

The Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board

Policy & Guidance on Managing the Risks of Lone Working

1 Policy Statement

- 1.1 The Board recognises that some staff are required to work by themselves in the community without close or direct supervision, sometimes in isolated work areas or out of office hours. Where the conditions of service delivery or its associated tasks require staff to work or travel alone, both the individual staff member and Managers have a duty to assess and reduce the risks which lone working presents.
- 1.2 There is no legal impediment to lone working but each instance must be risk assessed and subsequent controls put in place and communicated to employees. Managers and employees involved in lone working should receive the appropriate level of training.
- 1.3 This policy aims to:
 - increase staff awareness of safety issues relating to lone working;
 - make sure that the risk of working alone is assessed in a systematic and on-going way, and that safe systems and methods of work are put in place to reduce the risk so far as is reasonably practicable;
 - make sure that appropriate training is available to staff in all areas, that equips them to recognise risk and provides practical advice on safety when working alone;
 - make sure that appropriate support is available to staff who have to work alone; and
 - Encourage full reporting and recording of all adverse incidents relating to lone working.
- 1.4 Experience shows that the actual risk to lone workers in the Board area is relatively low: by following the advice in this document all staff will help ensure that this remains so.
- 1.5 This document provides advice and guidance on managing risk to lone workers.

2 Definition

- 2.1 The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) describe lone workers as "*Those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision*". However, for the purpose of this guidance, this definition has been expanded to: *Those who work by themselves and/or work in the community and/or with only limited support arrangements, which therefore exposes them to risk by being isolated from the usual back up support – whether they regularly work alone or are only occasionally alone, and do not have access to immediate support from managers or other colleagues.*

2.2 People may need to work alone because:

- they need to work in a separate part of the premises
- their work is outside normal hours
- they are mobile: such as valuers, technical staff and electoral canvassers.

2.3 There are, however, certain activities that should never be carried out alone, e.g. work in confined spaces or work at or near exposed live electricity conductors.

3 Other Board policies and procedures

3.1 This guidance should be read in conjunction with the Board's Health and Safety Policy and using the Highland Council's Policy and Guidance on Risk Assessment and its Policy and Guidance on Preventing Violence at Work as guidance, pending revised draft Board policies on these issues being brought to the Board in early course, for adoption.

4 Responsibilities

4.1 General health and safety responsibilities are set out in the Health & Safety Policy. Additional responsibilities relating specifically to lone working are detailed below.

4.2 Line Managers should:

- Identify all staff who are lone workers
- Inform staff of their responsibilities under the lone working policy
- Make the policy readily available to all staff members on induction and ensuring local procedures are in place
- Ensure that risk assessments regarding the personal safety of staff, including those working alone, are undertaken by competent persons
- Ensure that lone workers have no medical condition that may make them unsuitable for working alone
- Assist in the development and implementation of safe systems of work to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all staff
- Review lone working risk assessments on a regular basis, taking into consideration information provided by staff members regarding hazards relating to activities, environments and individuals
- Ensure that staff members have access to appropriate training opportunities regarding challenging behaviour.

4.3 Supervisors should:

- Ensure inexperienced workers are supervised
- Periodically check-in with lone workers
- Ensure that escalation procedures are put in place if lone workers fail to respond

4.4 Employees should:

- Participate in the risk assessment process and follow safe systems of work designed to reduce the risks associated with personal safety/lone working
- Read and understand the lone working policy and guidance
- Inform their line manager of any health conditions which may prevent them from undertaking lone working
- Take all reasonable steps to ensure their own safety and inform their line manager of any incidents/accidents or safety concerns.

5 Risk assessment

5.1 Risk assessments must be carried out in all areas of work where working alone poses an actual or potential risk to staff. The risk assessment will involve identifying all potential dangers and the risks associated with specific work tasks or activities and should identify all who will be affected and how, and the control measures which are needed to get rid of or reduce the risk to the lowest level reasonably possible. Risk assessment should be carried out by competent people and should be recorded and shared with relevant others.

5.2 Even where a member of staff works only in an office, they can become a lone worker when travelling for work purposes, working late or working from home. A risk assessment for lone working is required whether someone is a lone worker every day or just occasionally.

5.3 Managers should ensure that risk assessments are undertaken in line with the Board's guidance on risk assessment.

5.4 Should the risk assessment show that it is not possible for the work/task to be undertaken safely by a lone worker then suitable arrangements must be put in place and communicated to all relevant staff (see Appendix 2).

5.5 There may also need to be local detailed guidance to tackle specific areas of risk such as:

- lone workers travelling alone on work-related business;
- working out-with normal office hours;
- Working with potentially high risk client groups.

5.6 Further guidance on risk assessment and control measures is available at Appendix 1 of this document.

6 Incident/Accident reporting

6.1 All incidents and accidents arising out of lone working must be reported to the relevant line manager via the Board's guidance notes on reporting incidents, accidents and instances of occupational ill health.

7 Supervision

- 7.1 Risk assessment should identify the correct level of supervision or backup required for lone working. The extent of supervision will depend on the risk and the ability of the lone worker to identify and handle health and safety issues.
- 7.2 Employees new to a job may need to be accompanied until competencies are achieved.

Lone workers need to be sufficiently experienced to fully understand the risks and precautions required. Managers/supervisors should set limits of what may and may not be done whilst working alone.

- 7.3 There should be regular contact by, telephone or mobile phone. Automatic warnings should be activated if specific signals are not received at base - other warnings that raise the alarm in the event of an emergency should be devised. The supervisor should check that the lone worker has returned to base, or home, on completion of the work.

8 Training

- 8.1 Training on the understanding of the risks lone workers are faced with will be available to managers. The key objectives of the training courses are:
 - Know the employers' responsibilities towards an employee as defined within relevant Health and Safety legislation
 - Understand what defines a 'Lone Worker'
 - Know the potential risks faced by a 'Lone Worker'
 - Have a greater awareness of the benefits of successful implementation of violence prevention measures and staff support.
- 8.2 Lone workers will be offered training on:
 - the importance of control measures put in place for their safety;
 - how to plan and carry out a job safely, using appropriate equipment;
 - how to decide when to simply walk or drive away from a situation;
 - how to recognise danger and take appropriate action;
- 8.3 Staff who have to carry out lone working must be competent to deal with unusual or new circumstances beyond their training, and know when to stop and seek advice. No member of staff will be criticised for considering their personal safety first.
- 8.4 Other training courses to assist lone workers are available from Highland Council Learning & Development.

9 Control measures

- 9.1 Senior Management should consider what control measures they will put in place to ensure that communication with lone workers is maintained and that there are suitable escalation process in place should an employee fail to return to work or make contact at the end of the lone working period.
- 9.2 Control measures can vary from fairly simple, such as access to shared diaries and mobile phone numbers or access to personal alarms; more structured such as a Buddy System or more complex such as GPS tracking systems (See Appendix 2). There is no one preferred method and the choice should be taken as a result of the risk assessment.

10 Monitoring and review

- 10.1 This policy will be reviewed in line with Highland Council policy on an annual basis, or more frequently if changes in legislation or best practice develop.

Lone Working Risk Assessment

The risk which lone workers face should be reduced to the lowest level that is reasonably practicable. This Appendix should be read in conjunction with the Guidance on Risk Assessment.

Factors to consider when carrying out the risk assessment may include the following:

- Does the workplace present a special risk to the lone worker?
- Can the risks of the job be adequately controlled by one person?
- Is the person medically fit and suitable to work alone?
- What training is needed to make sure the staff member is competent in safety matters?
- Have staff received the training which is necessary to allow them to work alone?
- How will the person be supervised?
- Is there a risk of violence?
- Are people of a particular gender especially at risk if they work alone?
- Are new or inexperienced staff especially at risk if they work alone?
- Are younger workers especially at risk if they work alone?
- What happens if a person becomes ill, has an accident, or if there is an emergency?
- Are there systems in place for contacting and tracing those who work alone?
- Does the lone worker have a safe way in and out of the workplace?
- Can one person handle temporary access equipment, plant, goods or substances?
- How can supervision/advice be provided easily?
- Does the job need to be done by one person?

Safe Systems of Work are documented (written) procedures developed to reduce the level of risk that staff are exposed to. Local procedures should ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, security and well-being of all staff, including those working alone, and should provide information, instructions and advice on issues such as:

- Safety and security of mobile workers/staff working away from their base locations, e.g. staff having to park in poorly lit areas and walk a significant distance away from their vehicle to reach their client's home.
- What to do when a member of staff goes missing, e.g. who informs police, relatives, colleagues etc.
- What staff should do before setting out on a journey, e.g. ensure others know where they are going through a buddy system, location boards, telephoning colleagues.
- What staff should do when travelling during the course of their duties, e.g. plan their route, inform others of their route, and have their mobile phones with them.

- What staff should do on arrival at a client's home, e.g. call a buddy/colleague to say you have arrived, how long you will be there and when you will contact them next.
- What staff should do in an emergency situation, e.g. access to first aid kit, call base location for assistance or call emergency services.
- The provision of equipment such as personal attack alarms
- Methods of raising the alarm in the event of no contact within an agreed time
- Joint working with others for high-risk activities;
- Improvements to security arrangements in buildings;
- Security lighting in parking areas;
- Using checking-in and monitoring systems;
- Using personal protective equipment, such as mobile phones or alarms;
- Provision of welfare arrangements.

Control Measures

Buddy Systems

A buddy system is a process set up to increase the safety of a lone worker. In its simplest form a buddy system will involve the lone worker logging details of where they will be and at what time. Once the worker arrives they will then let their buddy know they are safe, and again once their meeting is finished, or checking in at certain pre-determined points while out on their own.

A buddy system doesn't have to be expensive and can be as simple as leaving details in an office diary/outlook and asking a colleague to be a buddy. This enables someone to know a worker is safe but also to be alert if there is a problem should they not make contact on time.

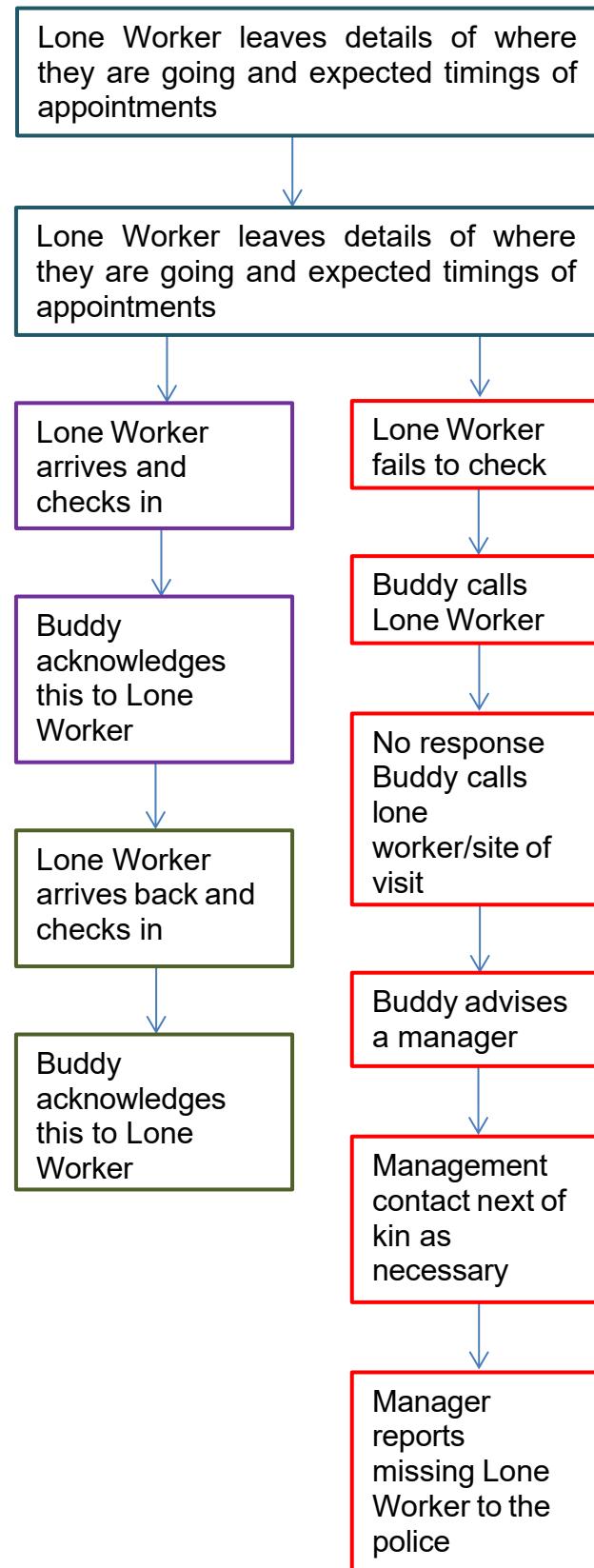
Do you need a buddy system?

The following questions can be used to assist in the determination of whether a buddy system should be introduced.

How many of these statements can you answer "yes" to?

- My colleagues know where to start looking should I not return on time.
- If I decide to change my plans during the day someone will be aware of this.
- We have a clear procedure to follow in case someone does not return at the expected time.
- We have a system for me to raise an alarm covertly in case of an emergency while working alone.
- I am confident that an appropriate person will pick up the phone if I call the office in an emergency.
- When (if) I am lone working out of office hours, we have a system to monitor my safety.
- There is information available so that my manager could contact my next of kin should I fail to return from an appointment.
- My next of kin have the contact details of a colleague should I fail to return from work, even if this happens outside office hours.

Simple Buddy System Model



Visiting clients

If a property is known to have violent or aggressive occupants a risk assessment must be in place prior to the visit: this should include consideration of:

- Previous history
- Behaviour patterns
- Problems with relatives
- Use of medication/drugs/alcohol

It may be necessary to seek information from external agencies to prepare the risk assessment.

GPS systems

Modern technology offers a number of GPS tracking systems which have better coverage than mobile phones. Such devices can allow managers to quickly locate lone workers, allow employees to raise alarms and/or contact a base to check-in. Many devices are directly linked to the emergency services.