

GUIDANCE NOTES

ON

VIOLENCE

AT WORK

**The Highland Council, Corporate Services,
*Health & Safety Team***

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1 Introduction

- 1 In its Policy Statement on Violence at Work, the Highland Council recognises that exposure to violence is not an acceptable part of an employee's job. Awareness of violence at work and the need for preventive measures has greatly increased over the last few years.
- 1.2 The problem of violence at work is an issue which may affect any employee of the Highland Council at some during their employment. It is likely however that certain groups of employees will be at greater risk of being subject to violence than others.
- 1.3 The effects of violence can not only cause pain, suffering, disability or stress and anxiety to the victim, but can also lead to low morale, increased costs, absenteeism and higher insurance premiums or compensation payments.
- 1.4 In its policy statement on Violence at Work, the Council has undertaken to do all that is reasonably practicable to protect its employees from violence and aggression at work.
- 1.5 The following guidance has therefore been developed to assist management and staff in dealing with the issue of violence and aggression throughout the range of Council work activities.
- 1.6 Incidents of violence occurring between fellow employees of the Highland Council will be dealt with in accordance with the Council's policy on Harassment.

2 Legal Requirements

- 2.1 The Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974, Section 2, imposes a general duty on employers to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all their employees. This duty is wide in scope and extends to the protection of staff against violent incidents where these are foreseeable. It also implies that an employer should consider not only the threat of actual injury, but also the potential effects on employees' physical and mental health and well-being, for example if subjected to verbal abuse.
- 2.2 The Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1992, Regulation 3, requires employers to carry out an assessment of the risks

to health and safety to which their employees may be exposed to. The risks associated with violence, ie physical assault, injury, verbal abuse etc must therefore be assessed as part of this process and suitable control measures introduced as a result.

- 2.3 There is also a Common Law general duty of care that employers must exercise. There are numerous examples of successful claims being pursued through the Civil Courts where employers have been negligent in their efforts to protect employees.

3 Definition of Violence

- 3.1 It is important to remember that the term “violence” does not just mean physical assault. The Health & Safety Executive’s working definition of violence includes abuse and threats as well as assault.

- 3.2 For the purposes of this guidance and the related policy, violence is therefore defined as:

“Any incident in which an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted by a member of the public (including, clients and pupils etc) in circumstances arising out of the course of his or her employment”.

- 3.3 This would include physical violence, aggression, verbal abuse, sexual or racial abuse and intentional damage to personal property.

4 Assessment of the risk of violence

- 4.1 Service Directors will need to ensure that sufficient numbers of staff are identified to assess the risk of violence to staff occurring in each of the premises and/or work activities for which they are responsible.

- 4.2 The risk assessment process requires an employer to determine the likelihood of harm occurring from, in this particular instance, violence at work.

- 4.3 The principle is based on prevention rather than cure, however details of known previous incidents can be a useful guide when considering the likelihood of harm occurring.

In other words if harm has been caused in the past and no preventative measures taken then it may recur at some time in the future.

4.4 In some services the absence of a system for recording violent incidents may mean that very little information is available on which to base an accurate risk assessment. All services dealing directly with the public should therefor undertake an initial survey of staff to determine the extent of the problem (See Appendix 1 for suggested questionnaire).

4.5 The results of the survey and information from the subsequent recording system should be used to determine levels of risk.

It may be useful to contact the local crime prevention officer when considering the potential violent risks that staff may face in a particular area. It is almost certain that specific groups of workers will be identified as high risk or at a higher risk than others.

4.6 Statistics compiled by the Health and Safety Executive indicate that the following groups of workers are probably most at risk.

JOB TYPE	EXAMPLE OCCUPATIONS IN HIGHLAND COUNCIL
Handling money or valuables	Cashiers, Delivery Staff, Service Point Staff.
Providing care, advice or Training	Social Workers Teachers, Housing Office Staff, Leisure-Centre Staff.
Carrying out inspection or enforcement duties	Protective Services Officers, Planning and Building Control Officers, Park Keepers, Ticket Inspectors.
Working with mentally disturbed, drunk or potentially violent people	Mental Health Workers, Reception Staff.
Working Alone	Home Visitors, Housing Officers, Property Maintenance Workers.

4.8 Having considered and recorded the effectiveness of any existing

control measures a risk rating can be established as follows:

SEVERITY OF HAZARD

- 1 LOW - Feeling or awareness of being at risk
- 2 MEDIUM - Alarmed or frightened. No physical harm or time off as a result
- 3 HIGH - Actual physical harm and/or time off as a result.

LIKELIHOOD

- 1 LOW - Unlikely to occur (Hazard non-existent or well controlled)
- 2 MEDIUM - Fairly likely (Hazard exists with limited control)
- 3 HIGH - Very likely (Hazard exists with little or no control)

The risk rating can then be obtained by multiplying the figures relating to severity and likelihood.

$$\begin{aligned} &\text{ie High Severity} \times \text{Medium Likelihood} \\ &= 3 \times 2 = 6 \end{aligned}$$

Using the above system it is considered that risk ratings of 4 or more are **SIGNIFICANT** and require **ACTION**.

- 4.9 Where the assessment indicates ratings of 3 or below there is still a requirement to take some action to reduce the risk to the lowest practicable level. This may result in the required action being taken in the longer term whereas scores of 4 and above are **URGENT**.
- 4.10 A suggested pro-forma for recording risk assessments is included in Appendix 5.
- 4.11 Members of the Health & Safety Team are available to offer training and advice to persons involved in the risk assessment process.

5 Control Measures

- 5.1 It is important to consult with staff involved when considering methods to control or reduce the risk of violence. Employees are likely to be more committed to preventive measures if they can help design them and put them into practice.

5.2 The normal procedure when considering what can be done in relation to a particular risk is to consider the following options in order of priority/effectiveness

- **Remove the risk completely** - ie if the risk is related to the handling of cash - consider whether cash needs to be handled at that location.
- **Try a less risky operation** - ie use of security firms to transport cash to banks etc
- **Prevent access to the hazard** - ie physical barriers, security screens etc.
- **Organise work to reduce exposure to the hazard** - ie establish safe systems of work and train staff accordingly.
- Issue personal protective equipment - ie personal attack alarms, CCTV, mobile phones etc.

5.3 If it is not possible to remove the risk completely then the following is a list of control measures that may be considered.

5.4 *Premises and Work Environment*

- Good Lighting
- Use of security screens
- Raised or widened counters
- Interview rooms with separate exit door for person conducting interview
- Use of alarm system
- Identity badges for staff
- Controlled public access - security locks on doors
- Clear signing and information for visitors
- Secure means of holding cash on premises
- Provision of closed circuit television systems (CCTV)
- Identify objects which may be used as weapons or missiles

5.5 *Work Practices/Procedures*

- Rotating high risk jobs so that the same person is not always at

risk or doubling up for particularly high risk tasks

- Ensuring details of staff planned schedules are held by base
- Provision of personal alarms for high risk staff
- Ensuring staffing levels are appropriate to the task and time of day
- Provide staff with adequate and appropriate information on procedures and systems designed to reduce the risk of violence
- Ensure customer care and complaints procedures are implemented
- Provision of specific training on violence (See Section 6)
- Establish procedures for cash handling and transfer designed to reduce the risk of robbery/assault
- Establish procedures for home visits (See Appendix 3 for suggested checklist)
- Establish procedures for dealing with known violent persons (See 5.8)
- Provide staff with general guidance on personal safety. (See Appendix 6 and accompanying leaflet)

5.6 The above lists are not exhaustive and may well be added to by measures developed in agreement with staff to control a particular risk

5.7 The local Crime Prevention Officer or Community Safety Officer at Northern Constabulary should be consulted as a useful source of advice and information on appropriate control measures

5.8 Services should make arrangements (ie via the Violent Incident Co-ordinators) to share information on persons with a known history of violence. This is important to ensure that other employees who may have to deal with such persons can be briefed on the risk they may present. This may then determine how the person is dealt with, ie staff being accompanied on home visits or interview with line manager present etc.

6 Training

6.1 Where the assessment process has identified the risk of violence then training should be organised for those staff at risk.

6.2 It is unlikely however that training alone will be sufficient to control the risk in any particular situation but should be used in conjunction with other measures including working practices developed through Service policies and procedures.

- 6.3 Training can be designed to meet the needs of services or specific job tasks. Alternatively it can be of a general nature.

Details of the courses currently run by Training and Development are contained in Appendix 4.

- 6.4 The training should be authorised by the appropriate level of line management for each service.

This should be done in conjunction with the Training and Development Team, Corporate Services to ensure discussion on training needs analysis and delivery of the appropriate course.

- 6.5 It is recommended that line managers of “at risk” staff should also attend a violence at work course even if they themselves may not be at risk.

7 Recording Incidents Of Violence & Aggression To Staff

- 7.1 Managers and supervisors may not perceive violence to be a problem, when in fact employees are experiencing violent incidents. It is therefore essential that all violent incidents no matter how insignificant are immediately reported to an employee’s supervisor or line manager.

- 7.2 Individuals may have their own level of tolerance in relation to verbal abuse. It is important therefore that the decision to report and record an incident rests with the individual concerned.

- 7.3 Employees should be encouraged to report all incidents of violent behaviour to which they have been subjected. They should not be made to feel that the situation reflects on their professional competence or that they have failed to handle a situation correctly

- 7.4 The line manager or supervisor should then ensure that the details of the incident are fully discussed with the employee concerned and the details recorded on the Report Form (See Appendix 2).

- 7.5 Wherever possible details of the failure of any existing control measures together with action taken or proposed to prevent a recurrence should also be included (See Section 5 on Control Measures).

- 7.6 Line managers should then ensure that Area Service Managers receive

copies of the report form, the original being retained on the premises.

7.7 Each Service should appoint a Violent Incident Co-ordinator to collate information on all incidents reported at Area level.

This should enable specific high risk groups to be identified together with an indication of the success or failure of control measures.

7.8 When considering the appointment of a violent incident co-ordinator, Service Directors should ensure that the person has:

a) The appropriate level of authority to monitor the implementation of the policy.

b) Responsibility to advise on appropriate control measures where cost implications apply.

c) Received sufficient training on all aspects of Violence at Work and an understanding of the Co-ordinator's role.

d) Sufficient time and other resources necessary to carry out the role effectively.

7.9 Service Co-ordinators should then supply information on incidents to the Health & Safety Team to assist in the development of cross-service or corporate strategies for preventing similar incidents occurring in the future.

8 Post Incident & Victim Support

8.1 The experience of a violent incident may, dependant on its nature and severity, have an impact on an employee's physical and mental health. This impact can be long lasting and may sometimes not be obvious. The person concerned may require support and care to help them recover and in some cases specialist counselling may be required.

8.2 Impacts are likely to include:

- anger
- general mistrust of strangers and wariness of customers
- fear and anxiety attacks
- feelings of helplessness, isolation, frustration and vulnerability
- guilt that they may have contributed to the incident
- loss of confidence
- physical symptoms including sleeping difficulties, loss of appetite,

trembling or outbursts of crying.

- 8.4 Arrangements must be made for the provision of appropriate first-aid and medical assistance if required.

Where physical violence has been a feature of the incident there may be a legal obligation to report to the incident to the Health & Safety Executive (See Policy and Guidance on Accident Reporting Procedures).

- 8.5 Where possible the victim's line manager should arrange an informal group meeting to allow full discussion to take place on the circumstances of the incident with all those involved or affected.

- 8.6 The violent incident recording forms should be completed (See Section 7 and Appendix 2).

- 8.7 If the incident involves a criminal act (ie threats, intimidation or physical assault) the line manager should ensure that the Police are notified of the circumstances. The victim should be encouraged to report the matter to the Police and should be supported by line management through any subsequent investigation and possible court appearances.

- 8.8 If following discussion with the victim it is clear that they have been emotionally disturbed by the incident, they should not be permitted to drive or operate machinery. In such circumstances arrangements should be made to escort the person to their home address and wherever possible ensure that a friend, neighbour or relative is informed.

- 8.9 The person should not be expected to return to work until they feel able to do so. The arrangements relating to sickness absence will apply and where necessary further advice can be obtained from the Area Personnel Adviser.

- 8.10 It is recommended that the line manager makes regular contact with the person to offer ongoing support and to keep them informed of the progress of any investigation or action to be taken by the Council or the Police.

- 8.11 In circumstances where a member of staff is off work as the result of a violent incident, the Council's Occupational Health Adviser should be informed.

8.12 The following information should also be made available in respect of additional victim support.

a) ***Victim Support Groups***

Charity network which provides counselling support, practical help and information. The service is confidential and free.

The address of their Scottish office together with local contact numbers are:

Victim Support Scotland
14 Frederick Street
Edinburgh
Tel: 0131-255-8233

Local Groups:

Caithness	Tel: 01847-892220
Lochaber	Tel: 01397-700111
Ross & Cromarty	Tel: 01349-865337
&	
Skye & Lochalsh	“
South Highland	Tel: 01463-710806

b) ***Legal Advice***

Informal advice on pursuing a legal claim can be obtained by contacting the Legal Section of the Highland Council Corporate Services.

c) ***Insurance***

The Highlands Council's insurance arrangements may cover personal injury and damage sustained to property as a result of the incident. Further information and advice should be obtained from the Insurance Manager, Finance Services.

d) ***Trade Union assistance***

Members of trade unions may be entitled to free legal and professional advice and should be advised to contact their local union office.

e) ***Post-Traumatic Stress Counselling***

Emergency Planning arranged for some 20 people throughout the Highland Area to be trained in post-traumatic stress counselling. The services of these trained counsellors can be called on either through

the Council's Social Work service or Emergency Planning.

9 Monitoring

- 9.1 Service Directors should ensure that suitable arrangements are made within their respective services to ensure that the policy is implemented and its effectiveness is monitored. This could be achieved via the system of Violent Incident Co-ordinators proposed in Section 7.7.
- 9.2 Area Managers should also monitor the implementation of the policy at Area Service level. This could be achieved by the requirement for progress reports at Area Management team meetings. Discussion should however focus on overall progress with risk assessment, introduction of control measures and training, not on individual cases where a violent incident has been recorded.
- 9.3 Members of the Health & Safety Team will also monitor the implementation of the policy during the course of their routine inspections and audits of premises. Progress reports will be submitted to the Central Safety Committee.

10 Policy Reference

- 10.1 Reference should be made to the following policy documents when considering the overall situation relating to violence at work:
 - Harassment Policy
 - Stress Management Policy
 - Disciplinary and Grievance Policy

11 Management Checklist

The following list provides a quick reference to the management action required to ensure implementation of the policy and guidance.

1. Have all staff been made aware of the contents of the policy and guidance?
2. Have questionnaires been issued to staff who deal with the public? (See Appendix 1)
3. Have risk assessments been carried out?
4. Have suitable control measures been identified and implemented?
5. Has a recording system been established for violent incidents?
6. Are arrangements in place for the periodic review and monitoring of the control measures?
7. Have all staff been issued with the general guidance on personal safety contained in Appendix 6?

Further advice, information and assistance with the risk assessment process etc can be obtained by contacting the Health & Safety Team, Corporate Services, Dochfour Drive, Inverness, Tel: 01463-703095.

APPENDIX 1

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

QUESTIONNAIRE ON VIOLENCE AT WORK

In its policy on Violence at Work the Highland Council has undertaken to assess the risk of staff being exposed to violent incidents. The policy defines violence as:-

“Any incident in which an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted by a member of the public in circumstances arising from his or her employment”

This includes verbal abuse and threats (with or without a weapon), rude gestures, innuendoes, sexual and racial harassment and harassment because of a person’s disability or sexuality, as well as physical assault, whether or not it results in injury. Physical assault includes being shoved or pushed as well as hit, punched etc. Members of the public include clients and pupils.

To assist in its assessment process it would be helpful if you could complete this questionnaire.

The survey is voluntary and may be completed anonymously, but it may help your Service to tackle specific issues if you enter details at Section A.

Section A

NAME _____ JOB TITLE: _____

OFFICE BASE: _____

Please enter a response for every question

Section B - Personal Safety

	Frequently	Rarely	Never
1 Have you ever been subjected to verbal threats? eg I’m going to let everyone know how bad you are.	_____	_____	_____
Verbal abuse: eg You’re no……good!	_____	_____	_____
2 Have you ever been subjected to physical threats? eg I’m going to hit you.	_____	_____	_____
Attempted physical contact:	_____	_____	_____
Physical assault:	_____	_____	_____

	Frequently	Rarely	Never
Actual physical contact:	_____	_____	_____
3 Have you ever received			
Written threats:	_____	_____	_____
4 Have you ever been subjected to any of the following:			
a) Threat of damage to property: eg I know where you park your car.	_____	_____	_____
b) Actual damage to property:	_____	_____	_____

If so, please give examples:

.....

.....

.....

	Frequently	Rarely	Never
5 Have you ever suffered any other type of harassment, ie of a sexual nature:	_____	_____	_____
or a racial nature:	_____	_____	_____

If so please give examples:

.....

.....

.....

6 Have you ever been subjected to any of the above as a result of employment, but outside of working hours (please ring as appropriate)	YES	NO
---	-----	----

7 Have any of the above instances in 1 - 6 resulted in:		
a A requirement for medical treatment:	YES	NO
b Your absence from work:	YES	NO
c An adverse effect on your work performance	YES	NO

8 Please list the categories of persons who have subjected you to threat, abuse or harassment, eg members of the public (indoors or outdoors), clients (indoors or

outdoors) any other visitors or contacts:

.....
.....
.....

Section C - Working Environment (In and Outside the Workplace)

9 Are there any arrangements for the security/protection of staff at your place of work, eg Location board, Alarms, Mobile Phone? Please give details:

.....
.....

If so, are they effective? If not why?

.....
.....
.....

11 Is your working environment safely designed/laid out? If not, please give examples and what has been done so far to tackle the problem:

.....
.....
.....

Section D - General

12 Have you any suggestions which you consider would help in your particular circumstances to minimise any risk to safety at work:

.....
.....
.....

Thank you for your co-operation. Please return this form to your Manager.

INCIDENT REPORT FORM

VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION TO STAFF

(Includes physical violence, aggression, verbal abuse, sexual or racial abuse intentional damage to personal property).

Managers of staff who have been victims of violence or aggression should complete this form as fully as possible. It will help us to understand the problems staff face in their work, and to see ways to reduce the risk of future incidents. Please use continuation sheet if necessary:

Date of incident	Day of week	Time
------------------	-------------	------

1 Employee - personal details of person assaulted

Name..... Work address.....

Job/Position.....

Service..... Age..... Gender.....

What work was being done when incident started?.....

.....

2 Details of assailants if known

3 Witness(es) if any

Name(s).....

Name(s) if any.....

Address(es).....

Address(es).....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Age(s) approx.....

Gender.....

Description.....

Relationship between employee and assailant, if

any.....

4 Details of incident:

a) Type of assault (including any injury suffered, treatment achieved, time off work etc)

b) Location of incident (attach sketch if appropriate)

c) Other details: Please describe incident, including where relevant events leading up to it, relevant details if assailant not given above, if a weapon was involved, member of staff present.

.....

.....

.....

5 Outcome: (eg whether Police called, what happened after the incident, any legal action)

.....
.....

6 **Other information** (to be completed as appropriate)

- a) Possible Contributory factors.....
.....
- b) Is assailant known to have been involved in any previous incidents YES/NO
- c) Give date and brief details of (b) if known.....
.....
- d) Had any measures been taken to try to prevent an incident of this type occurring? If so, what? How did they fall short? How could they be improved?.....
.....
.....
- e) Even if no measures had been taken beforehand, in your view could action now be taken? If so what and has it been taken?.....
.....
.....
.....
- f) Any other relevant information.....
.....
.....

Signed..... Date.....

Position.....

Please return as soon as possible to:

.....
.....
.....

VIOLENT INCIDENT SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION FORMS

Staff reporting violent incidents are asked to co-operate in attempting to determine what might have caused the incident, by completing the attached form.

- 1 How long had person been waiting?
- 2 Was there a previous history of incidents involving this person?
- 3 Did the person want to see a specific person who was not available?
- 4 What do you think caused the incident and what, if anything, could have been done to prevent it happening.

- 5 If a similar situation started to arise in the future would your action/behaviour be different?

If so, how?

VIOLENT INCIDENT SUPPLEMENTARY FORM 2

Managers are requested to complete the following:

	YES	NO
1 Has a local risk assessment been carried out?		
2 Have safety reps been involved in the assessment?		
3 Have significant risks been identified?		
4 Have significant risks been recorded?		
5 Are staff aware of the hazards?		
6 Is there a Safe Working Code of Practice?		
7 Has a review of procedures been carried out with staff and reps?		
8 Has counselling for staff affected been implemented?		
9 Have any changes been brought in?		
10 Have staff received any training?		
11 Was the staffing level adequate at the time of the incident?		
12 Has the officer suffered any previous violence at work?		
13 Has the perpetrator been responsible for previous incidents?		
14 Are there any racial overtones connected with this or previous incidents?		
15 Are there any sexual overtones connected with this or previous incidents?		
16 Has the officer been informed of insurance cover for lost time?		
17 Has the Hazard list been updated and office staff and caretakers alerted?		

Signed: **Date:**

APPENDIX 3: Home Visiting Checklist

Home Visiting: Checklist for Managers etc

Are your staff who visit.....

- 1 Fully trained in strategies for the prevention of violence?
- 2 Briefed about the area where they work
- 3 aware of attitudes, traits or mannerisms which can annoy clients etc?
- 4 given all available information about the client from all relevant agencies?

Have they.....

- 5 understood the importance of previewing cases?
- 6 left an itinerary?
- 7 made plans to keep in contact with colleagues?
- 8 the means to contact you - even when the switchboard may not be in use?
- 9 got your home telephone number (and have you got theirs)?
- 10 a sound grasp of your organisation's preventive strategy?
- 11 authority to arrange an accompanied visit, security escort or use of taxis?

Do they.....

- 12 carry forms for reporting incidents?
- 13 appreciate the need for this procedure?
- 14 use the forms?
- 15 know your attitude to premature termination of interviews?
- 16 know how to control and defuse potentially violent situations?
- 17 appreciate their responsibilities for their own safety?
- 18 understand the provisions for their support by your organisation?

OK - so what else is needed?

Home Visiting: Checklist for Staff who Make Home Visits

Have you....

- 1 had all the relevant training about violence to staff?
- 2 a sound grasp of your unit's safety policy for visitors?
- 3 a clear idea about the area into which you are going?
- 4 carefully previewed today's cases? Any 'PVs'?
- 5 asked to 'double up' take an escort or use a taxi if unsure?
- 6 made appointment(s)?
- 7 left your itinerary and expected departure/arrival times?
- 8 told colleagues, manager etc about possible changes of plan?
- 9 arranged for contact if your return is overdue?

Do you carry...

- 10 forms to record and report incidents?
- 11 a personal alarm or radio? Does it work? Is it handy?
- 12 a bag/briefcase, wear an outer uniform or car slickers that suggest you have money, or drugs with you? Is this wise where you are going today/tonight?
- 13 out-of-hours telephone numbers etc to summon help?

Can you....

- 14 be certain your attitudes, body language etc won't cause trouble?
- 15 defuse potential problems and manage aggression?

Remember the three Vs of visiting:

Vet Verify Vigilance

(Reproduced with permission from the Report of the DHSS Advisory Committee on Violence to Staff (Skelmersdale Report) HMSO ISBN 0 11 321158 9)

APPENDIX 4

VIOLENCE AT WORK

COURSE STRUCTURE AND TIMETABLE STUDENT NOTES

1 COURSE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to help those people who may have to face dangerous and possibly violent situations throughout their work. It considers the different psychological and social skills that might be brought to bear in dealing with and surviving those situations. In addition it introduces elements of physical control by looking at “break away” moves.

AIM

To provide the necessary knowledge and skills to help people understand and control potentially violent situations

OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course participants should be able to:

- 1 Explain the importance of personal preparation in the prevention of violent incidents.
- 2 Demonstrate how to control their own anxiety and aggression by relaxation.
- 3 Describe the main components of “good” communication relevant to potential and actual violent encounters.
- 4 Explain the elements of observation relevant to preventing potentially violent incident.
- 5 Describe and demonstrate the element of calming, reaching and controlling in difficult situations.
- 6 Describe and demonstrate the physical breakaway moves useful in violent situations.
- 7 Describe the elements of post incident disturbance and the need to re-establish personal control.

8 Discuss the implications of the course for their organisation.

2 STRUCTURE

The course is divided into 4 modules. Each module presents a separate stage in the process of anticipating, handling and surviving a violent situation. The 4 modules follow this time course for successfully handling an incident in the following way.

Module One INTRODUCTION AND AWARENESS

This module is designed to increase familiarity with the scene both in terms of personal and national experiences.

Module Two PERSONAL PREPARATION

Module two considers the skills and knowledge which can be brought to bear by the member of staff to anticipate and prevent a violent incident. This module involves understanding aggression, understanding the personal reactions to fear and anger, and issues of prevention involving calmness, communication, observation and the organisation.

Module Three CONTROLLING THE VIOLENT INCIDENT

This core module concentrates on the psychological skills and knowledge required to de-fuse effectively and control an actual violent incident. It also considers and demonstrates a series of physical breakaway moves of potential use to staff.

Module Four COPING WITH CONSEQUENCES

The final module considers what steps should or can be taken after an incident both personally, by the immediate work group and by the organisation. The aim of this module is to ensure that any personal psychological disturbance (post incident disturbance) is contained and that the organisation attempts to learn and reduce the chance of further incidents occurring.

APPENDIX 5 THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

VIOLENT INCIDENT RISK ASSESSMENT FORM To calculate the Risk Rating figure - Multiply SEVERITY by LIKELIHOOD

Details and location of Hazard and Persons affected (Note any Safeguards)	Severity (1 to 3)	Likelihood (1 to 3)	Risk Rating	Significant Risks* Action Required for Significant Risks
1				
2				

*RISK RATINGS of 4 or more are considered **SIGNIFICANT** and require **ACTION**

APPENDIX 6

GENERAL GUIDANCE ON PERSONAL SAFETY

Practical Guidance for Avoiding and Coping with Confrontation

The following information is not intended to take the place of the training courses run by the Council's trainers. It's intention is to raise your awareness of some of the basic skills which may be useful in avoiding or managing a potentially aggressive confrontation.

What Causes People to Become Angry and Violent?

In dealing with a person who is angry and aggressive, it is helpful to try and understand the reasons for their frustration. Recognising their feelings may help you to soothe their anger and prevent the discussion getting out of control.

REMEMBER THAT

- an aggressive person is very often under stress
- the person may feel frustrated at being sent from one department to another. We have all heard "you are the sixth person I have spoken to and no-one seems able to help me". Try to avoid this happening.
- people are more aware of their rights and also have increased expectations. If these are not fulfilled frustration can spill over and turn to anger and aggression.
- alcohol and drugs are well known factors in causing people to become violent and aggressive.
- some people feel threatened when confronted by authority. They react by being aggressive and trying to assert their own authority on the situation.
- some people think they will get their own way by threatening and abusive behaviour - bully tactics.

It helps to

- **Be prepared** - know the facts of the case you are about to deal with. It may make matters worse if the person feels you have not bothered to acquaint yourself with the facts.
- **Be sensible** - don't interview alone if you think the situation has the potential to become violent.
- **Be observant** - watch the person's reactions and non-verbal signs and deal with differing reactions.

Be Aware of Looks & Gestures Which

- clenched fists, poking fingers

Could Indicate Violence

- banging on the table
- a non-blinking stare
- sudden and agitated stare
- a change of tone in the persons voice, not all aggressors get noisy
- offensive language
- personal insults

Keep Calm

You need to control your own feelings in order to think clearly and make the correct decisions. Calm yourself by:

- taking deep breaths.
- making a conscious effort to relax parts of your body you have tensed up.
- speak slowly and clearly.

Be Confident

- never act like a victim.
- research has shown that people who portray a confident image are less likely to be attacked. But don't go to the extreme of being overbearing.

Communicate

It is vital that communication is maintained between you and the other parties involved.

- always allow people their dignity.
- encourage the person to talk.
- reassure him/her that you are listening and trying to help.
- don't rush things. Let the person take his/her time to get their points over.
- avoid audiences. People don't like losing face in front of other people and will become aggressive and violent in a bid to avoid this.
- not all of what you say will be taken in by the person you are talking to. You should always be aware that it is not only what you say that is important but how you say it.

- in a face to face situation, if your verbal communication does not match your non-verbal communication, then the message you are trying to convey may well be misinterpreted.
- be a good listener and pay attention to what is being said. Encourage the speaker by nods and gestures.
- never touch or reach out to a person who is angry. Keep a reasonable distance from them, do not invade their personal space.
- don't take criticism personally.
- ask for further explanations if it is not clear what is being said. At the end, summarise the information you have received and seek agreement.
- thank the person for the information given
- make sure the person understands what you are saying, by following these points:
 - plan what you are going to say
 - make your points in a logical order
 - don't assume that the person understands what you are saying, explain the point again **in a different way**. Do not be patronising
 - don't make too many points at once. Three or four are as many as can be understood at one time
 - speak deliberately and confidently
 - if possible allow the aggressor to back down without them losing face.

Keep Control of the Situation

Once you have calmed the person down and shown understanding and reassurance, it is time to deal with the contents of the argument

- try not to let your anger or frustration show.

Remember that stress from a heavy workload can reduce your patience and tolerance.

- try and break the argument down into various parts. There may be different solutions to each aspect of the problem.
- suggestions should always be made on the condition that the person remains calm and reasonable. No-one should think they are getting their own way because they have been abusive or threatening.
- if it is not possible to meet the person's demands, offer alternatives rather than a blank **NO**.
- if the answer has to be **NO**, be firm and state the reason why the demand can't be met.
- never be tempted to promise something which you know will resolve the situation, but which you know is unlikely to happen.
- don't rush the person into making decisions.
- be encouraging if the person starts to accept the situation and becomes less abusive.
- never prolong a discussion but try not to be dismissive.

On The Telephone **It is not always possible to be prepared to deal with an awkward situation on the telephone. You should, however, remember the following.**

- don't keep the person hanging on. If you don't have the relevant information to hand, explain that you will call back. Take the caller's name and telephone number and call back when you said you would.
- remember that the caller can't see you, so that the tone of your voice and what you say becomes very important.
- speak clearly and confidently. Don't butt in and put words in the caller's mouth. Let them have their say and if you have to bring the call to an end, do so firmly but politely.

Working Alone

There are many circumstances where council employees are by necessity working on their own e.g. staff in rural schools and libraries, Toilet Attendants and Countryside Rangers.

The general principles for avoiding and controlling aggressive situations will always be relevant but for lone workers the following points of good practice are also worth noting.

- Make sure you have some means of summoning assistance if it is required. Consider a mobile phone and it's worth remembering that a personal alarm can attract attention if you are ill or hurt as well as being used to confuse an attacker.
- Do not approach a group of people if you believe you could be compromising your safety.
- When working alone it is particularly important to be aware of the signals your body language is giving.
- Always let someone know where you are working.
- If you are working late and are alone in the office try to make sure that someone knows where you are and how they can contact you. Tell them what time you expect to finish and inform them who to contact if you do not return.
- Ensure that you can make an external phone call.
- Don't arrange for service users to visit you in the building when you are working late.
- If you are alone in a building make sure that it is secure.
- Familiarise yourself with where the light switches are in case the corridors are dark when you leave.
- Check that your exit from the building is well lit.
- If you are to meet or visit a potentially violent client on your own, make sure you have approval of your Line Manager. In such circumstances the agreed arrangements, your location, the purpose of the meeting and expected time of return must be made known to ensure there is an appropriate response if you are overdue.

Home Visits

Are often unavoidable. They are reality of the Council's service delivery. However, they can sometimes expose staff to additional risks and because of this they should never be undertaken lightly and without careful thought and planning.

If a visit is necessary then the following guidelines may help you to avoid confrontation.

Plan your visit carefully - consider the following:

- In the winter arrange your visit early in the day to avoid going or coming back in the dark.
- The locality you will be visiting.
- The location of the house.
- Who is likely to be in the house when you visit.
- Do you know of previous problems encountered by staff visiting that area/address.
- Have you been briefed in all the information relating to the reason for your visit.
- What questions is the client likely to ask and do you have the answers?
- Is the purpose of your visit likely to lead to confrontation?
- If you are concerned about making a particular visit on your own then don't hesitate to discuss your concerns with your Supervisor/Line Manager.

Never feel pressured into making a home visit alone if you have reason to believe that you are exposing yourself to danger.

- If time allows then always write to persons you are visiting confirming the reason for your visit, the time and ask them to let you know if the arrangements are suitable.

Before You Go

- Leave details of the visit in the office diary, you should record:
 - the name and address of the persons you are visiting;
 - the appointment time;
 - the time you expect to return.

If you are not going back to the office let family or friends know that you will be returning home straight after the visit and tell them when you expect to be home.

- If at all possible don't change your arrangements without advising the appropriate people.
- Try to be sure of exactly where you are going. Your office should have street maps showing the location of house

numbers.

- Assess the situation before you go into the house. If you feel that the circumstances are threatening e.g. the person who answers the door is abusive or drunk then don't go in - apologise and make an excuse.
- When you do enter the house try to remain alert for signs that tempers are rising. Try to remember your training on calming difficult situations - see good practice points in the section entitled Coping with Confrontation.
- Always try to appear confident and calm.
- If you sense that a situation is getting out of control make an excuse to leave, apologise and reassure the client that their grievances will be addressed by either yourself or your Manager.
- If the threat of violence is imminent, avoid potentially dangerous situations such as the tops of stairs and restricted spaces.
- Leave as soon as your business is completed.
- Always remember to report threatening incidents.

Travel

Helpful Hints for Travelling By Car

- keep your doors locked if you feel unsafe.
- keep your car in good working order.
- carry extra petrol in a safety approved container
- carry a torch.
- plan your journey and have directions so you don't need to stop and ask directions.
- carry an up-to-date map.
- don't take short cuts that mean you have to drive through an unsafe area.
- don't give lifts to strangers.
- drive to a police station or a busy area if you are sure you are being harassed or followed.

- don't stop to investigate if you see an incident or accident or someone tries to flag you down unless you are sure it is safe and that you can get help. It may be safer and more useful to go for help.
- don't get out of your car if anyone approaches you when you are stationary. Keep the doors locked, windows closed and engine running, if possible. Drive off if you are in doubt and if you are prevented from doing so make as much noise and fuss as possible.
- park in brightly lit places as close as possible to your destination away from pillars, bushes etc. When you park in daylight, think what the area will be like at night. If parking in a multi-storey car park, try to leave your car on the ground floor.
- when returning to your car always have your keys ready to get into your car.

If Your Vehicle Breaks Down

- If travelling on a motorway and your vehicle breaks down try to get your vehicle on to the hard shoulder. There are emergency telephones situated on the hard shoulder and these telephones are for your use in such a situation and are at 1 mile intervals along the motorway therefore, you should never be more than ½ a mile from a telephone. The direction of the nearest telephone will be indicated on a white coloured post with the symbol of a telephone thereon and an arrow pointing to the nearest telephone. These telephones are connected to the police who will contact a garage, relative, AA or RAC on your behalf.
- After you have used the telephone, return to your car. Do not sit in the vehicle if possible as a large number of accidents on Motorways occur on the hard shoulder when vehicles that have stopped for whatever reason are struck from behind by other vehicles. Sit on the grass at the side of the hard shoulder adjacent to your vehicle.
- If it appears that someone is stopping, return to your vehicle and sit in the front passenger seat and lock all the doors and close all the windows. This gives the impression that you are not alone and that the driver has gone for help. When he/she approaches, open the passenger door window about ½ an inch to allow you to speak to the person and them speak to you.

If it is a genuine offer of help, tell them that you have already

contacted the police and that help is on its way. Wait until they have left again before leaving your vehicle. If it is a police officer in a uniform or plain clothes, ask to see their warrant card and if it is a garage, AA or RAC they should know your name. In any case, do not open the door unless you are 100% sure of their identity.

- If when you are on the emergency telephone someone stops, quickly pass the registration number, make and colour of the vehicle and a brief description of the occupants over the telephone to the police and return to your vehicle. If they genuinely want to help, they won't mind.
- If you are unfortunate enough to break down on a road other than a motorway e.g. a dual carriageway, you can use one of the "Help Call Police" signs and wait/hope that a passing motorist does call the police or you will have to locate a nearby dwelling or telephone kiosk. Do not under any circumstances accept a lift from a stranger

Travelling by Foot The following guidelines provide advice on keeping safe on foot:

- think ahead, be alert and aware of your surroundings
- try to avoid walking alone at night
- keep to busy, well lit roads
- walk facing oncoming traffic to avoid kerb crawlers
- keep your hands free to defend yourself
- if you feel insecure carry an alarm in your hand, not in your handbag or briefcase
- avoid areas where you know groups hang about
- cross the road and keep walking if you think you are being followed. Look confident and positive. Head for a busy area or open shop and ask for help, if necessary
- don't take short cuts or walk through poorly lit or quiet underpasses
- keeping the contents of your bag to a minimum means that it is easier to give it up if it is snatched

- never resist in the event of a robbery
- if visiting an underprivileged area avoid wearing clothing and jewellery that will attract unwelcome attention or create an impression of wealth
- don't accept lifts unless you know and trust the driver
- it's not advisable to switch off from the world by wearing a personal radio or stereo
- if you are confronted by an attacker make as much noise as possible, don't just scream, shout loudly for help. Attackers are often nervous and drawing attention to the situation may distract them long enough for you to get away.
- avoid wearing chains and scarves that could be used to choke or pull.
- and never wait around unless you really have to. If you do keep to well lit or busy areas.

Office Layout

When receiving and interviewing members of the public the office layout can help or hinder.

As in all other areas of personal safety, a common sense approach needs to be taken when deciding an office layout, particularly in the case of reception area and interviews rooms.

It is often not necessary to make extensive or expensive changes to make an area more friendly or safe and the following points should always be considered to ensure a safe and pleasant environment.

Reception Areas

- Can the receptionist move away from the desk easily?

Ideally, two exits should be available.

- The reception area should have a broad surface that will help to distance staff from a would-be attacker.
- Are other members of staff within earshot? If not, panic buttons or radio alarm pendants should be considered.

It is preferable if panic buttons do not give an audible signal and staff who are to respond to them should be trained and drilled in their response.

- Are loose objects out of reach or secured down?
- Are there enough chairs for visitors, so that they do not have to stand while waiting?
- Is there plenty of up-to-date reading material and information posters?
- Is the area light and as attractive and comfortable as possible?
- Are required forms to hand and is there writing space available?
- Are doors leading off from reception areas protected to prevent access by members of the public?

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

DEALING WITH AN ABUSIVE CUSTOMER

“You find yourself dealing with a really abusive customer, who seems more interested in insulting you, than having his/her problem solved, how do you deal with it?”

- ◆ Subtly mirror the other person’s body language and pace of speech. Stay cool and calm and don’t take the insults personally – it’s the situation they are angry about, not you.
- ◆ Shift the focus of the discussion from what has happened in the past and over which you’ve no control to the future, over which you have some degree of influence.
- ◆ Endeavour to get the person talking about the end result they want to achieve.
- ◆ If the customer continues to be abusive and resists all attempts to discuss a solution, politely but firmly end the discussion.
- ◆ Suggest the need for a “cooling off” period after which you will be pleased to discuss the problem.
- ◆ If the customer persists in being abusive, then you may wish to ask your supervisor or manager to help with the situation.
- ◆ The person should be informed that the interview is terminated and a request made for them to leave the premises.
- ◆ If the person refuses to leave they should be informed that you intend to call the Police to assist with their removal from the premises.
- ◆ The Police should then be called using the emergency 999 telephone number. This will ensure a quick response from the Police, as sometimes calls to local numbers are treated with less urgency.
- ◆ If you are unable to call the Police yourself, then you should request a colleague do so on your behalf.

NOTE

Northern Constabulary has been consulted regarding such requests for assistance and are happy to respond on the basis of preventing a breach of the peace.

In addition to the above information being issued to all staff it is also recommended that the attached notice (Appendix 8) be displayed in all Highland Council public offices.



Customer Care Advice

HELP *US* TO HELP *YOU*

We place huge importance on providing a high standard of customer care to effectively deal with your request for advice and information.

We value the courtesy and respect we receive from customers.

However, there have been recent instances in which our employees have been abused, threatened, assaulted or intimidated by customers.

Please be aware that our employees are under instruction to immediately terminate an interview when they deem the behaviour of a customer to be unacceptable.

Mutual respect is the key to us helping you with your enquiry.

Thank you for your co-operation in this matter.