

HARLOW COUNCIL

Addendum to Health and Safety Policy

Aggression in the Workplace

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Introduction

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 places a duty on employers to ensure; so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of employees whilst they are at work.

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, employers must assess significant risks to employees' health and safety and then implement procedures that will minimise the identified risks to an acceptable level.

Failure to comply with the requirements of this policy is a disciplinary offence, which in serious cases could lead to dismissal.

General Statement

Harlow Council does not condone aggressive behaviour of any sort towards employees, from any source. However, in recognition that such behaviour can, and does, on occasions occur it will actively implement:

- a) Procedures to minimise the risk of aggression towards employees
- b) Procedures for the reporting of any acts of aggression
- c) A support process for any member of staff who experiences an act of aggression
- d) Training for staff that may work in areas where there is an increase risk of aggressive incidents

Aggressive behaviour includes occasions when:

- a) A physical attack on an employee is made or threatened
- b) The employee is subject to verbal abuse including; shouting, swearing, violent language, sexual racial or ageist comments, gestures or spitting
- c) Property, either the employee's or the authorities, is damaged

Some aspects of aggressive behaviour may be difficult to evaluate and quantify. Whether such incidents are considered significant ultimately depends on the individual who experienced the behaviour, and whether or not she/he feels violated.

Responsibility for the implementation of this policy rests with individual Heads of Service in conjunction with the Health & Safety Team and Human Resources.

Procedures to Minimise the Risk of Aggression towards Employees

The most effective way of dealing with the possibility of aggressive incidents is to prevent them from happening in the first place.

Although this may be a laudable aim, it is unlikely to be effectively achievable, and so procedures must be implemented to minimise the risk of aggressive behaviour.

Individual Services should already have in place procedures that they use for dealing with localised incidents, over which they have some control.

The Council will continue to consider and implement ways in which the possibility of employees being harmed is reduced or removed.

These will include:

Environmental factors

The layout of interview spaces and rooms will not only be done in a way that makes the person being interviewed feel at ease, but will focus on ensuring staff safety.

Security measures

Where staff and members of the public come into contact within Council buildings suitable security arrangements will be implemented. These will normally be measures such as 'panic alarms', but may include, in certain circumstances, the use of security personnel.

Safe working procedures

There is a need for all Services to develop working procedures that will help to reduce the risk of aggressive incidents. This is especially important for Services where staff, have a need to visit members of the public/clients in their own homes, or who undertake enforcement duties.

Generic assessments/safe working procedures relevant to this policy can be found on the Kaonet under the Health & Safety section.

Staff Safety Register

The Council's Staff Safety Register, (SSR), is accessible for Services which highlights Cautionary Contacts, allowing distribution of selected information between Services.

An example of this being that if one Service has experience of a tenant who has been aggressive towards a member of staff then using the Staff Safety Register will ensure this information is available to other Services.

Reporting and Investigating Incidents of Aggression at Work

Aggressive incidents should be reported using the online link available on the Kaonet, or via Contact Harlow who will be able to assist in the recording of information.

Employees are encouraged to report all incidents of aggressive behaviour, details of which will be treated in confidence at all times.

When the employee has completed the first part of the report form it should be passed to the Line Manager so that they can complete their part. All details are recorded and logged on the Achieve System, which is the reporting platform for a variety of incidents.

The Line Manager should investigate all incidents of aggressive behaviour with a view to preventing a recurrence. The investigation will involve talking to the member of staff concerned, but may also include other members of staff within the Team.

Any remedial action should be brought to the attention of all relevant staff.

Depending on the nature of the incident, the remedial action may also include forwarding information to other Services.

Post Incident Support

Part of the incident investigation process will be consideration of whether the member of staff concerned and/or their colleagues require additional support.

The first line of support for employees would normally be their Line Manager, and/or immediate colleagues.

Alternatively the employee may prefer to speak with Human Resources, the Safety Team, a representative from their Union, or a member of staff from another Service. There is also always an opportunity to contact the Employee Assistance support line.

Depending on the nature of the incident, the Council might also supply legal assistance/guidance in support of any action the employee wishes to take as a result of the incident.

Support of a general nature should be available from staff meetings, where discussion of violent incidents and responses and reactions to them could be aired.

Training

The Safety Team and/or Human Resources will arrange appropriate training for employees who work in areas where there is a risk of aggressive incidents.

Courses will include the following areas:

Front line staff that may have to deal with aggressive behaviour from members of the public or clients

Line Managers who may be at risk of aggressive behaviour from members of the public

Specialist courses such as 'dealing with armed hold ups'

Counselling skills

Basic signing (deaf)

NB - The above is not an exhaustive list

Sanctions

As a response to aggressive behaviour, by members of the public, the Council reserves the right to implement an appropriate response. These may include:

- Writing to the individual(s) involved pointing out that their behaviour is unacceptable and warning of future conduct
- Making an entry on the Staff Safety Register (SSR) for a period of time
- A refusal to deal with an individual at Council Offices. This may result in the need to make specific appointments

- A refusal to enter a person's home or property
- Future communication by written correspondence only
- Withdrawal of all Council Services
- Prosecution/injunction (Police or Council Prosecution – Civil Claim)

Problems within the Workplace

It is recognised that there may be occasions when violence or aggression occurs between employees at work. This can range from outright physical violence through verbal abuse to subtle methods of bullying and abuse of power.

The existing Council policy on harassment and bullying and the Council's disciplinary procedure should be used in these instances.

Should the person against whom the complaint is being made be the employees Line Manager, the employee may either consult another Manager within the Service or make a report direct to Human Resources or the Safety Team.

Links to Other Policies and Relevant Legislation

This policy is intended to provide good basic guidance in respect of aggressive incidents. Depending on the nature of what has happened it might also be necessary, however, to also consider whether other legislation or Council policies should also be consulted. The examples given below are not an exhaustive list:

- Harlow Council policy on Harassment and Bullying
- The Protection from Harassment Act 1997

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Revision History (if required)

Revision date	Previous revision date	Summary of Changes	Changes marked
August 2006	None	Original Draft document	
13/03/2008	August 2006	Updates from Draft. Inserted Revision History. Logo changed	No
1/2014	3/2008	Reviewed and updated – Contacts and procedures – SSR Noted	No
April 2020		Reviewed and updated	No