

# London Housing Trust

## Lone Working Policy

### Introduction

London Housing Trust attaches great importance to the safety of all its staff and clients, and acknowledges that risks towards staff and clients is an important health and safety issue.

Within the context of this policy, risk is defined as any incident in which a person working for or living at London Housing Trust is abused, threatened, or assaulted by either a client, colleague or a member of the public in circumstances relating to their work.

This would include: -

- Physical attack- whether visible injury occurs or not, and includes sexual or racial attack
- Verbal abuse or intimidation – where a member of staff or client feels that a threat has been made.
- Animal attack- i.e. where an animal is threatening, is used as a threat or as a tool for violence
- Attack against property - as a means of intimidating an employee or resident.

It is the aim of this policy to outline the provisions that should be taken to ensure that staff can work, and clients can live in safety.

### Legal Responsibility

Risk Assessment is an employer's explicit duty under the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

Employers have a duty under section 2 (1) of the Health & Safety at Work Act (1974) to take steps, as far as is reasonably practicable, to safeguard the safety of their employees and residents.

Employers also have a "Common Duty of Care" under the Occupiers' Liability Act (1957).

### Duties of the Employer

London Housing Trust is responsible for the provision of a safe working environment for its employees and its residents acknowledges that it has an obligation to strive to eliminate the danger posed by threats of violence .

In recognition of this responsibility the Society will: -

- Provide a written Health & Safety Policy.
- Provide a Lone Working Policy, documenting the process of assessing the potential hazards and identifying procedures necessary to reduce risk.
- Update knowledge and review workplace policies and procedures on an annual basis.
- Provide suitable and sufficient training and instruction.
- Provide risk assessment forms and instructions and training on conducting Risk Assessment.
- Provide Support Mechanisms in the event of an incident for both staff and clients.
- Record and investigate all incidents of violence directed towards staff or clients, and take any remedial action that may be required.

### **Responsibilities of Employees under the policy**

In order to assist the London Housing Trust to carry out its legal obligation, employees must:-

- Take reasonable care for your own health and safety, and that of other persons.
- Be aware and understand and comply with the Society's policies, procedures, guidelines and instructions relating to:
  - Lone Working
  - Health & Safety at Work.
- Participate in any training, which the Society makes available.
- Identify your own training needs in relation to risk management and lone working, through your Staff Supervision.
- Immediately report incidents of violence, harassment or intimidation to your Line Manager and the Police.
- Report all incidents, difficulties or risks raised from lone working, however minor, to your Line Manager, even if you do not wish further action to be taken. Failure to report an incident may put others at risk.
- Record details of all incidents by completing a critical incident form.

- Be aware of the Risks before entering a situation
- Transferral of information – ensure that all information about clients referred from other agencies is passed on. Particularly if there is a known risk or previous history of violence or aggression.
- Familiarise yourself with the policies and workplace procedures for preventing and dealing with situations where aggression or violence may occur.
- Report any incidents, problems or shortcomings, which arise from these policies, procedures and risk management guidelines, in place to control risks, to the line manager.

### **Definition of Lone Working**

Lone working may be defined as, any work activity, which is specifically intended to be carried out in isolation without immediate access to other workers, by an individual or a small team of people.

### **Types of Lone Working**

Lone working can take place when people: -

- Work as individuals at London Housing Trust, but are separated from others e.g. working a shift alone or interviewing clients alone, in interview rooms.
- Work alone away from London Housing Trust e.g. home visiting.
- Travel alone as part of their work e.g. travelling to meetings or travelling to client's homes or transporting clients to appointments.

Many lone workers will come into more than one of these categories.

### **Hazards of Lone Working**

The hazards, which lone workers can encounter, include: -

- Violence from clients or visitors to London Housing Trust
- Violence towards clients or visitors to London Housing Trust from staff
- Accidents

- Sudden illness.

These hazards may be exacerbated because lone workers lack the normal channels of support, which may result in such incidences being unreported or undetected for a considerable length of time, thus placing the worker or client at greater risk.

### **Definition of Risk Assessment**

Risk can be defined as:

- The possibility of incurring misfortune or loss
- The likelihood of adverse consequences arising from an event
- The chances of something that will impact on objects

The Assessment of Risk is simply a careful examination of anything that may cause harm to you or others during the course of your work.

### **Procedure for Risk Assessment**

The prevention of violence at work must start with a full Assessment of Risk.

All staff whose work takes them out into the community should carry out a Risk Assessment.

All lone working shall be subject to Risk Assessment.

A Risk Assessment form must be completed, by a member of staff, after every interview with a potential client. A fuller Risk Assessment must then be completed upon admission of a new client, by the member of staff doing the admission. It will be the key worker's responsibility to update this Risk Assessment, as and when necessary.

The key to maximising safety, wherever lone working is under consideration, is the performance of a satisfactory Risk Assessment.

The process for conducting a Risk Assessment for lone working is no different to that followed when assessing more conventional activities. The important point is to carry out the assessment systematically in the following way: -

- Identify the hazards associated with the work and carrying it out unaccompanied
- Assess the risks associated with the work and decide on the safe working arrangements to control these risks

- Record the findings of the assessment
- Implement the safe working arrangements
- Monitor and review the safe working arrangements

The risk assessment should also take into consideration:

- The time of day
- The location of the meeting/visit
- Whether women are particularly at risk
- The client history and previous Risk Assessment
- Emergency procedures and effectiveness of communications systems.
- Whether personal protection equipment is required.
- The potential risk for violence and or aggression
- Access and exit points
- Purpose of meeting/visit
- Methods of working
- Duration of work (including travelling times)

The Risk Assessment will provide an indication as to whether the work can or cannot be done safely, alone. If the Risk Assessment indicates unacceptably high levels of risk, then the work should not be undertaken unless further control measures are implemented, e.g. two people visiting together. It may be necessary to discuss the risks with your Line Manager or request assistance from the Police if there is a high risk of violence or intimidation.

All risk assessment forms will be retained for a period of 5 years.

Lone working must not be undertaken where there is a reasonable foreseeable risk that the work might result in an accident, violence or harm. If there is any doubt as to safety of yourself or others do not go ahead.

Risk assessments of violence can be made more accurate through:

- Detailed knowledge of the risk factors associated with violence
- Detailed knowledge of the person whose risk is being assessed and their past and present circumstances.

### **Factors associated with an increased risk of violence**

The following risk factors appear to be linked with an increased risk of violence to others:

- **History of violence**

This risk factor is probably one of the best predictors of violence. Obviously its value in predicting violence is limited to those who have previously been violent. The details surrounding past violence can be of enormous value in identifying the specific triggers for the individual's violence. For example: Are there particular types of victims or does the person tend to become violent under certain circumstances e.g. whilst under the influence of alcohol.

- **Clinical diagnosis**

Particular clinical diagnoses are related to an increased risk of violence. Although most people with mental health problems do not exhibit aggressive or violent behaviour, violent behaviour may sometimes be associated with particular categories of mental illness- namely psychotic disorders, organic disorders (e.g. delirium and dementia) and personality disorders.

It is important to bear in mind that it is not the presence of these disorders alone that increase the likelihood of violence, but rather the presence of active symptoms.

- **Substance misuse**

Drug and alcohol abuse is strongly linked to violence and aggression. Aggression may be particularly likely if the individual's demands for further drugs, or medication is being refused.

- **Abuse of position/authority**

It is important to recognise that staff are also capable of misusing their position and clients can be at risk from intimidation, aggression or false accusation from staff who are lone working.

## **Interview Rooms**

In addition to the points raised above, the following points should be taken into consideration for interview rooms:

- Interviews should only take place following an assessment that there are no risk factors involved.
- The interview room should not be totally isolated.

- If the Risk Assessment indicated that a potential risk exists, but that the interview/meeting should proceed, then a co-worker should be present during the interview/meeting.
- Make sure another member of staff knows that you are going to be in an interview/meeting, and give them an idea of how long the meeting will take. Always take the personal alarm with you when you go into a meeting with a client, and make sure another member of staff has the bell, so that they will be aware if you need assistance.
- The room to be used should be set up before the interview/meeting takes place – there should be no equipment or furniture which could be used as a potential missile or weapon. Furniture, for example chairs and tables, should be strategically placed to allow the interviewer the easiest exit should this be necessary. It is the interviewer's responsibility to arrange the room in advance.

### **Working a shift alone**

- When working a shift alone, you should avoid being alone with a potentially violent client. Be aware if the client appears drunk or under the influence of drugs, or particularly angry or aggressive.
- When working alone, you should keep the Office phone (which is cordless) with you at all times, in case you need to call for assistance.
- If staff or clients feel at risk as a result of lone working they can contact an emergency on call company called "Totally Inbound" on our free phone number 0800 955 6596, then request for another member of staff to call them back. "Totally Inbound" will start with the Project Manager the Deputy and then permanent members of staff, if no one else is available it will go to the Chairman of the Board of Trustee's.
- If a member of staff is taken ill while on shift on their own the above number can also be contacted and they will contact the appropriate agencies for cover to be arranged.
- If staff or clients feel at risk they should try and contain the situation in public areas where there is CCTV such as TV room, Dinning room etc, they should **NOT** be in rooms with the doors closed this includes the office unless there is CCTV fitted.
- If you have to leave the building to conduct a home visit or to take a client to an appointment, then a Risk Assessment must be completed. Before embarking on the visit a checking in and out system with a nominated responsible person must be implemented.

### **Visiting Clients at Home or Transporting Clients to Appointments**

#### **Personal and Vehicle Details**

Ensure Personal and Vehicle details are up-to-date on the emergency contact form

## **Before the lone worker leaves London Housing Trust**

Where the risk assessment indicates a potential concern for the lone worker a support system must be in place.

- 1) Identify a responsible person who knows where the visit is taking place, or that you have arranged to take a client to an appointment.
- 2) Identify a time scale by which the lone worker will contact the responsible person before, during or after the visit has taken place or vice versa.
- 3) Ensure the responsible person knows when, where and how to contact the police for assistance.

## **Lone working where the risk assessment indicates no concerns**

Under normal circumstances, provided the Risk Assessment has been conducted correctly, lone working in these circumstances is acceptable. However a member of your team or other responsible person should be aware of your general movements and what time you intend to finish work and go home, particularly if you do not intend to return to London Housing Trust.

## **The Role of the Responsible Person**

This is an important role in keeping lone workers safe.

1. Arrange contact times/venues etc with the lone worker before the visit takes place – e.g.
  - a) You may arrange to ring the worker after 20 minutes or 1 hour, to check that they are safe, or
  - b) You may arrange that if the worker does not call you after a specified length of time, then you will call the Police for assistance.

Whatever arrangement you make, ensure that it is clearly understood between the lone worker and yourself.

2. If the arrangements you and the worker have made are not adhered to, i.e. if you cannot contact the worker as arranged, or if the worker does not return to London Housing Trust as arranged, then the Police must be called for assistance immediately. The Line Manager must be informed.

### **Travelling to and from visits**

- Always lock doors whilst travelling.
- Park as close as possible to the house or building.
- Avoid parking in dark isolated spots.
- If unknown persons approach you whilst in your car, keep the doors locked and drive away if possible. If you cannot drive away, consider contacting the police if you have a mobile phone or use the horn to attract attention from other motorists/pedestrians.
- Do not get out of the car or open the window.

### **When arriving at a clients home**

- Assess the situation as you approach. Do not enter if you have any doubts – make an excuse not to go in if the person answering the door gives you cause for concern e.g. drunk, if client is not in, a potentially aggressive relative is present, or the client is aggressive. Be aware of your instincts.
- Check as you go in how the front door locks. Do not allow client to lock the door with a key.
- Take only what you need in the house.
- Take care with documents you may not want them to see.
- Remain aware of the environment. Look for an escape route in case problems arise.
- Ask for any animals i.e. dog, to be put in another room.
- Remain alert. Watch for changes in mood, movements or expression.
- Don't spread belongings around. You may need to leave in a hurry.
- If you feel at risk – leave A.S.A.P.
- Fill in an incident form A.S.A.P. and record in the client's file.

## **Home visiting in pairs**

If the risk assessment indicates that a visit in pairs is required, then a clear plan of action should be discussed should an aggressive or violent incident appear likely.

- Workers should discuss and agree how they would indicate to each other that they are in danger and need assistance.
- As with lone visiting, do not enter the house if you feel the situation is not safe.
- A clear exit strategy needs to be agreed.
- A mobile phone should be available on such occasions.
- Report any difficulties to your Manager.
- Fill in an incident form ASAP

## **Circumstances, which preclude home visits or the transporting of clients**

If the assessment of risk indicates that there is potential for violence, then a discussion needs to take place between workers and management as to the possibility of home visiting being withdrawn until the safety of staff can be guaranteed. In this case, it may be necessary for the client to visit London Housing Trust instead. If there is any potential risk, members of staff should not transport clients to appointments.

## **Information Sharing**

The way in which we organise our work needs to be regularly discussed and evaluated so that information about clients can be shared appropriately. Information about clients' potential violence and aggression should be communicated whenever:

- A member of staff has not been previously involved in the care of the client.
- A new client is admitted to London Housing Trust.
- There is a change in the client's physical, psychological state, mood, behaviour, medication etc.
- Home visits are being made to clients with a known or suspected violent history.

## **Issues of Consent**

- Personal information should only be disclosed to third parties with the consent of the subject of that information. Wherever possible, consent should be obtained before sharing the information. This must be consistent with the duties of confidentiality, data protection, human rights and any other relevant legislation or code of practice.
- Information shared should only be relevant to those who need to be aware of that information.
- Where a professional judgement indicates that consent cannot be obtained, a decision could be made to inform the client that information will be shared, without consent
- The passing of such information must be legally justifiable.

## **Prevention and Avoidance of Violence**

### **Personal Avoidance**

#### **Reading Situations**

- Always treat threats of violence seriously
- Be perceptive and read situations. Be constantly alert to signs of frustration, tension or aggression in an individual, e.g. heightened respiration, perspiration, pitch and speed of voice, invasion of personal space, flushed skin, increased muscle tension, pacing, restlessness, agitation and uncomfortable sustaining of eye contact.

#### **Body Language**

- Think about your attitude and body language. Exude calmness and confidence. Try to assess how you are being perceived. Try to maintain relaxed eye contact and keep your body as relaxed as you can (when we are frightened we often mirror the aggressors by clenching our fists, tightening our jaw, and leaning forward). Give an angry person as much room as possible (do not corner them verbally or physically) give them space to back down

## **Reporting Violent Incidents**

All violent or abusive behaviour must be reported to your Line Manager and recorded in the Handover book, further records may need to be kept on an incident report form and

in most cases should also be recorded on the clients risk assessment and if a member of staff was involved it should also be recorded on their records.

Where actual bodily harm has been incurred, a medical examination and statement of injury should be obtained as soon as possible after the event. The main purpose of recording the incident is: a) To provide an information base for further preventative measures b) To provide information necessary for any legal action which you may wish to take c) To ensure that the incident is highlighted to other London Housing Trust employees and residents.

## **Legal Action Against the assailant**

### **Police Involvement and Criminal Action**

If you have been assaulted then you have the right to make a complaint to the Police if you choose. The Police may decide to prosecute the assailant as a case of criminal assault.

### **Debriefing**

After an incident of violence to staff or client or visitor to the project (whatever the severity, from verbal abuse to physical / sexual assault), it is very important that there should be an opportunity for the Staff people involved to discuss the incident with the line manager.

This should take place as soon, as is practicable following the incident.

The purpose of the de-briefing is to:-

- Discuss the incident in order to support the person.
- Discuss the need for expert / further counselling for the person if necessary.
- Ensure the Lone Working Policy has been followed.
  
- Evaluate the actions of the Staff Member and if the Policy itself worked/failed.
  
- Ensure any protective factors or actions need to take place following the incident to protect Staff, Client, Visitor or property.

The de-briefing should take place in a comfortable or appropriate atmosphere. Interruptions should be avoided, and enough time should be made available so that Staff feel listened to and supported. Expert or other counselling should be made available to the worker if required.