AGENDA 10, Enc viii) Ashington Town Council - Lone Working Policy

1. Purpose

Ashington Town Council is committed to ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of all its employees. This policy sets out the council's approach to managing the risks associated with lone working and establishes clear procedures to keep staff safe.

Lone working is not inherently unsafe, but it does require proper planning, awareness and safeguards. The council recognises its duty of care to employees who work alone, and employees have a responsibility to take reasonable care of their own safety and to follow the procedures set out in this policy.

2. Scope and Definition

This policy applies to all Ashington Town Council employees.

A lone worker is anyone who works by themselves without close or direct supervision. At Ashington Town Council, this includes:

- Office-based staff working alone in the Town Hall offices
- The Executive Officer working outside normal office hours
- Officers working in the community or at allotment sites
- Officers working at the Council's unit at Green Lane

3. General Principles

- The council will assess the risks associated with lone working and put in place reasonable measures to manage those risks.
- All staff have a responsibility to follow the procedures in this policy and to raise any concerns about their safety with the Executive Officer.
- Lone working should be avoided where reasonably practicable if the risks cannot be adequately controlled.
- Staff must not take unnecessary risks. If a situation feels unsafe, they should remove themselves from it and report it.
- Personal safety is paramount. No task is so important that it cannot wait until it can be done safely.

4. Check-In System

The council operates a check-in system for all lone working. This is a simple arrangement to ensure someone knows where you are and can raise the alarm if you do not make contact as expected.

How it works

- Before starting a period of lone working, notify the Executive Officer (or delegated person in their absence) by text or call. Tell them where you will be, what you are doing, and when you expect to finish.
- When you have finished, send a text or make a call to confirm you are safe.
- If the Executive Officer does not hear from you within 30 minutes of your expected finish time, they will attempt to contact you. If they cannot reach you, they will follow the escalation procedure (see section 10).
- If your plans change significantly (location, duration, or nature of work), update the Executive Officer.

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Delegated responsibility

Check-ins should be made to the Executive Officer. In the absence of the Executive Officer, a delegated person will be nominated to receive check-ins and this will be communicated to all staff.

The person receiving check-ins must keep their mobile phone switched on and with them during working hours.

5. Lone Working in the Town Hall Offices

The Town Hall is a shared building with controlled access. Visitors cannot enter without being let in. This provides a level of security, but lone working in the office still carries risks.

Risks

- Medical emergency with no one present to assist
- Admitting an unknown or potentially threatening visitor
- Fire or other emergency with no colleagues to raise the alarm
- Slips, trips or falls with no one to help

Mitigations

- Use the check-in system. Notify the Executive Officer when you start and finish working alone.
- **Do not admit anyone to the office that you do not know and trust.**
- If someone unknown requests entry, ask them to wait and contact a colleague or arrange for them to return when other staff are present.
- Keep your mobile phone charged and with you at all times.
- Familiarise yourself with emergency exits and fire procedures.
- If you feel unwell or unsafe, stop work and contact the Executive Officer or another colleague.

6. Working Outside Normal Office Hours

The Executive Officer frequently works late outside normal office hours. Other staff may occasionally need to do so for meetings or urgent work.

Staff often start work before normal office hours. The same safeguards that apply to late working apply equally to early starts.

Before arriving at the Town Hall for an early start, notify the Executive Officer (or delegated person) of your expected arrival time. On arrival, send a text or make a call to confirm you have entered the building safely. If other staff are due to arrive later that morning, confirm when you expect them.

Be aware that the building may be unlit or have reduced heating. Take particular care on stairs and ensure you know how to operate lighting in the areas you will be using.

Additional safeguards

- The check-in system is essential when working outside normal hours. Always notify the Executive Officer (or delegated person) before starting and when you finish.
- For early morning starts, check in on arrival and be aware the building may be unlit or have reduced heating - take care on stairs and familiarise yourself with lighting controls
- Avoid admitting visitors to the building when working alone outside normal hours wherever possible.
- Ensure you have a means of summoning help (mobile phone, access to landline).
- Be aware of your exit routes and do not block them with bags, boxes or other items.

- If the nature of your work changes or you expect to be significantly later than planned, update the Executive Officer.

7. Community-Based Lone Working

Officers regularly work out in the community. While they are often surrounded by members of the public, they are working without direct colleague support.

Risks

- Confrontation with members of the public
- Working in isolated locations (particularly some allotment sites)
- Medical emergency in a location where help may be slow to arrive
- Vehicle breakdown in a remote area
- Adverse weather conditions
- Unfamiliar or unpredictable environments

Mitigations

- Use the check-in system. Before starting your shift or visiting a site, notify the Executive Officer of your location and expected finish time.
- Carry your work mobile phone at all times, fully charged.
- For visits to isolated allotment sites, check in with the Executive Officer on arrival and when leaving.
- Plan your route and let the Executive Officer know if it changes significantly.
- If you feel a situation is becoming confrontational or unsafe, disengage calmly and leave. Do not put yourself at risk.
- Wear appropriate clothing and footwear for the conditions and environment.
- Be aware of your surroundings and trust your instincts. If something feels wrong, it probably is.
- Report any incidents, near misses or concerns to your line manager as soon as practicable.

8. Working at the Neighbourhood Services Unit

The Neighbourhood Services unit is located away from the Town Hall in a shared, gated space. While the gated environment provides some security, the unit is more isolated than the main office.

Risks

- Medical emergency with no colleagues present to assist
- No landline telephone at the unit
- Isolation from other council staff
- Manual handling and use of equipment without immediate assistance available

Mitigations

- Use the check-in system. Notify the Executive Officer when you arrive at the unit and when you leave.
- Keep your mobile phone charged and with you at all times while at the unit.
- Do not undertake high-risk manual handling tasks alone. If a task requires two people, wait until assistance is available.
- Know the location of the first aid kit and fire extinguisher.
- If you feel unwell while at the unit, stop work, notify the Executive Officer, and seek assistance.

Use outside normal working hours

The unit must not be used outside normal working hours without prior approval from the Executive Officer.

If approval is granted for out-of-hours use, the following additional safeguards apply:

- The check-in system must be used, with check-ins at the start, during (if working for more than two hours) and at the end
- The reason for out-of-hours attendance must be justified and recorded
- High-risk activities must not be undertaken
- The member of staff must have a fully charged mobile phone

9. What Staff Must and Must Not Do

Staff must:

- Follow the check-in system and check in as required
- Keep their mobile phone charged and with them when lone working
- Report any incidents, near misses or safety concerns promptly
- Remove themselves from any situation that feels unsafe
- Familiarise themselves with emergency procedures for each location they work in
- Cooperate with any risk assessments or safety measures put in place

Staff must not:

- Admit anyone to the office that they do not know and trust when working alone
- Use the operational unit outside normal working hours without prior approval
- Undertake high-risk manual handling tasks alone
- Put themselves at risk to complete a task that can wait
- Ignore concerns about their own safety or the safety of colleagues
- Disable or ignore the check-in system requirements

10. Escalation Procedure

If the Executive Officer (or delegated person) does not receive an expected check-in and cannot reach the lone worker:

- Wait 15 minutes and try to contact them again by phone and text.
- If still no response after 30 minutes from the expected check-in time, assess the situation and consider attempting further contact, visiting the location, or contacting emergency services as appropriate.
- If the Executive Officer is the lone worker and does not check in as expected, the delegated person (or Chair of Personnel Committee if no delegate is available) will follow this escalation procedure.
- If there is reason to believe the lone worker is in immediate danger or has suffered a medical emergency, call 999 without delay.
- A record of any escalation will be kept and reviewed to identify any improvements needed.

11. Council Commitments

The council commits to the following to support safe lone working:

- Providing staff with a work mobile phone for use when lone working, where a landline is not available.

- Ensuring arrangements are in place for a delegated person to receive check-ins in the absence of the Executive Officer.
- Conducting risk assessments for lone working activities and reviewing them annually or when circumstances change.
- Providing training and guidance to staff on lone working procedures.
- Investigating any incidents or near misses and taking action to prevent recurrence.
- Considering additional safety measures where risk assessments identify the need, including personal safety devices or lone worker apps if appropriate.
- Ensuring that no member of staff is penalised for removing themselves from a situation they believe to be unsafe.
- Reviewing this policy annually and updating it as necessary.

12. Responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Council	Ensuring adequate resources, policies and procedures are in place to manage lone working risks
Executive Officer	Overall responsibility for implementing this policy; receiving check-ins from lone workers; nominating a delegated person during absences; approving out-of-hours unit use; investigating incidents
All Staff	Following this policy; using the check-in system; reporting concerns and incidents; taking reasonable care of their own safety

13. Related Documents

- Building Security and Visitor Management Protocol
- Health and Safety Policy
- Safe Working Practice
- Incident Reporting Procedure
- Risk Assessments

14. Monitoring and Review

The Executive Officer shall be responsible for reviewing this policy annually to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects current working practices. Any significant incidents will trigger an immediate review. Changes will be approved by the Personnel Committee.