

Violence and Aggression at Work Guidance

Introduction

You have the right to be treated with consideration, dignity and respect at work and should not experience violence or aggression as part of your job. We have a duty of care for our employees and are committed to doing all that we can to keep you safe at work. Working in public services brings us into contact with people in many different circumstances, including people in difficult and challenging situations. We will equip you with the skills to deal with potentially difficult interactions and support you if you experience these. We will not tolerate verbal or physical abuse towards any of our employees.

This guidance details the important preventative measures that must be put in place to minimise the risk of experiencing violence and aggression. It gives information on the ways you can defuse and de-escalate difficult situations where this is appropriate. We also provide information on what you should do if an incident occurs and explains how we will support you following an incident, the reporting process that applies and how we will take action to prevent something similar happening again.

The links below will help you easily navigate to the relevant section of this guidance document

[Process Flowcharts](#)

[High Risk Meeting](#)

[Prevention](#)

[Training](#)

[Incident](#)

[Follow Up/Support](#)

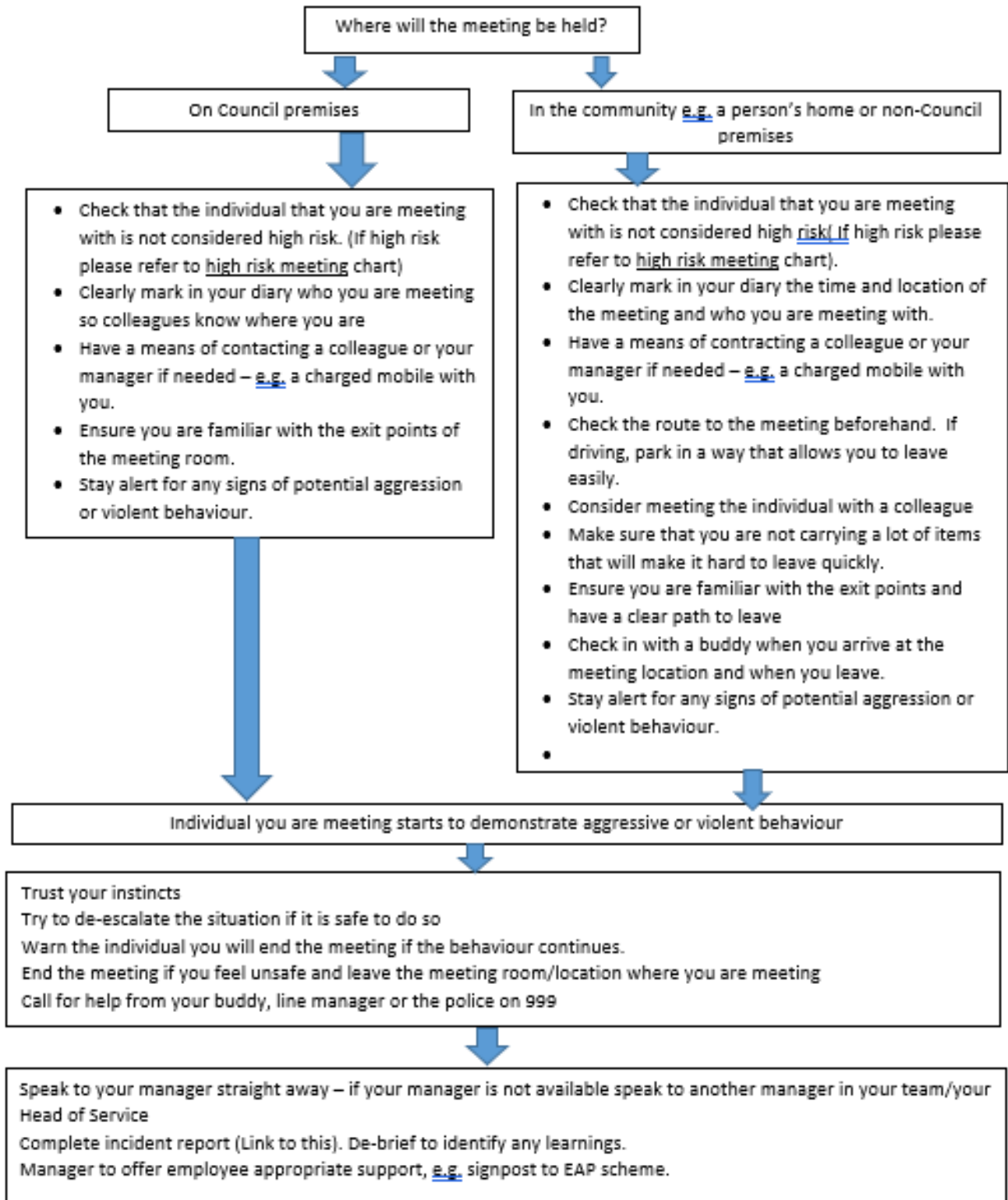
[Abusive Email](#)

[Abusive Phone Calls](#)

[Abuse via Social Media](#)

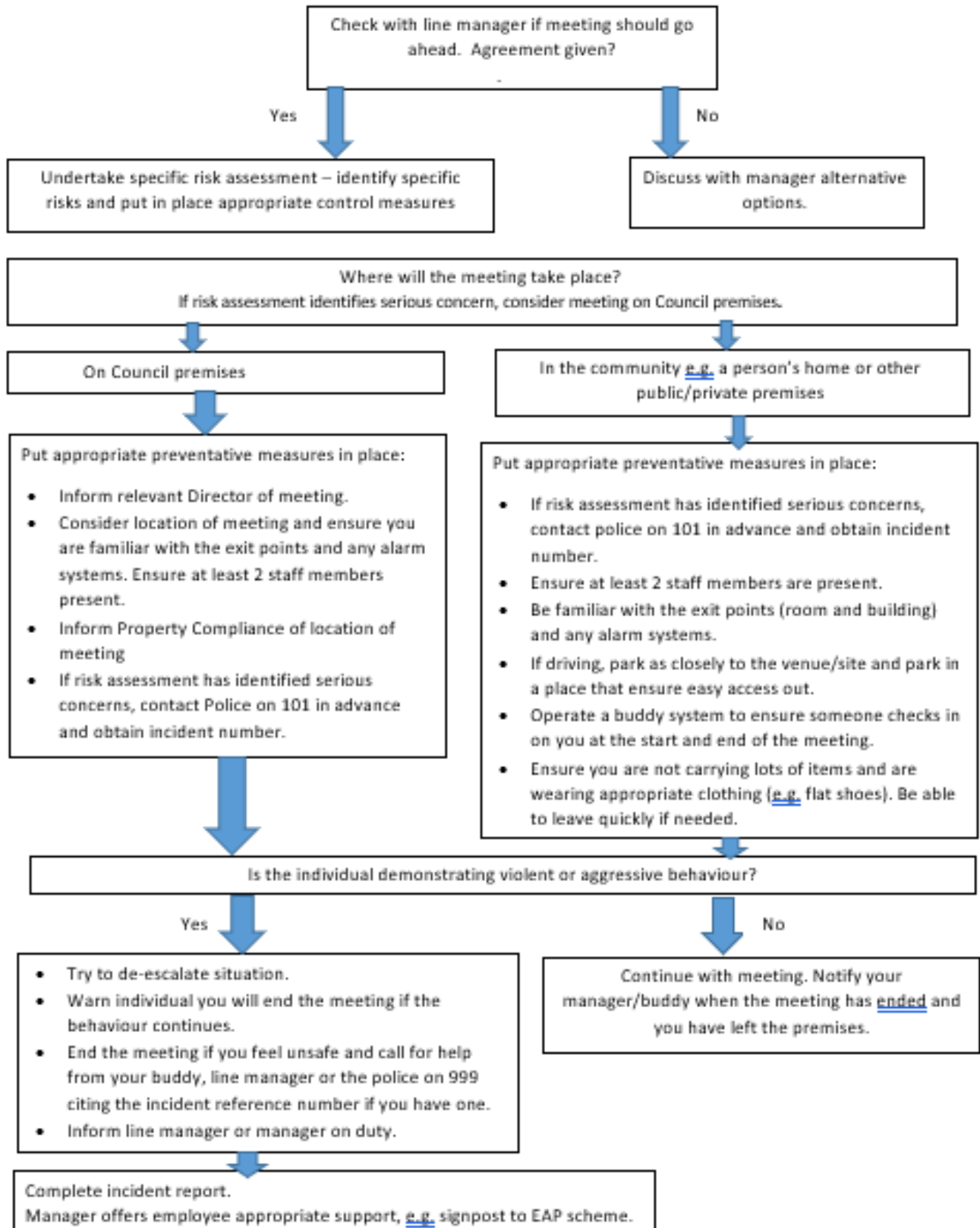
Process for Planned Meeting or Visit

This process is for a meeting that is not considered high risk – for high-risk meetings see the process for high risk meetings process chart

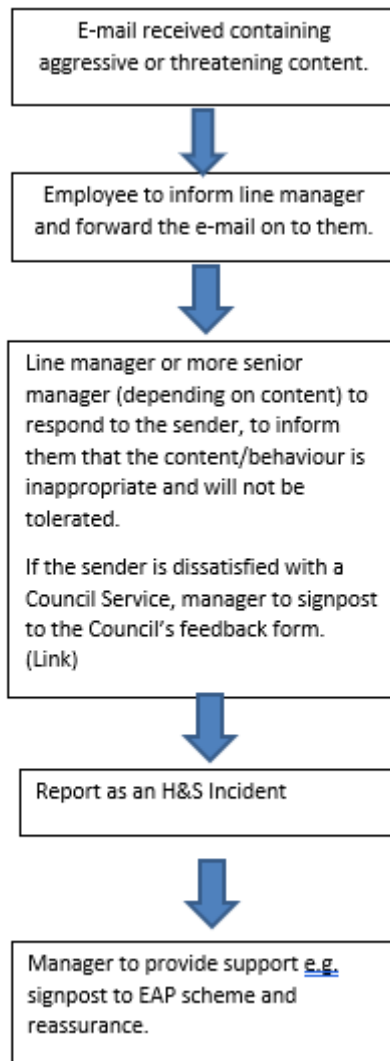


Process for a high-risk meeting

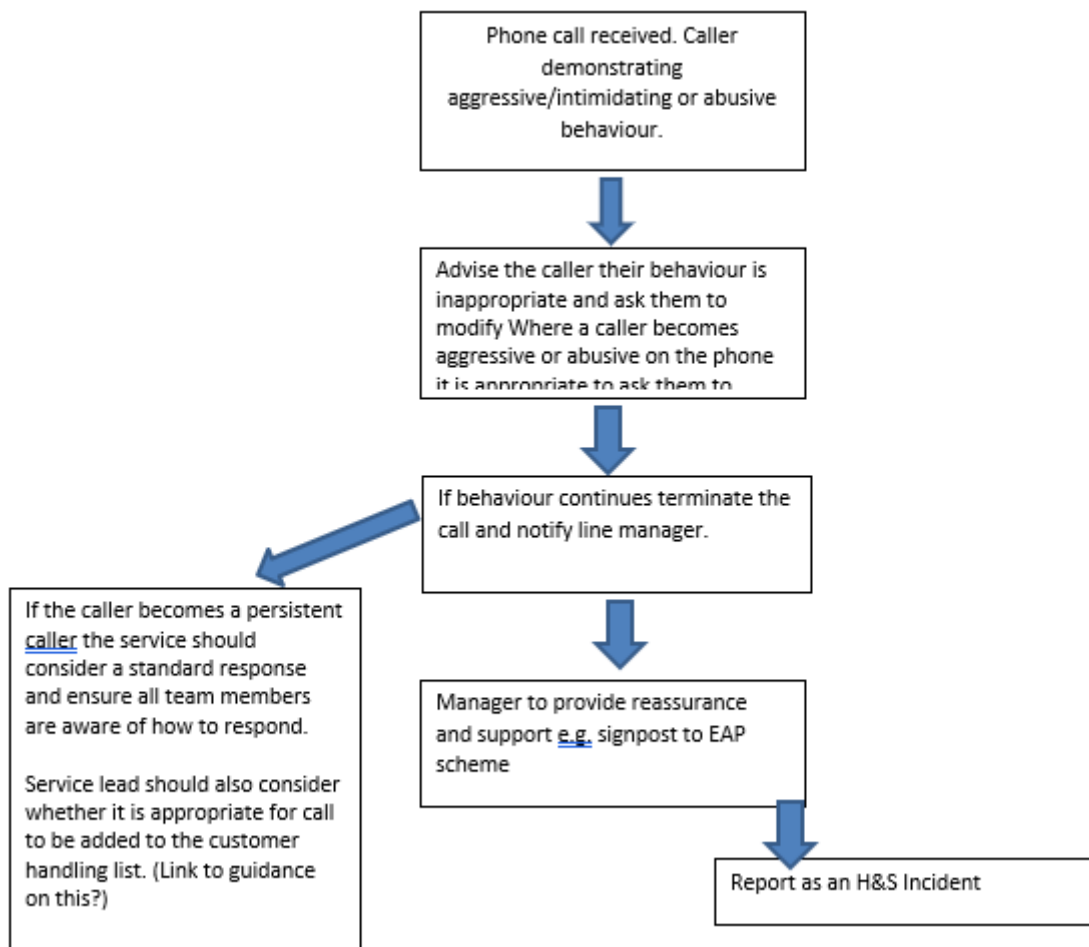
Meeting with individuals identified as high risk, e.g. where there is a known history of violence or aggression) or where it is anticipated an individual may become aggressive due to the nature/purpose of the meeting



Responding to an aggressive/threatening e-mail



Responding to an abusive phone call



1. Unacceptable Behaviours

Work related violence is any incident where you are abused, threatened, intimidated or assaulted while at work or in connection with your work. You should not experience any of the following types of behaviour:

- offensive language or gestures directed towards you in person or on the phone
- verbal abuse or aggression
- sexual harassment
- threats made towards you or others
- physical assault
- discriminatory language
- receiving messages that are offensive or threatening – by email, letter or via social media
- intentional damage to your property

These behaviours are not something that you should expect to experience at work and you are not expected to tolerate them.

2. Interaction with Council employees and elected members

The standards of behaviours expected from colleagues and elected members are defined in our [Respect@Work policy and Code of Conduct for staff, and the Members Code of Conduct](#). If you experience unacceptable behaviour from a Council employee or elected member the Respect@Work policy outlines how you can address this.

3. Interaction with customers

Our customer service charter outlines what the public can expect from us and our expectations of the public in our interactions. We expect people to treat our staff with courtesy and respect. The customer service charter states that we will not tolerate the use of physical or verbal abuse in any form.

Our customer handling policy outlines what we do in circumstances where customers may be pursuing complaints, and other service-related issues, in ways that could be considered to be unreasonable. The full [customer handling policy](#) is published on our external website. Unreasonable behaviours include:

- Behaving in a way that appears to be deliberately targeted over a significant period of time at one or more members of staff.
- Acting inappropriately towards Council staff such as inappropriate use of language, aggression or violence.
- Refusing to leave Council premises when asked to do so following the use of inappropriate language or behaviour.

If staff or customers are at risk we will call the police. When a customer is regularly displaying unreasonable and/or persistent behaviour the Council will write to tell them why we find the behaviour unacceptable and ask them to modify their behaviour. In some cases a decision may be taken to restrict an individual's contact with the Council. Examples of actions that we may take include only meeting with the customer in the presence of a witness, at Council premises and by appointment only. Full details are given in the [Customer Handling Policy](#)

4. Preventative measures

Policies

The following policies give information about how we protect you when undertaking different types of activities.

- [Lone working guidance](#) and associated [lone working risk assessments](#)
- [Customer Handling Policy](#)
- [Respect@Work](#) (applies to interaction between employees and also gives guidance on situations involving third parties such as elected members and contractors)

Managers are responsible for ensuring that all team members are aware of these policies and how they apply in their area of work.

Risk assessments

Services must have risk assessments in place that consider whether there is potential for employees to experience violence and aggression in their role. These will define the appropriate control measures that will be followed. These measures should be documented so that employees understand what they need to do and can refer back to them. All team members have a responsibility to work in accordance with the risk assessment.

Local protocols

Teams must have local protocols and safe systems of work that cover the specific types of activity undertaken in their team/roles. These should cover how to minimise the risk of violence and aggression and outline what to do if there is an incident. Managers are responsible for ensuring that team members understand and comply with these.

For example

- Pupil Referral Unit will have documented processes that would apply if a pupil is violent towards a member of staff.
- A Supervised Contact Officer will have a protocol to follow in the event of an incident.
- A Parking Enforcement Officer will have a protocol to follow if there is an incident involving a member of the public.

Managers must ensure that team protocols and safe systems of work are reviewed regularly and kept up to date. This is particularly important if there has been an incident that has highlighted any gaps in the local procedures or if working practices have changed.

Induction

Managers must ensure that all new members of the team, as part of their induction, are aware of the risk assessments that are in place for their area of work and understand what measures are in place to minimise the risk of violence and aggression. Managers must ensure that all employees understand what they need to do to stay safe and explain what to do if a person becomes violent or aggressive. If a new employee will undertake any lone working their induction should explain the lone working procedures.

Handling Challenging Customers Training

We have a wide range of teams that due to the nature of their work regularly have interactions with members of the public who may be upset or angry. For example:

- Teams in P&E undertaking enforcement visits.
- School admissions teams who are dealing with parents challenging school allocation decisions.
- Contact centre employees who are dealing with people that are unsatisfied about the service that they have received.
- Front line social workers who are dealing with people and families in challenging situations.

We will ensure that employees that have training on how to handle challenging customers so that they are equipped to deal with difficult interactions. Training will help you to identify when a situation is becoming difficult and equip you with a range of skills to defuse and de-escalate these

situations. This training also looks at ways of building personal resilience and is particularly important for people who are new to a role or have less work experience.

Lone working and Personal Safety Training

All team members must undertake appropriate training for activities that they will undertake – e.g. if a role involves any lone working the employee must attend lone working training (Personal Safety and Lone Working for Managers, Personal Safety and Lone Working for Practitioners), and physical intervention training. This needs to be done before undertaking the relevant activity. Employees should also undertake refresher training to keep their knowledge up to date and to remind them of the key considerations.

In a wide range of roles individuals should undertake both handling challenging customers training and personal safety training.

It is the responsibility of the line manager to ensure that the requirement for this training is identified and carried out.

Solo Protect Devices

A lone worker safety device is a discreet way to alert an emergency contact or the emergency services of an incident. We currently have a contract with 1st Reaction Security to apply a device called a SoloProtect ID. By pushing a button this will make an audio call to an Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) – linking a lone worker with 24/7 support if they experience verbal abuse or physical aggression. For more information about getting your team set up with these devices contact [Richard Panter](#). Teams using SoloProtect devices should ensure that they always keep them fully charged so that they are ready to use at short notice.

Recording Information about high risk individuals

It is important that we have accurate information about whether an individual is considered to be potentially high risk. In some teams e.g. the Integrated Front Door team this information might be provided by the police, health, probation or education services. Where a member of the team has experienced difficulties with a service user this should be documented in a way that other team members can access before any future interactions (e.g. using the Liquid Logic system or the services record keeping system and in case notes). It is important that team members check this information routinely prior to a meeting or visit.

5. Preparing to meet a high-risk individual

Before meeting someone you should check if they are known to be a high-risk individual. Your team should record information about potentially high risk individuals. Case notes should detail whether a person has previously behaved in a violent or aggressive way. In addition, you may anticipate aggressive behaviour if you are meeting a person for the first time to discuss something contentious or difficult e.g. visiting a landowner to address non-compliance with regulations.

Speak to your manager - You must speak to your manager as soon as you can about any situation where you consider that there is the potential for a challenging situation to arise. Under no circumstances should you attend any such meeting or site visit unless your manager has agreed that you should attend and appropriate precautions have been put in place. You must not attend a meeting, a home visit or a site visit alone where there is the possibility of any such violence or aggression towards you.

Undertake a specific risk assessment - Your manager will discuss the situation with you and agree what measures are needed to protect you and others. The specific risks need to be considered and appropriate control measures put in place for the meeting. These need to be documented in a specific risk assessment. Examples of protective measure include:

- Where possible hold the meeting on Council premises and in a room with fixed furniture and a panic button (property compliance can advise which rooms are available).
- Two employees should attend the meeting/undertaking a visit to avoid lone working with a high-risk individual.
- For meetings held on CCC premises arrangements should be put in place to closely monitor the individual joining and leaving the meeting either by phone call or in person.
- Consider how you will exit the meeting room.
- For visits off site consider how you can quickly and safely exit a person's home or the site.
- For visits off site operate a buddy system where an employee checks in with a colleague or their manager at the beginning and end of a meeting or a visit.
- Ensure that you are not carrying a lot of items that would make it more difficult to leave a situation quickly.
- Park as close as possible to a site and in a way that will allow you to leave easily.

This specific risk assessment is in addition to general risk assessments that are in place in your team for meeting members of the public/service users i.e. the risk assessment needs to be tailored to the specific interaction and individual. Your manager must review the risk assessment prior to the meeting or activity.

Alert the relevant people - In all instances where you are meeting a high-risk individual on Council premises you must:

- Alert property compliance in advance so that they can put in place appropriate security arrangements.
- Alert the relevant Director to the situation.
- Inform the police - if the risk assessment identifies serious concern your manager should contact Cambridgeshire Police (by calling 101 or online) before the meeting and advise them of the potential for violence. The Police Service Unit will record details of the situation and give you an incident number.

Brief others - Your managers must brief other employees who may be present when a high-risk meeting takes place (e.g. administrative staff, reception, Hall Keepers etc.) to ensure they are alert to the potential for an incident. You must agree with these people what they should do in the event of an incident.

If you are using a room with a panic button you need to:

- Agree in advance who the panic button alert will go through to.
- Ensure that the emergency contact person is going to be there for the full duration of the meeting.
- Decide in advance what they need to do if the panic button is pressed e.g. call security or call the police.
- Give the emergency contact the incident reference number previously provided so that this can be provided to the police.

Calling the police - If an individual threatens violence or becomes violent towards anyone, you or your emergency contact should call the Police (by calling 999) and quote the Incident number previously provided. This will ensure that the Police officers responding to the emergency call will be fully aware of the background before they arrive.

6. During a meeting or visit – stay alert

During a meeting or site visit you should look out for any warning signs that something is not right - watch a person's body language, gesticulating, their tone of voice, raising their voice or shouting, standing up or pacing, standing over you or getting close to you, making physical gestures such as banging on the table, trying to touch you or hurt you. You should trust your instincts if something is making you feel unsafe and you must act.

7. What to do if an incident occurs

What to do if someone starts to become aggressive and looks like they may become violent:

- Try to de-escalate the situation if possible.
- Warn the individual that they need to moderate their behaviour or you will need to end the discussion.
- If you feel unsafe - leave the meeting.
- Call for help – by pressing the panic button, calling your buddy/emergency contact or calling the police.

8. What to do if an unexpected incident occurs

An employee may unexpectedly encounter threatening or violent behaviour from a member of the public. For example, a person may come into a library and behave in a threatening way towards staff. Teams should have a risk assessment in place that outlines what to do in this situation. This is likely to include the following types of actions:

- Alert any colleagues present to the situation.
- Ask the person to leave the building or remove yourself from the situation.
- Ask other members of the public to move to a safe area.
- Call the police.

9. Reporting an incident

Tell your manager straight away what has happened. If your manager is not available call another manager in the team or your Head of Service. Your manager will record the details of what has happened and report the incidents using our [incident reporting system](#).

In addition to reporting the incident you should also keep a local record and/or case notes of what has happened for future reference. These will alert your colleague to an individual's past behaviour and will alert them to the potential for violence so that they can put in place appropriate control measures. Where appropriate you should ask for an individual to be added to the Council's Customer handling list.

In accordance with the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR), all incidents involving physical violence against employees that cause major injury or absence from work for more than seven days will be recorded and reported to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The Health and Safety team is responsible for doing this based on information provided from the employee/manager.

10. Investigating an incident

Following an incident report a detailed investigation will be undertaken by the line manager with assistance from health and safety. This is likely to involve the following steps:

- Obtain factual written statements from any witnesses – these should include the date and time of the incident.
- Ensure that statements contain the names and addresses of witnesses.
- Ask witnesses to sign and date their statement.

- If an implement was used it should be securely retained if this can be done safely.
- Inform your Head of Service of the incident and the details of the investigation and follow up actions.
- Retain written records for future reference.

11. Reporting to the police

In the event of a police investigation managers will provide full assistance to help with their enquiries. Without prejudice to the assaulted employee's right to report the incident personally to the Police, the Line Manager, in consultation with the victim, shall determine whether to inform the Police of the incident. There must be no delay in reporting incidents to the Police. If the Police decide not to act, then it shall be open to the Council to support the victim in pursuing an action against the perpetrator. The Line Manager will remain responsible for liaising with the appropriate Head of Service and Service Director regarding any action/outcomes following a referral to the police.

Following any incident, the manager should review and update the team/role risk assessments with what you have learnt. Where needed local procedures should be updated to put in place steps to prevent a similar incident from happening again.

12. Support following an incident

Experiencing aggression or violence at work is likely to be upsetting and an employee will in most cases need support from their manager following an incident. Exactly what you do will be guided by the circumstances and the wishes of the individual, however the following actions should all be considered:

- The line manager keeps in touch with the employee if they are off work following the incident.
- Support will be provided to other team members who have been affected or witnessed an incident.
- Make sure the employee and other team members know about the Employee Assistance Programme and how to access it – the EAP can provide access to Counselling if needed.
- Carefully plan the employee's return to work. This may involve a period where the employee undertakes modified duties on their return.
- Keep checking in with the individual via Our Conversations discussions which cover wellbeing every month.
- If the person has been injured at work they may be entitled to compensation. HR can provide guidance on the sick pay implications following an incident at work.

13. Support to deal with difficult interactions

It is very important that anyone who is having difficult interactions is well supported. This could involve having the opportunity to debrief with their line manager or a colleague following a difficult visit, meeting or phone call. While teams are increasing working in more agile ways they need to consider how this debriefing can continue to happen and this should be documented in your team charter.

Similarly the impact of having repeated difficult conversations can build up over time, individual interactions may not have been particularly challenging, however the cumulative effect of these interactions may have a negative impact on an employee. This needs to be recognised and addressed by line managers. Monthly discussions about wellbeing as part of the Our Conversations approach are a good opportunity to regularly discuss how a person is feeling in their role.

14. Discrimination

It is not acceptable for you to experience discrimination at work. For example racist, sexist, ableist, transphobic or homophobic comments or abuse. Discrimination will not be tolerated. If you experience discrimination you should end the conversation or visit. You should tell your manager what has happened straight away. If your manager is not available you should contact the most senior person on duty at the time. The incident should be reported via the incident reporting system. Where possible your manager will contact the individual to tell them that their behaviour is not acceptable and must not be repeated e.g. if the individual behaving in an unacceptable way is a service user your manager will speak to them or write to them to outline that discriminatory behaviour towards our employees will not be tolerated. Your manager will provide you with support following the incident. Your manager will keep checking in with you via Our Conversations discussions which cover wellbeing every month.

15. What to do if you receive an abusive or offensive email

If you receive an abusive or offensive email you should tell your manager straight away and forward the message to them. Your line manager should respond on your behalf, tell the individual that their email/their language is not appropriate and will not be tolerated. If the email is in relation to a service issue you should direct the employee to our feedback procedure. The incident should be reported via H&S Incident report system.

If you receive a threat of violence via email you should alert your manager to this straight away. What action is taken will depend on the nature of the message e.g. report the incident to the police, withdraw service from the individual. The incident should be reported via H&S Incident report system.

If you are receiving persistent and challenging contact from an individual via email you should forward the message to your line manager to respond on your behalf. Your manager will make contact with the individual to make it clear that persistent contact is not appropriate. You should consider whether it is appropriate to ask for a person to be added to the customer handling list. Your Head of Service should discuss this with customer services.

16. What to do if you receive an abusive phone call

When making work calls ensure that you use your work phone and not your personal phone, where necessary you can also choose to withhold your work phone number.

Where a caller becomes aggressive or abusive on the phone it is appropriate to ask them to moderate their language and tell them that you will terminate the call if they do not do this. Following an abusive phone call you should speak to your manager straight away for appropriate follow up action to be taken.

If you are receiving calls from a persistent caller you must alert your line manager and other members of your team. You should agree a standard response for any calls from the persistent caller e.g. forward their calls to the team manager. You should consider whether it is appropriate to ask for a person to be added to the customer handling list. Your Head of Service should discuss this with customer services.

17. Abuse on Social media

You are advised not to show your job title or employer on social media and to have a private profile – publishing this information can make it easier for members of the public to identify and contact you. If you receive an abusive message via social media in relation to your role with the Council, you should inform your line manager and block the person that has contacted you. If the person that has

contacted you is a service user or customer your line manager will follow up with them directly to make it clear that their message is not appropriate and will not be tolerated.