ADULT SOCIAL WORKER'S
LONE WORKING AND PERSONAL SAFETY GUIDANCE

London Borough of Camden

Adult Social Care

Version 3 – April 2019

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1. Introduction and purpose of guidance

Social care practitioners are required to undertake lone working such as travelling to visits and meet with vulnerable adults and families in their homes. As a result, they may be exposed to risks that have an impact on their personal safety.

Camden council has a duty of care to keep its practitioners safe whilst they are working within adult social care. It is the responsibility of Team Managers, Service Managers and Heads of Service' that this duty of care is met.

Camden define Lone Working as, any situation or location in which someone works without a colleague nearby; or when someone is working out of sight or earshot of another colleague.

This guidance sets out how managers will make sure that practitioners have a safe working environment, working practices, and access to relevant training, resources and professional support to keep them safe while delivering support to adults. This includes ensuring that practitioners have the right tools to take on the responsibility for their personal safety.

2. Guidance framework

Camden's corporate *Lone working and personal safety* policy sets out managers and employees' roles in identifying the risks related to lone working and taking action to eliminate or reduce them as part of a risk assessment.

This guidance deals with managing risk to the personal safety of practitioners. It also sets out the steps that managers and practitioners are required to take to ensure that they are able to keep themselves safe whilst delivering a service to adults within the community.

3. Roles and responsibilities

Heads of service are responsible for providing the overall structure and oversight of practitioner's safety by:

- putting in place a framework or guidance and practice to ensure practitioners safety;
- carrying out a risk assessment of working practice for the whole service and reviewing this as required;
- ensuring practice guidance is implemented at team and service level
- responding to any new risks to practitioner safety that may arise

- monitoring the effectiveness of any preventative measures.

Team and service managers are responsible for ensuring systems are in place within their team or service to keep practitioners safe by:

- ensuring lone working and personal safety guidance is implemented within their team or service and monitoring its impact;
- have an oversight for practitioners cases and risk assessments of individual cases
- ensure that risk assessments are adequately completed
- putting in place strategies and use of technology to keep practitioners safe
- responding to incidents and providing support
- ensuring all incidents are reported to the health and safety team
- reporting any new concerns around safety to senior managers

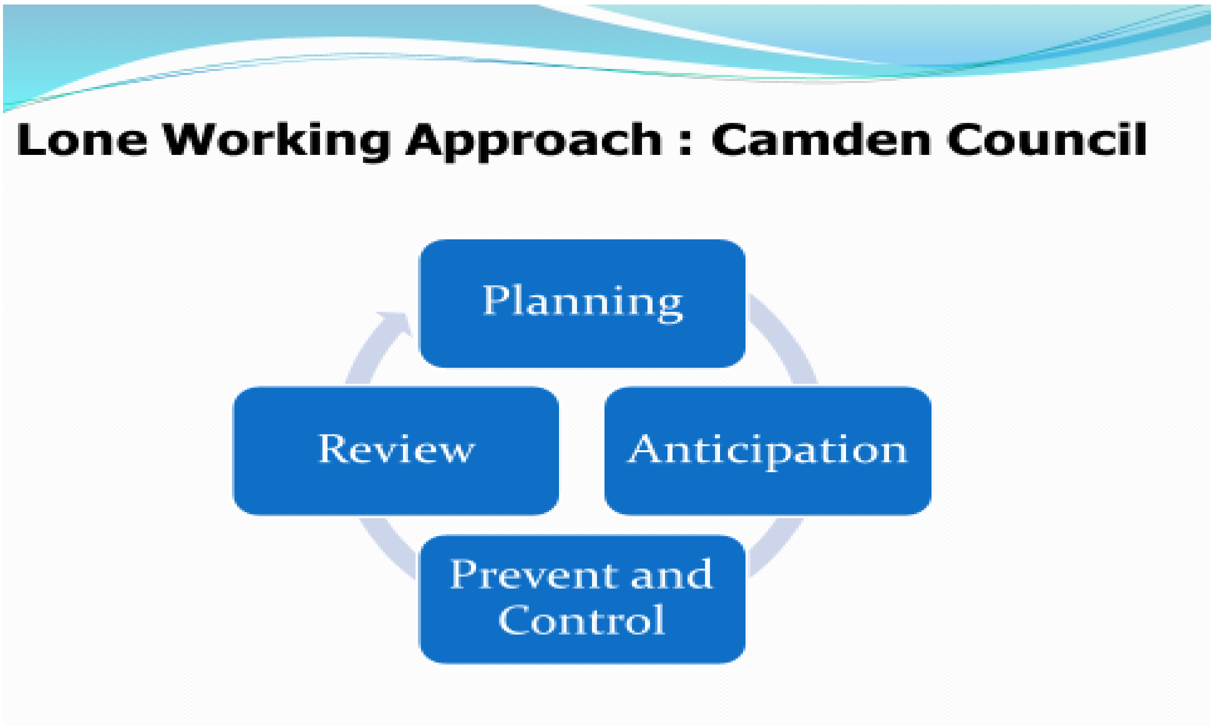
Social care practitioners (this includes social workers, occupational therapists, access and response workers, sensory needs workers and outreach workers) are responsible for cooperating with managers to ensure their own safety by:

- following the corporate Lone working and personal safety policy departmental and guidance to reduce risk
- carrying out a risk assessment for all cases allocated to them and updating risk assessments in line with this guidance
- reporting incidents involving their personal safety to their manager
- taking responsibility for their own safety

4. Identifying and managing risks

Social care practitioners are vulnerable to risks of threat and violence from adults that they work with in the community. Therefore, practitioners should ensure that they screen each case allocation thoroughly before completing a visit to identify potential risks in relation to the individual or family.

The following approach should be adhered to:



If following a visit further risks are identified, in particular high risks to personal safety, this should be discussed with their manager and added to mosaic as a warning.

5. Completing risk assessments

A risk assessment is nothing more than a careful examination of what in your work could cause harm to people, so you can weigh up whether you have taken enough precautions or should do more to prevent harm.

Case risk assessments should be carried out by the allocated practitioner and discussed with their manager. This is vital especially where there are concerns or incidents that suggest that there is a high risk to the safety of the practitioner from the adult or family.

A discussion regarding risk should take place during supervision as soon as the case is allocated or the incident arises. Practitioners can also seek advice through other forums such as during reflective peer group sessions, informal supervision and peer support.

When allocating cases, managers need to take into account levels of post-qualifying experience, the skills and expertise needed to work effectively with an individual that has been identified as hostile, difficult to engage or when a risk becomes apparent.

Risk assessments should be recorded on mosaic with a warning note stating '*See risk assessment'* completed on the Personal details screen. You can record a warning note via the *Person Details*, *Note* options on MOSAIC. Click on *Add* enter the text above and ensure to select Warning as a Type of Note.

Any practitioner carrying out work with an adult in the absence of the allocated worker should refer to the case notes and risk assessment to ensure they are aware of any specific risks attached to working with that person.

Risk assessments should be updated by the practitioner as part of the review process, following any incident or when risk increases or ceases to be present. If the risk ends, the warning note should be removed from MOSAIC. If the practitioner and manager disagree with the nature or level of risk, the matter should be referred to the service manager for further discussion.

6. Prevention

Planning for your personal safety is critical in avoiding potential incidents. Practitioners should P.L.AN. for their personal safety:

- Prepare
- Look confident
- Avoid Risk
- Never Assume

(Suzy Lamplugh Trust)

Safety issues should be discussed during supervision or as required so that practitioners and managers are aware of any specific risks and to ensure the personal safety of individual workers.

Practitioners have a responsibility to record in their calendar's full details of their visits so that their colleagues can check on their whereabouts at any time and so that their movements are known to someone in their team. This is essential so an alarm can be raised if a practitioner fails to return from a visit. *NB: people personal details should only be open to the team and not to the wider council.*

Where practitioners are carrying out visits after office hours or are carrying out consecutive visits during the day, there should be a process in place to allow them to report back to the manager to confirm they are safe and well. Each team manager has the responsibility of putting in place an appropriate system and framework that works for their team. This process needs to be in writing and easily accessible to staff to ensure consistency across the team.

Practitioners are issued with a smart phone to assist them in their day to day duties while out on visits and to help raise the alarm depending on the level of risk identified. The phone has an inbuilt function to dial 999 in case of an emergency. If there are high levels of concern, the manager should consider a joint visit and the adult should be made aware of the arrangements beforehand.

When meeting adults at 5PS, practitioners should aim to use interview/meeting rooms on the ground floor and make themselves aware of the location of panic buttons to summon support from Security if needed. The reception staff will assist in reserving a room or giving access to one of the rooms which cannot be reserved in advance. Practitioners can also request for Security to wait outside meeting rooms if there is a very high risk of violence, but this needs to be arranged with notice at reception/security.

7. Training and induction

Managers should ensure that discussion regarding personal safety is included in the induction programme for new practitioners in order to ensure that they are aware of their responsibilities under this guidance.

Practitioners should be informed of their responsibility to:

- record their whereabouts
- reporting when working away from the office
- how to report and record any incidents
- understand the importance of risk assessments, how they should be recorded
- take any necessary precautions to avoid identified risks

Managers and supervisors should ensure that during induction that new practitioner's book onto the Lone Working and Personal Safety training which can be found on Camdens Learning & Development Hub.

8. Reporting and responding to incidents

Practitioners must ensure that they report any incidents of hostility or aggression that makes them worried about their personal safety as managers need to be able to monitor levels of risk. Managers should remain vigilant to the possibility that their staff are experiencing difficulties and should also avoid making assumptions such as male workers being less at risk.

Managers should also bear in mind that incidents are likely to be under-reported as practitioners may make assumptions about threats and violence being "part of the job".

Managers should regularly discuss the topic of Lone Working during team meetings to remain up to date with what is happening on the frontline and ensure the process in place is working.

Key actions following an incident:

- Practitioners should report all incidents to their manager immediately and the manager should meet with the practitioner for a debriefing including obtaining an account of the incident.
- An incident report would be completed and sent to HR via email.
- The manager should contact the service manager to decide on whether the incident should be reported to the Police and any further action to be taken against the perpetrator.
- The manager and service manager should consider what information needs to be shared with the professional network and whether a multi-agency risk management meeting should be convened to obtain any relevant information about risks and devise a strategy for risk reduction.
- If applicable, the practitioner should place a warning note on the MOSAIC case record stating the specific risk posed by the individual and what action staff need to take to reduce risk, i.e.: visiting in pairs. This needs to be agreed by the manager.
- All incidents and accidents involving practitioners must be recorded and reported to HR using the incident reporting form: Incident Reporting

9. Supporting practitioners

Managers should offer emotional and practical support to practitioners and where appropriate refer their staff to Camden's Employee Assistance programme or occupational health if deemed appropriate. Supervision and peer group reflection sessions should also be used as a forum to discuss risks and explore issues in a safe environment. Managers should seek support from their Team managers and Joint Team Managers/Service Managers meetings.

Managers should create a culture where practitioners feel that their safety is considered a high priority and are able to raise their concerns knowing they will be taken seriously. The topic of personal safety should be regularly discussed in team meetings.

Ongoing threats on closed cases

Unfortunately, there may be situations whereby a practitioner continues to face threats or be at risk from an adult they may have worked with despite the case being closed. This could be caused by conflict regarding a decision taken on during casework.

It is important that any threats are reported to the senior management team so that an appropriate response can be agreed, including a discussion about the issue being reported to the police as continued threats are of a criminal nature. Team managers are responsible for ensuring that the practitioner involved receives support and completes a risk assessment putting in measures to ensure their personal safety.

If there is any media involvement this should be reported to the senior management team and passed to Camden's press office on: pressoffice@camden.gov.uk or call 020 7974 5717

10. Working with other agencies

It is important that information about risks from service users is shared with the professional network as this will lead to better quality risk assessments and more effective strategies for dealing with risk. Where there has been a serious incident involving a practitioner or other professional, and there is a high risk to professionals, the team manager should consider convening a risk management meeting. This should look at the risks and agree a strategy to ensure that professionals can work safely with the adult in question. Senior management should be made aware of any situations of that nature.

NB: Careful consideration should be given to the appropriateness and need to share information as well as obtaining consent to ensure that there is not a breach in confidentiality. The Health and Safety advisor should be contacted for further information and support regarding this.

11. Safe working practice

Avoiding allegations

Practitioners can be vulnerable to allegations being made against them and this may arise for a number of reasons. Examples include where an individual may

- Misinterpret words or actions
- Make a malicious allegation

- Disagreement about care recommendations i.e.: care hours or need for care home placement
- Think the practitioner is taking sides

Professional boundaries

Practitioners should take the necessary steps to avoid allegations, by maintaining professional boundaries at all times. Professional boundaries also include:

- Not using social media sites as a way of communicating with adults at any time
- Not allowing adults to access their own social media sites using council property
- Should not use their own personal mobile phones or email addresses when communicating with an adult and only use work telephones, email addresses and mobiles for contact
- Keep personal contact details private and use only office mobile phones

Staying safe during visits

Practitioners can keep themselves safe and reduce risks during visits by:

- Not enter a property where there are clear threats, for example dangerous dogs
- Make sure they have a clear exit from a property if they need to leave suddenly
- Make a quick assessment of risk before entering the home; if you are not sure make arrangements to meet the adult another time
- Be aware of techniques to calm situations, such as maintaining eye contact and speaking evenly.
- Leave as soon as there is any threat to their safety
- Only carry out visits to high risk adults jointly and during day light. Avoid making a visit at the end of the working day or outside office hours
- Consider holding meetings at neutral venues or in the office
- Always prepare for the eventuality of hostility even with adults who are not normally hostile
- If the adult is not well known, consider visiting with a colleague
- On entering the home, make a note of the layout of the property and any exits and consider your exit strategy. Try to ensure your access to the exit is not blocked. Plan in advance on how you can excuse yourself and how you can raise the alarm quickly.

Keeping safe on the streets

- Avoid using mobile phones in public and keep lap-tops and valuables out of sight
- Plan your route to avoid looking “lost”
- At night, keep to well-lit main roads as far as possible
- Always be aware of what’s going on around you and avoid wearing head-phones
- Keep car and bike keys to hand to make it quicker to find them
- Only use taxi firms that are approved by the Council and always sit in the back behind the driver
- If you are worried you are being followed, go into a shop or busy area and call for help.
- Staff are advised not to wear their ID badges in public when travelling to and from visits.