Kent County Council (KCC) has a duty under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their employees in relation to violence whilst at work to provide, as far as is reasonably practicable, working conditions that are conducive to the prevention of and safe management of violence.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines work-related violence as:

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

The purpose of this guidance is to give general practical advice to managers and staff on the principles to manage the prevention of violence, threats and aggression within the workplace in order to reduce the likelihood of violent incidents.

Ensuring the safety of employees and service users is a priority for the Council. The Council is committed to creating a safe environment within which to work or receive services. The Council does not tolerate verbal or physical harassment in any form by employees, service users, and members of the public or others. While it is accepted that the provisions of some services can involve situational conflicts, this recognition should not be equated with considering any form of aggression and/or violence as being inherent, inevitable or acceptable. Where a risk is identified and assessed the Council is committed to making considered decisions around providing staff with a safe working environment while continuing to deliver services.

# Duties, roles and responsibilities within the Council

# Corporate Management Team

Have overall responsibility for ensuring that governance arrangements are in place in order that

legislative, professional and organisational obligations in relation to work-related violence and

aggression are being addressed. These governance arrangements fall under the General

Statement of Policy on Health, Safety and Welfare at Work to ensure, as far as is reasonably

practicable, the safety, health and welfare at work of all employees and others affected by the

Council’s work activities.

# Directors and senior managers

Are responsible for ensuring that adequate and appropriate arrangements are in place for their respective areas of responsibility by ensuring that their service has undertaken risk assessments, safe systems of work and appropriate training related to work-related violence and aggression. Directors and Senior Managers are responsible for identifying environmental and operational risks and developing and implementing appropriate action plans to reduce the risks and ensure that local procedures are communicated to all employees and others who may work on our behalf.

Directors and senior managers are responsible for identifying patterns and trends of incidents, monitoring the effectiveness of preventative measures and using these to plan the management of violence and aggression both operationally and strategically. In addition, they will ensure that robust post incident management takes place, including completion of the online KCC HS157 accident/incident form and a post incident review to support employees, and any visitors who are victims of violence and aggression in the course of KCC’s undertaking.

# Managers

Are responsible for ensuring that systems and processes are in place to safely and effectively manage violence and aggression and maintain the safety of staff and service users, ensuring that risk assessments are undertaken, actions are completed and risk controls are in place and recorded in all situations where the task to be undertaken presents risk.

Managers must ensure that any arrangements implemented to safeguard staff against the risk of violence or aggression are regularly monitored and that staff receive appropriate information about their responsibilities, instructions on safe systems of work, and support in the performance of the task, this includes situations where staff are located in other premises, e.g. NHS, Partnership premises and Community premises.

Managers shall ensure that staff are fully supported following a violent incident, this will include debriefing and a reminder of the support line facility as well as informing the Trade Unionis of any serious incidents of violence in accordance with the Councils procedures for accident reporting.

# Employees

Are responsible for taking due care of their own safety, health and welfare and that of others by

working in a safe and responsible manner and co-operating with their employer in order to comply with the law by adhering to locally produced policies, procedures, risk assessments and safe systems of work. All employees will undertake relevant training as appropriate for their job role.

**The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999** require employers to assess the risks to employees and make arrangements for their health and safety effective by:

* planning
* organisation
* control
* monitoring and review.

The risks covered should, where appropriate, include the need to protetct employees from exposure to reasonably foreseeable violence. Verbal abuse and threats are the most common types of incident. Physical attacks are comparatively rare.

The term violence covers a wide range of incidents, not all resulting in injury.

**Physical assaults** include, but are not limited to:

* punching
* slapping
* kicking
* biting
* head-butting
* spitting (where contact is made)
* deliberately contaminating victim with bodily fluids (e.g. urine, faeces, blood)
* strikes with a weapon.

**Non-physical assault** is the use of inappropriate words or behaviour causing distress and/or constituting harassment”. Types of non-physical assault include, but are not limited to:

* swearing
* threatening behaviour
* offensive gestures
* invasion of personal space
* threats to staff
* unwanted remarks
* abusive phone calls
* intimidation
* bullying and harassment
* social medial and bullying
* stalking.

# Effective management of violence

There are 4 stages to a straightforward management process to effectively manage violence.

1. Finding out if you have a problem.
2. Deciding what action to take.
3. Take action.
4. Check what you have done.

It is important to remember that these four stages are not a one-off set of actions. If stage 4 shows there is still a problem then the process should be repeated again. Stages 1 and 2 are completed by carrying out a risk assessment.

1. **Finding out if you have a problem**

The first step in risk assessment is to identify the hazard, you may think that violence is not a problem in your workplace or that incidents are rare, however your employee’s view may be very different. Informally ask your staff via managers, supervisors and safety representatives if they ever feel threatened or use a short questionnaire to find out. Discuss the results of your survey so that staff realise that you recognise the problem.

Some employees may be reluctant to report incidents of aggressive behaviour which make them feel threatened or worried. They may for instance feel that accepting abuse is part of the job. You will need to record all incidents to enable you to build up a complete picture of the problem. Encourage employees to report incidents promptly and fully let them know that this is what you expect. KCC staff should report incidents on the KCC online HS157 accident/incident report form which can be found on KNET/KELSI.

It is important that managers examine each accident/incident report to establish whether there could have been a more serious outcome and if futher preventative measures are required for the work activity being undertaken. Check for patterns and look for common causes such as specific areas of work where the incident took place or the times the incidents occurred in order to take steps to target issues where they are needed the most. Do not restrict your assessment to incidents which have already affected your own employees, there may be a known pattern of violence linked to certain work situations. Trade and professional organisations and trade unions may be able to provide useful information on this.

1. **Deciding what action to take**

Having found out that violence could be a problem for your staff, you need to decide what needs to be done by completing a risk assessment.

1. **Take action**

When completing a risk assessment you will need to identify the hazards, identify who might be harmed and how, implement control measures to reduce the hazard, record your findings and regularly review and revise your assessment to ensure that it remains effective.

# Identifying risks

Examples of situations or circumstances that could increase the risk of violence;

* previous history of violent behaviour
* statutory work where there may be a perceived infringement of the customer’s rights
* inconsistent or unexplained treatment of customers
* situations in which a staff member is blamed for refusing a request
* situations in which staff could be blamed for police or court action
* where the customer considers they have been discriminated against or “labelled”
* where customers are kept waiting
* money transactions
* people bearing a grudge, feel victimised in any way or harbour a sense of injustice
* people who suffer from a mental health disorder
* people under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

**When deciding who might be harmed and how**, identify which employees are at risk – those who have face-to-face contact with the public are normally the most vulnerable. Where appropriate, identify potentially violent people in advance so that risks from them can be minimised.

**When evaluating the risk**, check existing arrangements, are the precautions already in place adequate or should more be done? Remember it is usually a combination of factors that give rise to violence. Factors which you can influence include:

* the level of training and information provided
* the environment
* the design of the job.

Examples of preventative measures where you can influence factors that give rise to violence are listed below:

**Training and information**

* train staff so that they can spot early signs of aggression
* anticipate factors which might make violence more likely
* provide staff with information they might need (e.g. clients with a history of violence)
* make sure staff fully understand any safe systems of work which should be followed
* outline emergency response procedures.

**The environment**

* install alarm systems
* install CCTV cameras and monitoring screens
* swipe cards
* intercoms intruder/personal alarms
* adapt the layout of the premises to ensure safe exit routes
* adapt the layout of interview rooms to ensure a clear escape route is available
* consider seating arrangements when interviewing potential aggressive clients
* ensure there is adequate lighting
* use coded security locks to separate staff from clients/MOP where applicable
* use key fob entrance doors to separate staff from clients/MOP where applicable
* design wider counters and raised floors on the staff side of the counter (to give staff protection)
* use a safe parking area when away from base
* viewing panels in access doors
* conventional mobile phones
* Personal safety devices
* vehicle tracking systems.

**The design of the job**

* use staff input when designing control measures for safe systems of work
* check the credentials of clients
* check the arrangements of the venue being visited
* work in pairs if meeting a suspected aggressor at their home or remote location
* maintain numbers of staff at the workplace to avoid lone work situations where required
* use lone worker systems
* effective communications systems
* vary routes when banking money
* arrange transport to take you home when working late.
1. **Check what you have done**

Check on a regular basis how well your arrangements are working, consulting with staff and their representatives by setting up joint management and safety representative committees. Keep records of incidents and examine them regularly to show what progress you are making and identify if the problem is changing. If measures are working well keep them up, however if violence is still a problem, try something else, go back to stages 1 and 2 in your risk assessment and identify other preventative measures that could work. Continue to review and revise your risk assessments and safe systems of work on a regular basis, particularly if a significant incident has occurred.

If there is a violent incident involving your staff member, you will need to respond quickly to avoid any long term distress. It is essential to plan how you are going to provide them with support, before any incidents. Where an incident is considered ‘serious’ the line manager is required to carry out an investigation using HS160 investigation form. The results of this investigation must be fed back to the person/s affected and be used to review the risk assessment. Incident reporting is essential because it helps to identify trends and evaluate the effectiveness of existing measures.

# Staff support mechanisms

* **debriefing**

Staff will need to talk through their experience as soon as possible after the event. Remember that verbal abuse can be just as upsetting as a physical attack.

* **time off work**

Individuals will react differently and may need differing amounts of time to recover, in some circumstances they might need specialist counselling. Staff should contact supportline@kent.gov.uk to find out how to access this service.

* **legal help**

In serious cases legal help may be appropriate.

* **other employees**

May need guidance and/or training to help them to react appropriately.

# Further Sources of Information

**Related KCC Policies and Guidance**

Prevention and management of violence - Social media, bullying and stalking guidance

Lone working and personal safety guidance

Dignity and respect at work policy

Dignity and respect at work guidance

KCC Security Strategy

**HSE Guidance**

Protecting lone workers: How to manage the risks of working alone

Violence at work - A guide for employers