

MERTON PARISH COUNCIL

Lone Worker Policy.

This document sets out Merton Parish Councils approved and agreed practices. Any deviation must be made by resolution of the full Council and recorded below.

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1. Introduction

The Merton Parish Council recognises that its employee(s) are required to work by themselves for significant periods of time without close or direct supervision in the community, in isolated work areas and out of office hours.

Under the **Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999**, Merton Parish Council has a duty of care to advise and assess risk for workers when they work by themselves in these circumstances. However, employee(s) have responsibilities to take reasonable care of themselves and other people affected by their work and to co-operate with their employers in meeting their legal obligations.

2. Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to all situations involving lone working arising in connection with the duties and activities of Merton Parish Council staff and Councillors when conducting work for the council in the community.

3. Definition

The Health & Safety Executive defines lone workers as “those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision”. This covers Merton Parish Council’s Clerk, who is required to carry out their duties for all or part of their working day working in isolation. As the Clerk is expected to work alone at home, she is defined as a lone worker and is entitled to support and protection

There are a number of situations where the Clerk may be expected to work alone. These may include but are not restricted to: -

- Working alone at home
- Working with other members of the council and members of the public in own home or else where
- Driving on behalf of the Council

4. Aims

The aim of this policy is to:

- (a) increase awareness of safety issues relating to lone working.
- (b) ensure that the risk of lone working is assessed in a systematic and ongoing way, and that safe systems and methods of work are put in place to reduce the risk so far as is reasonably practicable.
- (c) ensure that appropriate training is available to all members & employees in all areas that equips them to recognise risk and provides practical advice on safety when working alone.
- (d) ensure that appropriate support is available to staff who must work alone.
- (e) encourage full reporting and recording of all adverse incidents relating to lone working.

5. Responsibilities

5.1 Councillors and the Clerk are responsible for:

- a) ensuring that all staff are aware of the policy;
- b) taking all possible steps to ensure that lone workers are at no greater risk than other employees;
- c) identify situations where people work alone and decide whether a system can be adopted to avoid workers carrying out tasks on their own;
- d) ensuring that risk assessments are carried out and reviewed regularly;

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- e) putting procedures and safe systems of work into practice which are designed to eliminate or reduce the risks associated with working alone;
- f) ensuring that staff identified as being at risk are given appropriate information, instruction and training, including training at induction, updating and refreshing this training as necessary;
- g) managing the effectiveness of preventative measures through an effective system of reporting, investigating and recording incidents;
- h) ensuring that appropriate support is given to staff involved in any incident; and
- i) providing a mobile phone and other personal safety equipment, if and where this is felt to be desirable.

5.2 Employees are responsible for:

- a) taking reasonable care of themselves and others affected by their actions;
- b) following guidance and procedures designed for safe working;
- c) reporting all incidents that may affect the health and safety of themselves or others and asking for guidance as appropriate and complete an accident form;
- d) taking part in training designed to meet the requirements of the policy;
- e) reporting any dangers or potential dangers they identify or any concerns they might have in respect of working alone; and
- f) always maintain good communication to minimise risk.

6. Guidance for Risk Assessments of Lone Working

Risk assessment is essential to good risk management. Assessment will be carried out for and on behalf of all staff whose working practice makes them vulnerable. This includes staff that are site based but work in isolation as well as any mobile staff whose work takes them out into the community. Recommendations will be made to eliminate or reduce the risk to the lowest level reasonably practicable. A lone workers assessment will be completed. This will be used as a tool to identify if the existing control measures are adequate and if not, what modifications or additional actions can be considered necessary to help reduce the risks associated with lone working. Once the checklist has been completed a risk assessment will be carried out and documented in a risk assessment form.

Risk assessments for site based lone workers will include:

- a) is the person fit and suitable to work alone;
- b) safe access and exit;
- c) risk of violence;
- d) are women especially at risk if they work alone;
- e) safety of equipment for individual use;
- f) channels of communication in an emergency;
- g) site security;
- h) security arrangements, i.e. alarm systems and response to personal alarms;
- i) the level and adequacy of on/off site supervision.

Risk assessments for mobile lone workers will, additionally, include:

- a) travelling between sites;
- b) reporting and recording arrangements;
- c) communication and traceability and personal safety/security.

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Following completion of the Risk Assessment consideration will be given to any appropriate action that is required.

7. Incident Reporting

An incident is defined as “an unplanned or uncontrolled event or sequence of events or near misses that has the potential to cause injury, ill health or damage”. In order to maintain an appropriate record of incidents involving lone workers it is essential that all incidents be reported to the Clerk who will prioritise each incident and identify any immediate action. Staff should ensure that all incidents where they feel threatened or “unsafe” (even if this was not a tangible event/experience) are reported. This includes incidents of verbal abuse.

8. Contacting/Involving the Police

The Council is committed to protecting its staff and councillors from violence and assault and will support criminal proceedings against those who carry out assault. All staff are encouraged to report violent incidents to the police and will be supported by the Council throughout the process. Except in the cases of emergency, members or employees should inform the Clerk of any incident immediately. The Clerk will thereafter take responsibility for contacting the police to report the details of the incident.

9. Support for Staff

Employees working for the Council should know that their safety comes first. Staff should be aware of how to deal with situations where they feel they are at risk or unsafe. Staff should also be able to recognise how their own actions could influence or even trigger an aggressive response. The Clerk will ensure that all lone workers’ training needs are assessed and that they receive appropriate training.

10. Immediate Support following a Violent Incident

In the event of a violent incident involving a lone worker, the Clerk will immediately ensure that the employee receives any necessary medical treatment and/or advice. If an incident occurs out of hours, the Council’s Chair should be contacted. The Clerk will also consider whether the employee needs specific information or assistance relating to legal or insurance aspects. The Clerk or Chair will also ensure appropriate written and verbal reporting of any violent incident.

11. Lone Working for the Clerk

Where the items above relate directly to the Clerk as a staff member the appropriate controls will be exercised by the Council or, in an emergency situation the Chair of the Council. During the Annual Appraisal, there should be an agenda item covering any issues related to lone working. Any concerns, training issues or requests for additional support should be shared and discussed as part of this item. Any issues arising must be remedied at the earliest opportunity.

The Clerk has a duty of care to oneself to ensure a reasonable work life balance and the Council has a duty of care to support the clerk in achieving this

Work life balance is defined as the amount of time an employee spends doing ones job compared the amount of time one spends with one’s family and doing the things one enjoys, this is particularly difficult to achieve when working from home. The Clerk will work almost exclusively from home which means the physical boundaries between work and personal life can feel virtually non-existent.

The Council recognises that the clerk will experience difficulties managing her career and household in the same space and to enable the line between the professional and personal to be maintained. Especially as regards hours of work.

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The Council will support the Clerk to take steps as suggested below. These steps are included below but are not limited to:

- When working from home wear appropriate attire, as this will encourage the right psychological frame of mind for work
- Create and maintain a designated workspace, this will also help the rest of home feel like it is not the workplace
- When at work reduce distractions from home to a minimum
- Take appropriate breaks from the work station, walk stretch, eat, drink and have proper meals
- Make sure work ends at the allocated time at the allocated time and switch off ways of communication to ensure work life balance

If at any time the pressures of work are makes the Clerk feel abnormally stressed or anxious the Council should be informed immediately, and they will make every reasonable effort to ensure the Clerk's health and wellbeing is maintained at work irrespective of whether stress is caused by work or home influences.

12. Good Practice for Lone Workers

- a) During their working hours, all staff leaving the workplace should leave written details of where they are going and their estimated time of arrival back.
- b) If, in the course of a trip away from the office, plans change significantly, this should be communicated back to the office.
- c) If the visit is assessed to have a sufficient risk, arrangements should be made with a councillor to check that a lone worker has returned to their base on completion of the visit. If possible, delay the visit until staff can be accompanied.
- d) Telephone contact between the lone worker and a councillor may also be advisable. Staff should avoid being left on their own with a client in their workplace or leaving a councillor in this situation.
- e) Lone workers should have access to adequate first aid facilities and mobile workers should carry a first aid kit suitable for treating minor injuries – to be reported if used.
- f) Lone workers should be provided with a mobile phone and other personal safety equipment where this is necessary.
- g) Staff should **never** transport a child on their own and should assess any risk before transporting a vulnerable adult alone. (*"A vulnerable adult is defined as a **person** who is 18 years of age or over, and who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness and who is or may be unable to take care of him/herself, or unable to protect him/herself against significant harm or serious exploitation."*)
- h) Before making home visits, the lone worker must have full knowledge of the hazards and risks to which he or she may be exposed to and apply control measures to eliminate or reduce the potential risks.
- i) Having collected all the relevant information, you then need to plan your contact:

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- i. Trust your intuition and always think of your personal safety;
- ii. What is the best time of the day to visit? Assess the situation. Are you familiar with the property locations? Consider the weather/visibility/seasons – will you be driving in the dark?
- iii. Where is the most appropriate place to see this person?
- iv. Do you need to take a councillor with you?
- v. If another company is involved, can a joint visit be arranged?
- vi. Ensure that someone knows where you are at all times and do not make last minute/unplanned visits.
- vii. Do you have a personal panic alarm (if applicable) or mobile (if applicable) – check it is charged.
- viii. Know where you are travelling to. Check your route to avoid stopping and asking strangers for directions.
- ix. Park near street lighting or lit areas whenever possible.
- x. Reverse into parking spaces to ensure a quick getaway.
- xi. Keep all doors locked whilst driving and keep valuables out of sight.
- xii. If you do not intend to return to the office after your visit let someone know.

13.Exemptions

Employees and volunteers are exempt from working alone in certain situations:

- Young persons under instruction in a fixed base (example work experience, helping with council tasks etc.)
- Where activities and work with substances/machinery could be hazardous to health.

This policy will be reviewed annually by Merton Parish Council to ensure that it is relevant to working practice.