware of the purpose of the visit?

None of the above should be taken to imply that when violent incidents occur it is the employee's fault; these are simply examples of ways to reduce, not eliminate, the risks by modifying behaviour.

Training on dealing with difficult situations is available through the Learning and Development programme.

Notices are posted in Council buildings to which the public has access indicating clearly that unacceptable behaviour towards staff will not be tolerated. These notices warn that in the event of any incident, the Council may impose sanctions including banning them from Council premises and reporting incidents to the police, and that these actions might result in them being prosecuted. It is hoped that these will act as a deterrent and may help stop an incident from escalating.

Should an employee be subjected to online abuse from a member of the public, the Council will consider ways in which this can be prevented or taken down from an online platform. This may include contacting the online platform provider and seeking the removal of the abusive material or making direct contact with the member of the public. Further recourse to the Council's Legal Department or, dependent on the circumstances, the Police will be considered.

Managers have responsibility for supporting the health, safety and welfare of their staff however, for their own safety, employees should be aware of issues like the following:

- In a potentially difficult situation, they should check that they know the way out and that their path to an exit is not blocked.
- If going off site, the employee should find out what they can about where they will be going and what to expect there and, where necessary, ensure the appropriate emergency response alarms are provided.

- When going off site, the employee should ensure their colleagues know where they are and when they are expected back and should call the office if they are delayed - in some cases a checking in procedure should be used.
- Employees should never put themselves in danger by trying to protect cash.
- Employees should never be embarrassed to raise an alarm or ask for help or to be accompanied.
- Employees should be made aware of meeting room facilities and the arrangements to seek urgent assistance
- Employees should discuss potentially difficult situations with their manager, to see if the risk can be reduced (e.g., by sending two people, or arranging for the member of the public to come into the offices).
- Is the availability of employees with relevant knowledge sufficient to ensure that an emergency can be dealt with without undue delay?
- Will the individual feel that he or she has been listened to?
- If it is necessary to refuse a request or take an unwelcome action, has the action been explained to the individual?
- Could the individual interpret the employee's body language or speech as threatening, and could that threat be reduced by, for example, sitting down or speaking calmly?
- If visiting the member of the public at home, have they been told who the employee is, been shown their identification card, and are they aware of the purpose of the visit?

None of the above should be taken to imply that when violent incidents occur it is the employee's fault; these are simply examples of ways to reduce, not eliminate, the risks by modifying behaviour.

Above all, if the employee has any reservations about their own safety in a situation, they must withdraw.