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**East Dunbartonshire Council**

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**EAST DUNBARTONSHIRE SOCIAL WORK  
OPERATIONAL STAFF SAFETY  
PROCEDURES**

**February 2008**

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## 1. Introduction

These procedures provide operational guidance to fieldwork staff around safety. They need to be read in conjunction with wider Council policies and procedures around staff safety, in particular on Violence in the Workplace and Health and Safety *and in no way provide a substitute for the latter.*

Staff safety is of paramount importance and should be at the forefront of all practice. East Dunbartonshire Council has a clear responsibility to ensure it provides maximum protection for its staff and these procedures outline some of the measures it has taken to do this. However it is also the responsibility of each employee to look after his or her own safety, and to follow agreed procedures with the support of managers and colleagues.

Definitions of ‘violence at work’ are contained within the Council’s Violence in the Workplace policy (p 8 – 9)

## 2. Buildings/Premises

The manager responsible for each building used by Social Work staff should request a security audit and updated risk assessment annually by the Council’s Health and Safety Officer which should include reception areas and interview rooms as well as staff areas.

Operational managers can contact Health and Safety directly to complete risk assessments on all premises used by East Dunbartonshire staff, including:

- Council buildings (or those leased by the Council) where staff are based
- Any other premises used irregularly or sessionally
- Premises managed by another agency e.g. CHP where social work staff are based full-time or for specific periods that do not operate under social work.

Equivalent procedures should be available for NHS staff based within Council premises who will also be expected as far as possible to comply with these procedures given the Council’s duty of care towards these staff.

Requirements/recommendations arising from health & safety inspections and risk assessments should be acted on immediately by the manager responsible for the building and action taken/problems arising fed into the Community Care Staff Safety Group.

[Refer to pp 23 - 24 of the EDC Violence in the Workplace policy]

### **3. Informing Staff about Safety**

Each manager is responsible for ensuring that his or her staff are briefed on the general principles/policies relating to safety and operational procedures should be issued at induction and reinforced regularly. Health and Safety should be a standing item on every team meeting agenda.

### **4. Holding Information in case of Emergencies**

#### **Personal and Vehicle Information**

Each member of staff who uses a car for business purposes should provide the following information to the Admin officer and ensure that any changes to it are immediately reported to the Admin Officer:

- descriptions of vehicle(s), i.e. colour/registration;
- description of the individual,
- next of kin details

This data should be kept securely in an agreed location with ready accessibility by agreed named people.

### **5. Mobiles**

Staff should ensure they are issued with a work mobile phone and carry this at all times during working hours, charged up and on (unless driving or in a meeting).

All work mobile phone numbers must be logged for each team with admin staff both as a central list which is readily accessible and on each worker's personal card. Operational managers should be provided with the list of workers' phone numbers for their team and the building as a whole and keep this with them at all times. Staff should have the office number in their phone so that this can be readily retrieved.

### **6. Personal Alarms**

Staff should be issued with personal attack alarms and appraised of how to use them. Workers should ensure that they carry the alarm with them at all times.

### **7. Working within Premises**

Within each location there should be a clear and agreed policy as to the minimum number of staff who should be present within the building at all times

- during times when customers are being seen
- at any other time

In association with the Health and Safety Officer and dependent on the level of risk, premises should have a clear statement about minimum numbers in specific

circumstances. As a general rule no member of staff should be present on their own in any building at any time unless this has been agreed and appropriate security is in place.

All premises should have secure entry and staff should exercise caution in terms of not passing on any details which would allow an unauthorised person entry.

It should be made clear to admin and fieldwork staff by managers as to the circumstances when it is not appropriate to allow entry to the building, i.e. when the behaviour of a customer or other person could pose a risk to the worker or others, e.g. abusive or threatening manner or where the presence of the customer could have a detrimental impact e.g. relationship between particular customers, pressure from appointments system.

Notices and information should be displayed explaining the behaviour that is expected of service users and no tolerance policies on violence to staff.

[Refer to p23 of EDC Violence in the Workplace policy]

## **8. Home Visits**

Staff should take particular precautions when undertaking visits to a customer's home or other location outwith the office.

The Council policy supports lone working but the worker and their manager should 'risk assess' any unaccompanied visit, routinely where it is a new customer and where there are known risks in terms of behaviour of the customer or others likely to be present. Where there is a known risk the Council's policy (p 25) advises arranging an initial meeting in the office and ensuring that key people are present.

### **Prior to Home Visit**

#### **See Appendix One-Checklist for Home Visits**

- Carefirst or PIMS warnings, including any advice regarding type of intervention, number of staff to visit etc should be considered prior to a home visit.
- where there is an agreed practice within a team (e.g. always two staff to attend first visit to a new customer) the manager should ensure that staff are made aware of this and comply with this.
- worker undertaking visit must record details of who visited/address of the visit, how long the visit will be including travel time in the visit book or diary which is clearly available to admin/team members.
- staff must also use the whiteboard to note destination and anticipated time of return for ease of gathering information on where staff are at any given time.

### **On a Home Visit**

A checklist will be provided for staff safety purposes on home visits; however staff should pay particular regard to;

- environment-around the home visit, parking in a clear space with as easy access to the car as possible
- preparation-have the mobile phone switched on, mobile alarm and mobile phone in easy reach
- inside house-note the layout of the flat/house on entry, stay seated near the door to exit if possible, note who else is present during the visit
- gender-whilst there are no firm rules on men visiting women alone or vice versa, particular care needs to be taken where there may be risk of allegations being made against the worker
- in general it will not be appropriate to continue a lone worker visit if any service user is intoxicated or under the influence of drugs, prescribed or otherwise, or is displaying aggressive or bizarre behaviour to the extent that no reasonable interaction can take place and there may be a risk to the worker
- gut feelings are valid, if the worker feels unsafe in any way s/he should feel able to terminate the visit and report back

### **After a Home Visit**

On most occasions, a staff member would immediately return to base.

Otherwise, if it is the end of the day or the worker intends to leave to go home, the base must be contacted by phone and the worker must say 'SAFE', the admin worker (or other person taking the call) should then note the worker on the board as SAFE.

If the worker intends to finish the visit after 5pm, they must individually make arrangements with their line manager or other manager either

- for calling in after this time where it is adult protection or other urgent situation
- in non-urgent situations to ensure that clear information is available to the line manager (or manager covering) as to whereabouts of the worker i.e. they know location and expected finish time and at least brief details of the purpose of the visit.

No home visit which is planned (i.e. not an emergency) to take place after 5 p.m. should proceed unless the worker has made a prior agreement arrangement with their line manager that a formal cover arrangement is not required or some other form of cover has been put in place.

Admin staff will be asked to monitor the comings and goings of staff via a board or book with a team manager or senior staff member overseeing this to ensure safe return. The responsibility for the safety of fieldwork staff does not lie with admin staff but they are best placed to monitor staff movements and alert the relevant manager if there are concerns.

As stated it is the responsibility of the staff member to phone in at the end of their visit if they intend not to return to the office and say “safe” to admin staff.

The same procedure should take place at the start of the day where a member of staff is carrying out a home visit prior to coming into the office base. Admin staff will be asked to note if a worker has not arrived at the office at the time indicated. Again the worker is responsible for ensuring that he or she has either made a prior arrangement with the line manager or phoned the office to inform of his or her delayed arrival and that this has been entered into the visits book and white board.

Where admin staff (or other worker) realise that a staff member has not returned or called in from a home visit at the expected time, the line manager or other senior worker will be alerted and efforts made to locate the person by

- phoning the person on work mobile
- phoning the worker at the service user’s home or other location
- if practicable visiting the location.

The action taken will to some extent depend on the nature of the visit and the length of time after the anticipated return time. However it cannot be assumed that any visit is entirely ‘safe’ and the worker may have been involved in an incident outwith contact with the customer.

Should the above action have been taken and there is no means of contacting or checking on the safety of the worker the Council’s policy advises that ‘if necessary the Police should be contacted’ to report concerns about the worker and provide details of the employee and any vehicle.

#### **‘4.30 check’**

At 4.30 each day admin staff will be asked to consult the board and visits book to check that all staff have returned from visits where the anticipated return time was to have been PRIOR to 4.30 p.m.

Admin staff will alert the line manager or other available manager to report any worker who has not been accounted for.

[Refer to pp 20-21 & 25 – 26 of the EDC Violence in the Workplace policy]



## 9. Council response to Violent Incidents

The Council has a Violence in the Workplace policy which states that if a violent incident, *which includes verbal abuse*, occurs either within or outwith the Council premises, action must be taken to protect the staff member and/or other staff or members of the public both

- to deal with the actual incident e.g. removing the staff member from the home visit or removing the service user from Council premises
- to assess the ongoing risk to staff and others should a service still need to be provided to the customer displaying violence.

The policy also states that the relevant manager should, in consultation with the staff member, decide whether to report the matter to the Police. Where there is a general public safety issue the Police should be routinely called by senior staff. [refer to p 40 of the EDC Violence in the Workplace policy].

The following action should follow any violent incident:

- staff member(s) should be offered immediate support and debriefed on the incident by a manager [refer to pp 36 – 38 of the EDC Violence in the Workplace policy].
- a Violence to Staff proforma should be completed
- all other relevant agencies involved with the customer care should be contacted as soon as possible with the information in order to minimise risk
- CareFirst should be updated to record the incident and a decision made as to the creation of a 'warning indicator' on the system

Thereafter, the decision about what future contact there is with the service is dependent on the identification and management of risk and the requirement to continue providing a service to the customer.

However no service user should be allowed to continue using the service unless he or she is formally notified of the unacceptability of his or her behaviour and the consequences of a repeat of such behaviour. In general this should always be communicated in writing but as far as possible backed by a verbally or face to face discussion to underline concerns with the customer involving an appropriate manager.

Action taken affecting the delivery of the service to the customer might include:

- *restricting contact with the customer to certain locations*
- *avoiding home visits and/or lone working*
- *restrictions on/reconfiguration of, the type of service which can be provided*



## **10. Training**

Staff should have access to an annual staff safety training including management of aggression.

Staff and students must have basic information on these procedures and any local arrangements included in their induction. They should be shown how to access and use panic alarms etc within premises.

All staff must sign to confirm they have received a copy of this operational procedure.

[Refer to pp 33 – 34 of the EDC Violence in the Workplace policy].

## **11. Review of Procedures**

Procedure reviewed February 2010.