

LONE WORKING POLICY (INCLUDING PASTORAL VISITING)

Lone working is an everyday and essential practice for ministers and church workers, including some who serve in a voluntary capacity as well.

Home working, working alone in an office, work travel and working at remote locations, such as home visits, could all constitute lone working.

The aim of this policy is to:

- help everyone (including volunteers acting on behalf of the churches) think about how to undertake lone working safely;
- show our commitment to keeping our workers and volunteers safe so far as we reasonably can.

Some of the people a lone worker might meet are those who, for medical reasons or through substance abuse, are liable to mood swings leading to physical violence. However, we recognise that threatening and violent behaviour might arise in any context and even with people previously known to and trusted by the church worker. We also recognise that the risks in lone working extend far beyond the possibility of threatening or violent behaviour, and include the possibility of accidents, safeguarding incidents (including false allegations), 'spiritual abuse' and more.

Therefore we are committed to:

- Ensuring that all one to one contact with individuals in the context of church life is properly planned, its risks considered and recorded effectively (see below).
- Ensuring that all our ministers and church workers (including volunteers acting on behalf of the churches) are aware of the need for appropriate physical, sexual, emotional and psychological boundaries. Inappropriate touching or gestures of affection are to be avoided. This is to ensure that the risk of misunderstanding and any potential upset are avoided so far as is reasonably practicable.

Planning lone working

In undertaking any lone working, ministers, church workers, and volunteers should always consider the following:

- Is lone working necessary? (Confidentiality can be assured with other people within reach.)
- Is it wise? (In this situation? With this person? In the light of how often you have met them and when you last saw them?)
- If there are casual callers take precautions before opening the door (see guidance from National Churchwatch).
- Who will be involved? And who else should know about what you are doing?

- When and where will it take place? (Be careful to avoid making any arrangements which could be misinterpreted. Note that it will sometimes be very unwise to meet someone on their own in their own home. Not only can private meetings like this easily be misinterpreted by the person you are meeting or others who know you are meeting; it can also be much harder to get away if you need to.)
- Is there a risk of violence? (A good working definition of violence is: any behaviour which produces damaging or hurtful effects, physically or mentally, on people. This includes violence from the person you are meeting, or someone else who might be present – eg another family member in their own home.)
- Are there any increased risks to the worker? (eg. dangerous or unpredictable pets, drug material lying around)
- Are there particular risks of false accusations being made, by the person being visited, about the person visiting? (If so, you should definitely only visit with someone else.)
- Are there any known medical or other factors which could make either party more vulnerable? (Some medical conditions can lead to disinhibition.)

Control measures

- The proposed lone working should be planned in advance and recorded appropriately (see below). Where appropriate (and possible) another appropriate person should be notified of what you are doing. (This is not normally necessary when work is done at home and does not involve face to face contact with other people.)
- Some of the people the lone worker is at risk of meeting are those who, through medical reasons or substance abuse, are liable to mood swings leading to physical violence. If this is, or might be, the case, recommended good practice is to encourage the person you are meeting to enter a room first and for the lone worker to seat themselves closest to the door. Should the situation lead to risk of violence, the lone worker then has a higher chance of withdrawing safely.
- The lone worker must have access to a landline phone or carry a mobile phone and be accustomed to using it.
- Automatic warning devices can be obtained for use in risky places or activities. Should you feel that one of these might be needed, you should definitely raise this with the appropriate person (eg. your Church Safeguarding Officer).
- It may be appropriate for lone workers to be asked to check in with the notified person once they have completed their task or safely reached their home following it.

Assessing Risks

The law states that when an organisation employs more than five people, a simple risk assessment should be recorded and control measures identified for their work. Therefore our PCCs must carry out and review our Lone Working Risk Assessment every two years (or sooner if for any reason it becomes clear that this is required). It is the responsibility of supervisors to ensure that anyone involved in lone working under their supervision is aware of this policy, the risk assessment, and the control measures that should be taken.

Recording Pastoral Encounters

Pastoral encounters are a significant part of lone working. They may take the form of face-to-face encounters, written or telephone communication. It is not necessary to record every such encounter, although in our current climate it is probably wise to err on the side of over-recording. The following is a guide and some discretion will be needed in putting it into practice. Please make sure any questions about putting this into practice are discussed with an appropriate person (perhaps your Church Safeguarding Officer).

If a safeguarding issue is raised, the matter must be recorded (follow separate guidance on recording safeguarding issues). Otherwise:

- a brief conversation at church on a Sunday or in the high street is unlikely to warrant a record (although this may depend on the circumstances and/or content of that conversation);
- a home or hospital visit or scheduled meeting with someone in a coffee shop or pub should normally be recorded. Exceptions would be in situations where the visit is made to someone as a friend as distinct from a visit in the name of the church. (It will be for the person making the visit to decide on the nature of the visit in such cases);
- telephone calls would not normally be the subject of a record, but this may be judged wise in certain situations;
- records may be kept when cards ('get well', condolence, congratulations etc.) are sent;
- e-mails and other messages on social media will vary considerably in content and therefore discretion will be needed when deciding whether to make a record or not; significant emails may need to be printed out and hard copies retained;
- letters are usually written to ensure there is 'something in writing' and so it is likely that a record would be appropriate.

These records should include the date, time and venue of the encounter, who was involved, and a brief note of what was discussed. These records should be retained by the church when a minister, church worker, or volunteer moves on.

In all matters, ministers, church workers, and volunteers working on behalf of the church should maintain appropriate confidentiality, while always being careful to avoid any sense of secrecy (either driven by them or by the person they are meeting with). Enforced secrecy is often a characteristic of coercive relationships. Whenever you are working on behalf of the church it will be appropriate for at least someone else to know what you are doing.

For Further Guidance:

Oxford Diocese Lone Working Policy

<https://www.oxford.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Lone-working-1.pdf>

National Churches Trust Guidance on Clergy Safety Whilst Working at Home

<https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/sites/default/files/resources/CHURCHWATCH%20clergy%20home%20security%202013.pdf>

See also Lone Working Risk Assessment approved by the PCCs in May 2021.