



DRAFT

East Herts Council

Managing Violence and Aggression in the Workplace
Policy

June 2007

Introduction

Customer Services and HR have developed this draft appendix to the Council's Health and Safety policy. It begins to address the need for support processes and guidelines for frontline staff when situations arise where customers may become aggressive or agitated. It has initially been shared with Benefits, Revenues and Housing Options for input and comments.

East Herts District Council Health and Safety Policy

Our staff aim to provide high-quality services for our customers, and work hard to achieve this.

East Herts Council is committed to the well being of our staff, customers and guests and we do not tolerate verbal abuse, harassment and threats or acts of violence or aggression that may affect their safety.

In the event of any of these occurring, East Herts Council will not hesitate to take action that may lead to prosecution.

Violence and Aggressive Behaviour - Non Aggression Policy

1. Introduction

The Corporate Management Team is committed to raising standards of health, safety and welfare management and believes that the management of agreed standards of appropriate behaviour at work is an important part of controls that may be required as a result of a risk assessment process.

2. Purpose

- 1.1 This policy is designed to ensure that East Herts Council takes all reasonable steps to ensure the safety of its employees, guests, contractors and visitors.
- 1.2 This updated procedure takes into account the requirements under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and has been designed to uphold the principles of Management of Health and Safety and duty of care.

3. Principles of the Non Violence and aggression procedure and guidance in its application

- The negative effects of such unreasonable behaviour are recognised and the impact on people is understood
- Verbal abuse, aggressive behaviour (verbal or physical) implied and actual threats made against staff are identified within the workplace through risk assessment and incident reporting
- Such potentially damaging behaviour towards employees carrying out their duties in the course of their work is not tolerated under any circumstances
- The concerns of the Corporate Management Team, heads of service, line managers, employees and safety representatives regarding verbal abuse, aggressive behaviour (verbal or physical) implied and actual threats of harm and assault at work are considered
- Members of staff appreciate the commitment of managers to ensuring their health, safety and welfare
- The Council complies with legislation and promotes good practice

What is Violence?

The Health and Safety Executive's definition of work-related violence is:

'Any incident in which a person is abused threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work'.

Violence can take many forms including:

- **Verbal, implied threats and abuse including threats and harassment of a sexual or racial nature**

When an employee feels an unacceptable threat has been made against them.

- **Threats with a weapon**
- **Rude gestures or innuendo (lewd, suggestive, sexual or obscene)**
- **Physical or implied threat of physical attack**

Whether a visible injury occurs or not. This includes racial or sexually motivated attacks

- **Animal attacks**

Where an animal is used as a threat or tool of violence

- **Attack or damage against physical assets and property**

As a means of intimidation against employees or is used to actually cause physical or implied harm

Violence at work may or may not result in actual physical injury but in all instances, staff may suffer some degree of emotional stress. This may be as a consequence of threats of future physical attacks occurring or being made, or of malicious damage to property and assets.

It is appreciated that employees will have differing perceptions of violence and will have different levels of tolerance for such behaviour. Behaviour which one member of staff finds threatening or offensive may cause only a minor annoyance in another person. Not all employees are the same.

It is therefore important that all employees are encouraged to report **all** incidents of violence. This will assist managers in determining the appropriate and proportionate level of action required.

Who is at risk and why?

Many Council employees meet with the public in order to carry out their work activities and deliver the Council's wide and varied range of services. Occasionally a customer may perceive that this service has fallen short of what they consider is reasonable or may feel that they have been slighted in some way and may become annoyed, upset, abusive or aggressive. However the vast majority of customers normally behave reasonably but occasionally annoyance can lead to threats of violence, or actual physical violence.

There are duties that must be performed that carry a degree of risk because they may be of a contentious nature or because they have to be carried out during unusual hours. All employees engaged in delivering services directly or indirectly to members of the public may be exposed to incidents of violence and aggression.

Activities

- Premises management and caretaking
- Frontline customer services
- Home and site visits, interviews and inspections
- Daytime and evening lone working
- Managing evening or night work and activities, call out duties
- Enforcement duties
- Voluntary duties e.g. staffing polling stations, assisting with public meetings and events
- Delivering literature and information

Responsibility

It is the responsibility of the Heads of Service to ensure that they undertake Risk Assessments to determine the likelihood of harm and what safe systems of work they must put in place to safeguard their employees.

Key points to take into consideration when carrying out the risk assessments include:

- Call in arrangements for off site, lone working and home visits
 - Is there a diarised log of planned visits, how many visits an officer is expecting to make and what are the call in arrangements
 - Are staff aware of emergency contact arrangements if they experience difficulty, who must they call during normal working hours and out of hours
 - Are there written safe systems and procedures to guide staff on dealing with unknown situations, when visiting properties and sites, what to look for, evidence of site safety, are there signs of animals present etc
 - Where it is known that an individual exhibits aggressive or violent behaviour it may be appropriate to arrange meetings in the office
 - Entry to property, security 'call in' measures
 - Are teams briefed on procedures and what measures are in place to monitor compliance of expected good practice? Ensure all staff understand why these procedures exist and do they understand them

Guidance – What to do

This guide is intended to assist Heads of Service in the steps that they may wish their teams to take when dealing with difficult or aggressive persons in the event that a situation becomes unpleasant or potentially dangerous.

- In the event that a panic button is used – follow the below 'Panic Process' procedure for frontline services.

In the extreme case that a member of staff is in a situation where the police have to be called for assistance in dealing with a difficult or aggressive person the following process and actions should be followed.

If the situation is taking place within an interview room the panic button must be pressed and:

- 1) *The member of staff should immediately leave the room.*

- 2) *Customer Service staff will immediately contact the police and begin to clear the relevant reception area of all customers through pre-defined routes and means. All access points into the 'back-office' area of the council premises will then be locked*
- 3) *The member of staff should advise a line-manager of the situation and liaise with Customer Services staff (who will also have advised a line manager of the situation) to await the arrival of the police.*
- 4) *The incident will be recorded within the relevant incident log, giving full details.*
- 5) *The Head of Customer Services and the relevant section Head will then liaise with the Health & Safety Officer to discuss a Cautionary Persons Register entry and if needed contact the relevant director to discuss any legal proceedings etc.*

If the situation is taking place within a reception area:

- 1) *The Customer Service officer will contact their line manager through one of the following means:*
 - a. *If they are able, to advise the customer that they are going to call a member of staff in the relevant department, call their line manager and use a pre-defined phrase that identifies to the line manager that there is a need to call the police.*
 - b. *The line manager will contact the police and request that additional members of Customer Service staff remove any public from the reception area through pre-defined routes and means, which will then be locked.*
 - c. *Staff will then remove themselves from the reception area.*
 - 2) *The incident will be recorded within the relevant incident log, giving full details.*
 - 3) *The Head of Customer Services and the relevant section Head will then liaise with the Health & Safety officer to discuss a Cautionary Persons Register entry and if contact the relevant director to discuss any legal proceedings etc.*
- *In extreme cases reception are to call the police for assistance. A clear step by step procedure is to be issued by the Head of Customer Services and issued to frontline staff. A copy is also to be made available to all Service Heads and posted on the intranet for access by all staff.*
 - *It may be necessary that two people be present during interviews*

Requesting aggressive or potentially violent persons to leave premises

To seek assistance, if required, when any form of violence is taking place. It is acceptable to walk away or terminate the interview when faced with verbal, threatening, etc, behaviour and/or call the Police. Inform your supervisor and Head of Service immediately.

- Explain that you are unable to help when shouting or aggression develops, that they will be asked to leave.
- If situation deteriorates explain that the interview is to be concluded and ask them to leave
- If the person becomes violent leave the interview room, advise the Head of Service immediately or the next senior manager

Reporting Process

All cases of aggressive and violent behaviour must be reported using the 'Incident Report Form' on the Intranet.

The completed form must be submitted to the Head of Service and the Health and Safety Officer.

Management Action

To fully implement the policy and procedures relating to Violence at Work in a decisive, sympathetic and fully supportive way.

To attend/manage the appropriate training courses for supervisors/managers of 'front line' employees.

Heads of Service and Line Managers should consider all safety and preventative measures to alleviate incidents of violence, and draw up appropriate instructions for their own and other employees. To aid these considerations they should organise regular discussion meetings involving front line employees and appropriate trade union representatives.

When an employee has encountered any form of violence she/he should be offered immediate support and counselling and/or reasonable time off as appropriate. Employees should be encouraged to contact the Employee Assistance Scheme 'PPC' who have qualified support personnel for victims and their families.

In the event of any threat either verbal or physical to staff, CMT have advised that the Council will explore all potential legal routes that may lead to prosecution. Subsequent to an incident occurring an 'evidence pack' will be created by either the Head of Customer Relations or the respective Service Head (i.e. Benefits) that will include incident reports, staff/public statements, legal guidance and any additional evidence (e.g. CCTV footage). This pack will be presented to CMT for their consideration in respect of the any route that the Council will follow.

Information

Recognising potentially violent situations

A person's body language can convey information on their potential for violent behaviour. Recognising the signals and paying close attention to what is being said and how it is being said can act as a warning to staff of possible or impending trouble.

Understanding this information may help prevent and avoid situations becoming violent, some examples are given here:

- **Body** Agitated and restless movements, tense posture

- **Voice/Verbal** Volume, changes in pitch, unnatural quiet and non responsive
Shouting, muttering, unable to articulate responses clearly
Significant changes in speed and pace of speech
Abrupt replies, interrupting responses with gestures
Speech directed in general and not at you
Using aggressive language, name calling, swearing or being deliberately provocative or attention seeking
Attempts to draw others into situation

- **Eyes** Dilation of pupils
Increased and rapid movements of the eyes
Eye contact intensifies or breaks off
Looks away, down or eyes closed

- **Face** Tensing of the facial muscles, jaw line
Grinding of the teeth, increased swallow reflex
Change in skin colour, increased perspiration

- **Arms** Folded across chest
Raised
Rapid movements, gesticulation, sudden changes in movement

- **Hands** Clenching and making fists
Wringing, locking and unlocking fingers
Tapping on surfaces
Flexing 'cracking' joints
Thumping fist or slamming on surfaces or other hand
Picking up objects, tearing or scrunching papers

- **Legs** If seated, may be restless or swinging
- **Feet** Tapping
- **Other factors** Heightened tension, unwillingness to discuss issue privately
Agitated, sudden changes to posture, tensing shoulders
Moving away or closer

Preventative measures

It is not possible to completely eliminate the potential for a violent or aggressive situation from occurring, but it is possible to implement measures to control and reduce the risk.

Physical security

Physical security arrangements implemented in buildings can make a significant contribution to safeguarding staff, guests and other users of Council services.

- Displaying 'Zero Tolerance ' statements in reception and public areas
- Use of CCTV surveillance equipment with appropriate statement on use
- Fitting panic buttons and secure furniture in interview rooms, regular testing must take place to ensure panic buttons work correctly.
- Controlled access and restriction to other parts of the building
- Avoid placing heavy objects in reception areas as these may be used as weapons or missiles in a confrontation
- All employees should be encouraged to sign visitor books when signing in and to wear their name badges
- Try to keep information and literature current and in date
- Ideally waiting times should be kept to a minimum. However delays do occur and this may aggravate a potential situation. If there are delays please explain this to the customer. They may feel aggrieved if they perceive that they have been ignored or forgotten
- When using interview rooms consideration should be given to arrangements when dealing with persons of a known unpleasant or aggressive nature. It may be practical to have a colleague present. If this is not practicable then it may be necessary to have a colleague enter, under the guise of providing additional information, to check that all is in order.