The Lone Working Guidance below was endorsed by Council leaders in August 2020 for circulation to Scottish Councils for consideration on a voluntary basis.

Introduction

The Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 requires employers and the self-employed to prepare a written statement of general policy with respect to the health and safety at work of all employees, inclusive of unpaid volunteers. Employers must also put in place systems of work that are, so far as is reasonably practicable, safe and without risks to health. While councillors do not have employee status, their health and safety is just as important and while councils are not their employers, it is recommended that all councils consider how to help ensure councillors health and safety.

The following guidance specifically considers councillor safety in relation to lone working outlining key principles for consideration and providing examples of how these might be applied in a council setting.

The guidance does not provide a policy for adoption but principles to facilitate the ongoing development of local, supportive and appropriately funded lone working practices.

Lone Working Guidance

Given the nature of their work, councillors frequently undertake duties in various locations, including but not restricted to:

- council premises
- community spaces
- online
- home
- in constituents' homes.

They will often be working or traveling alone, without physical support and frequently work outside of office hours.

The principles below should be considered with regard to all locations and circumstances in which a councillor is lone working and used to inform decisions on how best to help ensure their safety.

Each principle could be put into practice in a number of different ways and this may differ from councillor to councillor according to their individual needs.

Lone Working Principles

- Councillors are appropriately trained to recognise and manage risks to personal safety that may arise. This should include risk assessment on arrival at a location, but training might also suitably include:

- conflict resolution
- conflict de-escalation
- managing online harms.

- Locations in which a councillor is working are risk assessed and exit strategies identified for use should a councillor feel endangered.

- Councillors have a means of communicating with others at all times.

- Councillors do not advertise that they work from home and councils seek to ensure that their home addresses remain private as far as is practical.

- A system is available that allows councillors to provide their whereabouts, so support staff know where a councillor is and with whom. Consideration should be given to a system that:

  - Ensures councillors can make support staff aware of their plans for their working day
  - Enables 'safety calls' for meetings with a new constituent to check perceived safety, with a predetermined code word ready in place to summon help
  - Allows councillors to 'check out' indicating that meetings have been safely completed.

- An emergency alarm system is in place which will enables councillors to summon assistance if necessary. This has been tested, and a response protocol has been put in place.

- Councillors are supported and encouraged to establish effective working relationships and maintain open communication lines with Police Scotland Community Policing Teams.

- No set of safety measures is fail safe and councillors must actively consider their personal safety throughout their work, committing to attend and apply relevant training and raising any safety concerns with support staff.

Supporting Lone Working arrangements

As a result of the legitimate actions undertaken in their role the personal security of an elected member may become significantly, adversely affected. This should be recognised both by councils and individual elected members:

Councils should give full consideration to funding or providing support necessary to enable a councillor to discharge their role reasonably and safely. This is inclusive of measures that support positive lone working practices and may require the funding of training and/ or appropriate security measures to protect councillors from personal risk or significant threat.

Councillors should be considerate of the role lone working arrangements play in ensuring their own safety and that of others, recognising that precautions taken may differ between elected members according to individual needs and supporting others in the decisions taken to ensure their safety.

Utilising Existing Resources

Councils may wish to consider utilising provisions already in place for staff, volunteers or the wider public in order to make lone working arrangements for councillors. For instance:

- Training on personal safety for social work staff
- Call systems in place to track social work staff
- Utilising safe and connected/ telecare lines, enabling councillors to check in after evening meetings.

This will assist in maximising local resources.

Lone Working Case studies

Examples below highlight how a sample of government bodies currently manage loneworking in relation to some of the principles above. All systems have advantages and disadvantages and processes put in place must meet local needs.

Training and Risk Assessment

East Ayrshire Council revised their Health and Safety Standard: Lone Working following the death of Jo Cox, MP and amended this to include elected members and elected member surgeries in its remit. Training in conflict handling, personal safety and de-escalation techniques are provided for elected members in their training programme and delivered through their Elected Member Learning and Development Strategy.

West Lothian Council have carried out health and safety venue assessments for surgeries and there is a self-complete checklist for all members. Lone working is covered in the Health and Safety training offered to elected members following election. Home visits are discouraged where possible, opting for arranged appointments at the Civic Centre building instead.

The Welsh Parliament discourages members from undertaking home visits alone.

Tracing Systems and Emergency Alarms

Glasgow City Council has developed a lone working app currently utilised by staff; this can be downloaded to iPhone or android and has both tracing and emergency alarm functions. To use the tracing function users add their location and time they anticipate being in a meeting. The alarm receiving centre is notified of this and if the user does not clock safely out of this meeting following a prompt the alarm centre can utilise GPS as well as specific information on location the user has added to the app, for example a flat number and an activation procedure is followed. The app also enables a ' red alert' to be raised with the alarm receiving centre in emergency situations either via the phone handset or a covert button that can be placed on an ID badge or a in a pocket, should the user be separated from their phone.

Westminster provide MPs with a lone worker device / SoS Fob that acts as both an emergency tracing system and an emergency alarm. It can be utilised to leave a message that can be picked up by staff telling them where they are and when they will be finished. An emergency button also opens a two- way microphone so that help can be called if required.

In Scottish Parliament security devices are made available to MSPs. These can be carried when loneworking and are often utilised during surgeries and when traveling. They contain a GPS and a red button which, when pressed allow a security company to listen, and if required send the emergency services to the required location.

Those currently operating these systems emphasise that they complement rather than replace training and risk assessment.

Lone Working and Covid-19

Covid-19 has impacted councillor work patterns. Under local lockdown restrictions councillors will be required to work from home and online, meaning they will be working with less face to

face staff support and have no physical support in a meeting context. In this scenario attention should be given to:

- councillor safety at home
- managing online harms.

As restrictions are lifted and councillors resume face to face works with constituents and continue to follow public health advice it may be harder than usual for councillors to arrange to meet clients in public spaces such as libraries or supermarket cafes. Thought should be given to how the safety of councillors can be safeguarded within the specific context.