LONE WORKING

Health, Safety & Wellbeing Guidance – Schools

Health, Safety & Wellbeing Section
Corporate Services and Transformation
Derbyshire County Council
County Hall
Matlock
Derbyshire
DE4 3AG

Email: healthandsafety.enquiries@derbyshire.gov.uk

2025.08 V3.2

What is Lone Working?

There is no legal definition of 'lone working' or 'working alone'. There is however, a general acceptance that lone working means working in a situation where there are no other workers present, such that in an emergency there is no-one to give assistance or summon help.

The Health and Safety Executive in their guidance describe lone workers as "those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision."

Lone working is not time limited and there is therefore no set duration that establishes that someone is a lone worker.

As there is no one fixed description of lone working there is the potential for confusion as to who is or isn't a lone worker. For example a person could be a lone worker if they work in an isolated worksite in a large well populated office complex. However, the categorisation wouldn't apply to someone working alone in a room where colleagues were working in rooms nearby. Managers will need to look at their staff and how they work to decide if they are lone workers based on the following:-

Lone Working in Children's Services

There are potentially 3 areas of work within the scope of the department and establishments' activities where lone working is possible and these are as follows;

1. PEOPLE IN FIXED ESTABLISHMENTS WHERE:-

    i. Only one person works on the premises e.g. adult education clerk at remote site

    ii. People work separately from others in the establishment e.g. cook in a school kitchen.

    iii. People work outside normal hours e.g. caretaking or cleaning staff; staff working late alone in an office block, waking night duty staff if they are alone.

2. STAFF WHO WORK AWAY FROM THEIR MAIN BASE OR IN THE COMMUNITY:-

    This would include; for example staff who carry out home visits; detached Youth Workers; Outdoor Education Staff; Staff who regularly travel between different establishments etc.

3. HOME WORKERS:-

    Those who have officially been designated as home-workers and whose base is therefore their home if they are alone during the day.

Is Lone Working Legal?

Whilst there are some specific restrictions on lone working, (see below), there is no general legal restriction on lone working that would affect the work of most staff within the Children's Services Department, Schools and other settings.

However, the duties imposed on employers by the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 still apply.

The department therefore requires Managers of Lone Workers to identify any <u>significant</u> hazards associated with the lone working.

Once these are identified the Manager/Headteacher must ensure that a suitable and sufficient risk assessment is carried out which details the necessary control measures to reduce the risks associated with these hazards to an acceptable level. The Manager/Headteacher must ensure that these measures are implemented and that all lone workers are aware of them and follow them. Only then will Lone Working be acceptable.

Restrictions on Lone Working

These are some specific pieces of legislation which prohibit lone working and the department has therefore decided that the following activities should not be carried out by lone workers.

- Work on ladders or stepladders.
- Work on roofs
- Work in confined spaces e.g. coalbunkers, service ducts, manholes etc.
- Erecting or dismantling scaffolds (including mobile towers)
- Work with high-risk machinery e.g. circular saws, band saws, lathes etc.
- Electrical work which involves work on or near live conductors.

Lone Working – Assessing the Risks

In order for the risk associated with lone working to be fully assessed the Manager/Headteachers need to look at the lone working to be carried out systematically, as follows:-

1.   <u>IDENTIFY THE HAZARDS</u>

Firstly, the hazards associated with the lone working need to be identified and evaluated to decide which are significant and which are trivial. The risk assessment produced should focus on those which are significant. Most hazards faced by lone workers are not unique to lone working but their potential consequences are increased due to the fact that there are no other workers or supervisors present. Typical hazards include: -

i.   Violence and Robbery

ii.   Abusive or unpredictable clients (possible under influence of drugs/alcohol or emotionally charged) or other people connected to the work such as relatives who could be a problem.

iii.   Extreme weather

iv.   Manual handling

v.   Electric shock

vi.   Falls from height

vii.   Slips trips and falls at same level

viii.   Animals

ix.   Driving (particularly late at night or in remote locations)

x.   Lack of oxygen (confined space or inhalation of toxic substance)

The above is not an exhaustive list of hazards and each lone working situation will need to be evaluated. In order to ensure all the hazards are identified it is important to ensure that employees and their representatives are consulted as part of this process as they will best understand the work and potentially be aware of hazards you hadn't considered.
NB THEY SHOULD BE CONSULTED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE PROCESS SO THEY ARE AWARE OF, AND ACCEPT, ANY CONTROL MEASURES ULTIMATELY DECIDED UPON AND TO ENSURE THESE ARE RELEVANT AND WORKABLE.

2. WHO MAY BE HARMED & HOW

Once all the significant hazards have been identified and agreed the next stage is to look at who may be harmed.

You will need to identify all those who could be lone workers. This does not mean you have to identify them by name; it could be by the job role or groups of employees carrying out similar tasks.

Once you have identified those who may be at risk of harm you need to look at how they may be harmed, and the type of harm that may occur. It is often sensible to consider three elements as part of this process.

Three elements need to be considered here as part of the process:

a. The Individual

i. Medical History:
Does the person have any medical conditions which could increase or add to the risks of lone working? e.g. does the person have a hearing impairment which may affect their ability to hear a fire alarm. Other conditions which could have an effect are phobias, visual impairment, epilepsy, pregnancy, anaphylaxis etc.

ii. Experience and Training:
Is the person sufficiently experienced and trained to undertake the lone working task? Are the person's experience and skills relevant to the lone working that you are asking them to do? Will their experience and skills allow them, with appropriate information, instruction and training, to recognise the hazards and appreciate the risks of the lone working task, and to implement the control measures? Will their experience and skills allow them to react appropriately in an emergency situation?

It is vital that employees are not asked to undertake lone working tasks beyond their competence and ability. Particular attention will need to be paid to young or inexperienced/newly qualified workers. Managers/Headteachers must never just assume competence.

b. **The Task**

The task is the activity that you are expecting the lone worker to carry out. Managers/Headteachers need to consider the task in its entirety including how the lone worker will get to and from the place where the task is to be carried out, and what the task actually involves and the likely outcomes and injuries should the task be carried out incorrectly. You should consider such things as:-

   i. Access to and from the workplace

   ii. Equipment that is to be used

   iii. Whether any manual handling is involved

   iv. What time the task is to be carried out? (Does it include out of hours working? Does the amount of daylight increase/decrease the risk are there likely to be fewer people around?).

   v. Does the task involve interaction with members of the public?

   vi. Does the task involve handling money?

   vii. Does the task involve entry into a confined space?
   viii. Prevailing or likely weather conditions.

   Again the list is not exhaustive.

c. **The Environment**

The place where the lone working is to be carried out and any specific risks this creates should be considered. There will generally be two types of environments in which lone working is carried out.

   i. <u>Environments over which the Manager/Headteacher has control</u> For these environments the Manager/Headteacher should consider amongst other things whether the environment allows for:- adequate supervision; communication with the lone worker; adequate warning of emergency situation, fire alarm, panic alarm etc.; visual checks of lone worker on a regular basis.

   ii. <u>Environments over which the Manager/Headteacher has no direct control</u> This will include work at other locations either in the field or visiting clients at home or other premises. With these conditions whilst you may not have direct control it is important to establish as much information as possible before lone working

is undertaken there. You should try to establish such things as: -

- Any specific physical hazards that exist at the location of the lone working (machinery, electrical, fire)
- What communication routes exist? (e.g. will mobile phones work at the location)
- Any problems with access/egress to the area of lone working
- Who else could be present in the area/premises that lone working will occur.
- Does anyone there present a specific risk to individuals due to gender ethnicity etc?
- Are there animals present?

3. EVALUATE AND CONTROL THE RISK

Having established the significant hazards and who might be affected, it is important to ensure measures are in place to reduce the risks and harm to an acceptable level.

The easiest way to control the risk from lone working is to remove the risk all together i.e. eliminate the lone working. If practicable this should be the first measure to consider and implement, however for many of our situations this is not possible.

In this case you should look at the lone working situation and what control measures, if any, you have already in place. If these control measures reduce the risk of harm to an acceptable level then you need to ensure that these are documented, communicated and monitored as per steps 4 and 5.

Where the current control measures do not reduce the risk to an acceptable level then you will need to carry out a full assessment of the risks and put in place additional control measures to reduce it to acceptable level. It is sensible to involve the staff involved in this process, as they will fully understand the work and the risks involved. It also helps to ensure any control measures decided upon are implemented as the staff involved will have a sense of ownership of these.

The department has produced a generic risk assessment for lone working which Managers/Headteachers can use as a starting point for their specific risk assessment and control measures. There is also guidance on violence to staff which should also be referred to if necessary. The generic assessment should be adopted and adapted to suit the hazards and risks that apply to the particular lone working task being carried out and to reflect the individuals involved.

Over and above the generic risk assessment some issues that you may wish to consider when devising appropriate control measures are as follows. This is not an exhaustive list and each situation must be assessed and control measures appropriate to the risks put in place. It would however give managers a starting point to work from.

1. <u>THE INDIVIDUAL</u>
   - Does the individual have the necessary experience and competence to carry out the lone working task?
   - Has the individual been given sufficient information, instruction and training?
   - Are you aware of any medical issues the individual has and have these been taking into account?

2. <u>LONE WORKERS WORKING WITHIN A BUILDING WE CONTROL</u>
   - Who will check the lone worker, how often will they do this and how?
   - Has the lone worker been given the correct equipment and trained to use it?
   - Is any training the lone worker needs up-to-date?
   - Do you have a system for ensuring intruders cannot access the building but the lone worker can easily escape in an emergency?
   - Are routes around and within the building well lit?
   - Are workers who work out of normal hours allowed to park as close to the building as possible?
   - Is vegetation around the building trimmed back to reduce the chances of anyone hiding in it?
   - Is there an agreed means of a lone worker raising the alarm if they require help? Is there an agreed response should the alarm be raised?

3. <u>LONE WORKERS WORKING IN A LOCATION WE DON'T CONTROL</u>

   a. **<u>Before the Visit</u>**
   - Consider whether or not the work can be carried out on the premises you control rather than a remote location.
   - Ensure you have all the relevant information on any clients to be seen. This may include information from other agencies and should include all know hazards e.g. dangerous animals present, certain attitudes toward gender, ethnicity etc., or problem relatives or neighbours etc. This information must be fully

considered before deciding if it is safe to carry out lone work at this location and should be fully shared with the lone worker.

- Is there a system for lone workers to record at base their planned movements? Is this a formal system and is someone tasked to periodically monitor it? The system should include start and finish times for appointments, order of appointments, address and contact numbers for each appointment and any phoning-in arrangements. Are workers aware of it and using it?

- Is there a system which allows for alterations to the above or not. If there is, are staff aware that this is the only method by which alterations to their schedule should be made? Are staff aware that they must not add to or deviate from their recorded schedule if no such system exists?

b. **Getting to the Visit Venue**

- Has the route to the venue been planned?

- Has the visit been planned to take place during office hours where possible?

- Is there somewhere to park - as near to the venue as possible?

- Do staff know to park in well-lit and open positions away from possible assailant hiding places?

- Do staff check on arriving at a venue that they have mobile phone reception in the area, before commencing the visit?

c. **At the Visit**

- Have staff been trained in how to recognise potentially aggressive/violent situations and what to do in these?

- Do staff know it is acceptable to terminate a visit if they feel threatened?

- Do staff have a means of contacting base and agreed code words that would trigger an emergency response. Do staff at base know these and know what response to trigger?

- Is there a system for checking up on home workers at the venues they are visiting throughout the day at agreed times?

d. **After The Visit**

- There should be a formal system in place for lone workers to report that they have left their appointment safely and are back in their transport. This should be recorded. Managers/Headteachers will need to ensure that this system includes out of hours appointments as well as those during office times if their staff are expected to carry out such work.

- There should be an agreed procedure in place to follow if a lone worker does not check in at the end of a visit.

Having assessed the risk and put in place control measures then the residual likelihood of harm occurring needs to be decided.

For those risks that still present a high or medium risk rating managers will need to consider whether further control measures can be put in place to reduce the risk.

If following these measures the risk rating still remains medium then Managers/Headteachers should carefully consider whether lone working is appropriate for this task before authorising it.

Those situations where the risk is deemed to still be high following all risk control measures being put in place should be considered as unsuitable for lone working.

Recording implementing the Findings

Once all the risks have been fully evaluated and the control measures decided upon it is important that these are recorded. You should use the departments risk assessment form to do this.

It is also vital that these risk assessments are shared with all the staff involved in the lone working activity or activities and that you ensure the staff are fully familiar with and understand them.

Managers must also regularly monitor that staff are complying with the finding of the risk assessment and that it is controlling the risk to an acceptable level.

Review of Lone Working Arrangements

As the nature of the work of the department is such that situations change - for example; a new technological control measure is introduced; a client's personal circumstances alter; a new client is introduced to the service; new staff start in post; it is important that lone working risk assessments are reviewed regularly.

Managers/Headteachers should decide the frequency of routine reviews in conjunction with their staff based on the type of lone work they are doing

In addition to this, risk assessments should always be reviewed following any accident/near miss and if there is any significant change in the circumstances of the lone work.