



MEDSTEAD PARISH COUNCIL

LONE WORKING POLICY

1. Introduction

As an employer of at least one staff member, Medstead Parish Council must comply with Health and Safety legislation for employers. This includes a duty of care to advise and assess risk for lone workers when they work by themselves and to identify suitable control measures. There is no single piece of legislation on lone working, but the main legislation is in the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines lone workers as ‘those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision’. This definition covers Medstead Parish Council’s Clerk, who is required to carry out their duties for all or most of their working day working alone, sometimes in isolated areas and out of normal office hours.

Risks are greater for lone workers as there is no-one to protect them from violence or abuse by others, they are reliant only on their own knowledge and training to deal with situations as they arise and there is no-one to help them if something goes wrong.

Health and Safety legislation does not aim to prohibit lone working as it is an essential part of many people’s jobs, including that of a Parish Clerk. However, it aims to ensure that risks are properly assessed, steps are taken to manage risks and to identify when a task undertaken alone creates an unacceptably high level of risk, and to ensure lone workers have appropriate training to enable them to identify hazards and best cope with situations which may arise.

2. Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to all situations involving lone working arising in connection with the work activities of Medstead Parish Council’s employee(s), regardless of whether they are full-time, part time, permanent or temporary and regardless of whether they are in a fixed location or out in the community.

At present there is just one part-time employee (the Parish Clerk / RFO). However, this policy does not preclude the fact that in future there could be more than one employee.

As well as employees, the Council has responsibilities for the health and safety of volunteers who undertake work activities for the Council and self-employed people contracted to do work on behalf of the Council. Sometimes Councillors undertake voluntary work tasks and are therefore considered volunteers in that regard for the purposes of this policy.

3. Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this document is to:

- Raise awareness of the safety issues relating to lone working
- Identify and assess potential risks to an individual working alone
- Explain the importance of reasonable and practicable precautions to minimise potential risk
- Provide appropriate support to lone workers
- Encourage reporting of all incidents associated with lone working so that they can be adequately managed and used to help reduce risks and improve working arrangements for the future.

4. Lone working in Medstead Parish Council

4.1 Employees

Medstead Parish Council currently employs a single member of staff as Clerk / RFO, who predominantly works alone either at home or in the Parish Office. Also, the Clerk mostly operates alone when visiting the cemetery, village green, noticeboards and other Council-owned property. It is not always possible to confine duties to normal working hours, with evening, early morning and weekend work often undertaken. The role involves meeting members of the public at times, including scheduled meetings in the Parish Office and ad hoc encounters when out and about.

Whilst there are no current plans to increase the number of employees, this situation could change in future with recruitment of additional staff, overlap between new and leaving staff or use of a self-employed locum on a temporary basis, either in addition to or instead of the Clerk. This policy applies to all such situations.

4.2 Councillors

Councillors are holders of public office and not employed by the Council and therefore essentially not covered by Health and Safety legislation. However, on occasion Councillors undertake physical work activities on behalf of and as agreed by the Council, such as minor maintenance tasks, moving items or inspections of land or equipment. For those purposes, this policy applies and appropriate risk assessments should be considered with regard to instances of lone working as volunteers.

4.3 Volunteers

The Council uses volunteers for certain tasks, such as pond maintenance and other ad hoc tasks. When doing risk assessments for these, lone-working issues should be assessed. The HSE states that an employer should provide the same level of protection to volunteers where they carry out similar activities and are exposed to the same level of risk as employees.

Any worker under the age of 18 years, or anyone working in confined spaces is not permitted to work on their own.

4.4 Contractors

Self-employed people contracted to do work for the Council must have their own public liability insurance and should carry out a risk assessment in relation to their specific work, taking advice from the Council as necessary. This must include specific regard to lone-working. Part of any tendering or contracting process by the Council should include risk assessment affirmation.

5. Responsibilities

5.1 Clerk

The Clerk, on behalf of the Council, is responsible for:

- Ensuring that there are arrangements for identifying, evaluating and managing risk associated with lone working
- Ensuring that risk assessments are carried out and reviewed regularly
- Ensuring that there are arrangements for monitoring incidents linked to lone working

5.2 Council

The Council should do the following:

- Avoid lone working where reasonably practicable where risks are higher, such as in remote locations, late at night or early in the morning where fewer people are around

- Avoid lone working altogether where risks are unacceptably high
- Ensure that the worker is competent to work alone
- Ensure that all lone working activities must be formally risk assessed. This should identify the risk to lone workers; any control measures necessary to minimise those risks; and emergency procedures
- Provide resources for putting the policy and risk assessment into practice (including any personal safety equipment, where relevant)
- Ensures arrangements for lone working are made clear to staff and volunteers and the details of what can or cannot be done while working alone are explained
- Inform lone workers of the hazards and understand the necessary control measures that need to be put in place and give lone workers the opportunity to contribute to the risk assessment
- Raise the alarm if a lone worker cannot be contacted when expected or does not return as anticipated
- Ensure that all staff and volunteers are aware of this lone working policy and any procedures
- Put procedures and safe systems of work into practice which are designed to eliminate or reduce the risks associated with working alone
- Ensure that lone workers are given appropriate information, instruction and training, including training at induction, updating and refreshing this training as necessary
- Manage the effectiveness of preventative measures through an effective system of reporting, investigating and recording incidents
- Ensure that appropriate support is given to staff involved in any incident

If the Council employs more than one member of staff, the Clerk as senior officer will act as manager to the other members of staff and should undertake the responsibilities listed above with regard to lone working by other members of staff, overseen by the Council. The Clerk will also take the same responsibility with regards to volunteers.

5.3 The Lone Worker

The lone worker has the following responsibilities:

- Take reasonable care of themselves and others who may be affected by their work
- Follow any instruction, guidance or procedure given by the Council that is designed for safe lone working
- Adopt the control measures identified in the risk assessment, and to refresh familiarity with them as needed
- Raise with the Council any concerns they have in relation to lone working
- Not to work alone where there is inadequate information to undertake a risk assessment.
- Inform the Council at the earliest opportunity in the event of an accident, incident of violence or aggression whilst working alone
- Contribute to the risk assessment as appropriate, reporting any dangers or potential dangers they identify or any concerns they might have in respect of working alone
- Identify any training needs and to take part in training designed to meet the requirements of the policy
- Advise the Council of any medical conditions that may affect safety when working alone
- To maintain good communications to minimise risk

5.4 Other staff

If there is more than one member of staff, other staff should be aware of colleagues working on their own and alert to unexpected changes of routine, unanticipated periods where there is no communication and use buddy schemes with up to date contact details as appropriate.

6. Risk Assessments

Risk assessments should be completed for all lone working activities. These should be reviewed by the lone worker before undertaking the work and communicated to all relevant Councillors. A lone working risk assessment template is presented in Appendix 1. This is used as a tool to identify if the Council's existing control measures are adequate and if not, what modifications or additional actions might be necessary to help reduce the risks associated with lone working.

In general, the responsibility for conducting risk assessments for the Council typically falls on the Parish Clerk, with oversight and input from the Council itself. The Clerk is often the individual best positioned to identify and manage risks as they relate to the Council's operations and activities, and they have time allocated to do it as part of their paid role. However, the entire Council is accountable for ensuring risks are identified and addressed and should review all risk assessments. The Finance and General Purposes Committee has delegated powers in its Terms of Reference to review risk assessments on behalf of the Council.

In the specific case of risk assessments for lone working by the Clerk, the Council must be aware that it has responsibility as a whole corporate body for their line management (tasks can be delegated to a Staffing Committee if required). Whilst the Clerk can do much of the work involved in the risk assessment, the responsibility lies with the Council to ensure that this is done.

For volunteers (including Councillors as volunteers) and any other members of staff (should the Council take on additional employees in future), the Clerk acts as the Manager and is responsible for the Risk Assessments, to be overseen and reviewed by the Council.

The Clerk's work is very varied on a day by day basis, so it is not meaningful to risk assess every single activity. However, categories of lone working activities should be identified in the risk assessment. These include:

- Visiting the village green, cemetery or other Council-owned land for inspections, assessing situations, minor physical tasks, meeting contractors, locking and unlocking gates, taking photographs, marking up graves and other cemetery business.
- Putting up notices on noticeboards
- Travelling to stores, post offices, external meetings or the bank on Council business
- Checking footpaths
- Working at home
- Working in the parish office
- Meeting members of the public in the parish office
- Meeting members of the public elsewhere
- Other ad hoc activities to be identified on a case by case basis

These categories can be further broken down to specific activities as appropriate.

For volunteers (including Councillors when doing voluntary work activities), the Council should risk assess categories of activities, such as pond maintenance, DIY maintenance at the pavilion, inspections etc., and should do an additional risk assessment for every new type of activity.

For Contractors, the Clerk should make sure that they are aware of lone working practises, and should check that they have adequately risk-assessed the work activity with regard to lone working.

Key issues to be considered in risk assessment are:

- Is there risk of violence?
Is the person medically (and psychologically) fit to work alone?

- Is any special training required?
- Are the individual(s) concerned and any necessary safe working practices adequately monitored?
- Are there adequate arrangements in the event of an emergency?
- Can all plant, substances and equipment involved in the work be safely handled and/or operated by one person?

7. Hazards of lone working

It is important to keep a sense of proportionality in mind when assessing the risks involved with lone working as many potential eventualities, such as breaking down, having a car accident, falling ill, sustaining an injury etc have no higher risk than in the lone worker's personal life. Also, many of the risks encountered in lone working are exactly the same as for those that people face when doing the same task when not alone.

Often everyday control measures such as a lone worker carrying a charged mobile phone and emergency contact numbers, properly maintaining their vehicle, having breakdown cover, wearing sensible clothing and footwear, telling a partner or family member when, where and for how long when going out, having a first-aid kit etc. will often be adequate measures. However, the Council must be aware of its legal obligations that apply specifically to lone working and its obligations as an employer, regardless of whether similar activities are done outside of work.

The following hazards are potentially more significant when working alone:

- Sudden illness and accidents
- Faulty equipment
- Animal attacks
- Abuse from members of the public
- Remote locations
- Travelling alone

The Council also has a duty to protect visitors and the public from work activities, and when doing a risk assessment should consider whether lone working poses a greater risk to the public. For example, does a task undertaken by just one person risk leaving unsafe materials or a half-built item etc. unattended whilst needing to go to fetch something or go for a comfort break or seeking help for injury? Can it be adequately controlled with safety fencing or signage at the work area, or are two people required?

8. Ways in which lone working risks can be reduced

Every lone working environment and situation is different, and therefore it is not possible to implement a 'one size fits all' approach. As there are regular and repeated instances of lone working, the Council will devise and implement a lone working plan that meets the needs and risks of their particular circumstances. The plan should be proportionate to any risks that are identified from the risk assessment. This should be written down and communicated to all relevant staff and where appropriate, Councillors.

NALC recommends the following example strategies that could be implemented (on their own or combined). Whilst some of these are better suited to Councils with multiple employees, they are options to consider:

- Signing-in and Out book
- Electronic (or hard copy) diaries to be kept up to date with meeting/visit/lone working details
- Agreed times and method of contact
- Buddy scheme (exchange of details of the lone working and emergency contact details and emergency 'code word' with another person).

It is important to avoid overly complicated controls such as constantly checking in with Councillors (except where merited for higher risks) for three reasons: i) anything too complicated and unnecessarily onerous risks not being done as it becomes too difficult to maintain; ii) constant unnecessary checking could be very stressful for staff, and the Council has a responsibility for their mental well-being as well as physical; iii) the Clerk's role is part-time but can extend across the whole week including weekends, evenings and early mornings and this makes it harder to keep tabs on the Clerk's safety compared to a fixed working week, and also risks measures become intrusive to both the Clerk and Councillors. Hence, the control measures identified in the risk assessment need to be carefully considered to be both adequate and pragmatic.

If abuse from members of the public is considered a risk, the Council should consider whether employees need training to handle conflict situations.

9. Health and wellbeing

In order to ensure an employee or volunteer's personal safety, it is important that they share any details of any aspects of their health (including pregnancy) that could lead to increased risk. This should be communicated to the Council, staffing committee (if one exists), Clerk or specific Councillors as appropriate. They can then jointly plan to mitigate any potential risks caused by the circumstances. This information will be treated on a strict 'need to know' basis with confidentiality of the utmost importance.

If the Council or Clerk is unsure whether someone's health condition means they are safe to work alone, they should get medical advice. The Council needs to think about both routine work and possible emergencies that may put additional physical and mental burdens on the lone worker.

Risk assessments should consider whether lone workers should carry first aid equipment, receive first aid training, including how to use first aid on themselves or have access to adequate first aid facilities.

The Council should be aware that lone working can at times create additional stresses for an employee, particularly at times of high workload. Whilst staff should knowingly take on the role with awareness of what it involves and suitability for lone working should be considered at recruitment, the Council should be aware that issues can arise due to isolated working practices, particularly as it is harder for lone workers to get support and there are less opportunities for the Council or Manager to spot signs of stress. If contact is poor, workers may feel disconnected, isolated or abandoned. This can affect their performance and potentially their stress levels and mental health, which is important as well as physical well-being.

10. Reporting incidents

Any incidents or perceived risks encountered while lone working should be recorded, reviewed and acted upon. The report should include:

- A brief note of what happened, when, and who was involved
- For any work-related aggression (verbal or physical) including threatening behaviour, all of the details of the incident and of the perpetrator should be captured, which could then be used if the police take any formal prosecution action. This might be particularly important for more serious incidents of work-related violence
- In any instance, this might also include recording details of any circumstances the lone worker thinks might have contributed to the incident, e.g. the context of the interaction, perceptions about the condition of the perpetrator, or any environmental circumstances. This information would then support the Council to review its risk assessment process and to see if any additional measures are needed

If an employee or volunteer feels unsafe, unwell, or becomes injured they should call the emergency services if immediate assistance is needed. If possible, they should call a Councillor to let them know what is happening.

11. Contacting / involving the Police

The Council is committed to protecting its employees from violence and assault (including sexual 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, staff should inform the Chair and/or Vice Chair of any incident immediately, who will thereafter take responsibility for contacting the police to report the details of the incident.

12. Immediate support following a violent incident

In the event of a violent incident involving a lone worker, the Chair or Vice Chair will immediately ensure that the employee receives any necessary medical treatment and/or advice. The Chair or Vice Chair will also consider whether the employee needs specific information or assistance relating to legal or insurance aspects and ensure appropriate written and verbal reporting of any violent incident.

13. Useful resources

The Health and Safety Executive have extensive advice and guidance on lone working, including guidance on the risks of lone working.

Lone working: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/lone-working/>

Lone working - protect those working alone:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/lone-working/employer/index.htm>

Lone workers – your health and safety:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/lone-working/worker/index.htm>

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

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.htm>

Violence and aggression at work: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/violence/index.htm>

Self-employed workers: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/self-employed/does-law-apply-to-me.htm>

Home working: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/home-working/index.htm>

APPENDIX 1 LONE WORKING RISK ASSESSMENT

This risk assessment will be carried out for and on behalf of all staff and volunteers whose working practice makes them vulnerable. Recommendations will be made to eliminate or reduce the risk to the lowest level reasonably practicable. It 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

IDENTIFIED RISK	POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCE OF RISK	ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT (H/M/L)	LIKELIHOOD OF RISK OCCURING (H/M/L)	CONTROLS TO MANAGE RISK AND FURTHER ACTION NEEDED IF NECESSARY