
LONE WORKING POLICY

2024

Policy

The Diocese of York is committed to the health, safety and wellbeing of all its clergy, staff and volunteers who, in the course of their work and ministry, may have to work alone, and this policy provides a framework for managing the risks presented by lone working, as well as identifying the responsibilities each person has in this situation. This policy relates to all church personnel who work out in the community and/or in other people's homes, or who work alone in churches or other establishments and may be physically isolated from colleagues or family, without access to immediate assistance.

Principles

It is recognised that lone working is an everyday and essential practice for clergy and church workers, and it is therefore important that the additional risks that arise from this are fully understood, and appropriate risk management put in place in order that they can go about their daily work in relative safety. This policy should therefore be read in conjunction with the Church of England Code of Safer Working Practice, which also sets out the appropriate boundaries for preventing misunderstandings and reducing risks.

All workers and volunteers should avoid working alone if it is not necessary, and work with others where possible, however, if this is not feasible, they should be aware of the importance of personal safety and take all reasonable precautions to safeguard themselves from harm, as they would in any other circumstances. It may be helpful for the PSO, or other relevant person, to spend some time looking at possible risks for lone working with a group of people e.g. home visitors. This will help raise awareness.

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) is responsible for ensuring that all lone working activities within the church are formally identified, and appropriate risk assessments are undertaken to identify and reduce the risks which lone working presents. In drawing up and recording an assessment of risk, issues such as the place of meeting, security, the risk of violence and the nature of the task or activity should be considered alongside any other factors appropriate to the circumstances.

Everyone can differently see the perception of risk, and, therefore, it is important that all lone workers receive relevant information about the identified risks within their role, in order that they are equipped to recognise these, and are enabled to take responsibility for their own safety and security.

All risks identified to workers arising from lone working must be recorded, in accordance with requirements of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

Parishes should ensure they have adequate insurance in place to cover all lone working activities which have been formally identified by a risk assessment.

Where there is any reasonable doubt about the safety of a lone worker, consideration should be given by the parish to undertake other arrangements to complete the task or activity, such as ensuring individuals work in pairs.

Procedure

It is important not to over-emphasise the risks of lone working and create an unnecessary fear amongst workers that is disproportionate to the reality of the risks faced. However, lone workers do face increased risks because they do not have the immediate support of colleagues, or others, if an incident occurs, and particularly if they are in someone's home, or are working in an isolated or rural location. The following guidance is, therefore, intended to reflect good practice in relation to the protection of lone workers, and can also be used by churches to develop their own local procedures.

Working Alone in Church or at another Building

Within this document, lone working refers to situations where individuals, in the course of their duties, work alone or are physically isolated from colleagues and without access to immediate assistance. In this regard, PCCs should ensure that they:

- Undertake a risk assessment on building safety to determine if the church/building needs extra security. For example, spy holes, camera doorbells, door chains or outside lighting can all help to safely identify callers.
- Consider how lone workers will raise the alarm if necessary, and ensure they have a means of communicating with others in the event a problem arises.
- Agree a protocol for visitors to the building; and decide whether to allow visitors in when only one person is there.

No worker should ever plan to be alone on church premises with children or young people. However, if they should find themselves in this situation, it is important that another adult is made aware immediately. The worker should also assess the risks involved in sending the child or young person home, against the risk and vulnerability of being alone with them.

Personal Safety

Whilst the PCC has a responsibility to ensure their lone workers' health, safety and welfare, there are also several things individuals can do to take reasonable care of themselves. As above, PCCs should take opportunities to discuss this as a group but without unnecessarily raising concerns.

- Lone workers should never put themselves at risk. If a situation arises that they are unfamiliar with, or in which they feel unsafe, they should withdraw and seek further advice or assistance.
- Staff and volunteers should conduct their own risk assessment on the occasions when they are working alone, which will help them to decide how safe a situation is and what action should be taken to avoid danger. If there are any concerns or risks known before a visit made, you are advised always to undertake a risk assessment. In these circumstances, consider whether the visit is necessary, or whether you should be accompanied by another church officer. In addition, visiting in pairs may be advisable, especially if the adult is perceived to be vulnerable.
- Lone workers should be aware of themselves, their behaviour, and the signals they may be giving, and to think about their body language, tone of voice and the choice of words they use with others that could be taken as confrontational.
- Staff and volunteers who work alone also need to be aware of changes in the behaviour of the person they are with, especially if they become angrier or threatening.
- If an incident occurs – even if it is considered a minor incident – the worker should make the activity leader and or Parish Safeguarding Officer know as soon as possible in order that the appropriate risk assessment and follow-up action can be taken.

- Staff and volunteers should take every reasonable precaution to ensure that they do not disclose their personal details, such as address and telephone number or their social networking profile, without good reason.

Home Visits

Home visits can be potentially risky situations, and therefore the PCC is responsible for ensuring that appropriate risk management measures are in place before a home visit is undertaken, which may include ensuring that staff and volunteers work in pairs on a first visit. Lone workers should also be aware of their responsibilities in ensuring their personal safety when visiting people in their own homes. It is important to note that members of clergy should be included when considering good practice in respect of home visits.

- Lone workers should always ensure that someone else, i.e. either the activity leader and/or colleague/family member, is aware of their movements. This means providing them with the address of where they will be visiting, details of the person they are visiting, telephone numbers if known and expected arrival and departure times, ensuring that someone is aware that they have returned home or their next destination safely.
- Do not call unannounced; call by appointment if appropriate telephoning the person just before visiting.
- Be clear about what support you can offer and the purpose and limitations of any pastoral care/support that is available.
- All staff and volunteers who work in the community and undertake home visits should ensure that they always have access to a mobile phone, which is in good working order.
- All home visits should be recorded, as clear and detailed record keeping may prevent problems in the future.
- No staff or volunteers should ever undertake a visit to a child or young person in their home unless another adult is present.
- Lone workers should be alert to any signs of potential danger during a home visit and be prepared to leave immediately if they have any concerns. Confrontation should always be avoided, and lone workers should never assume that violence will not happen, as while there are many home visits made safely every day, personal safety is paramount. Any incidents should be reported to the activity leader and/or the Parish Safeguarding Officer as soon as possible.
- Staff and volunteers who undertake home visits should ask the person they are visiting if they can secure any pets, they may have which may present a safety risk.
- Where possible, home visits should be conducted in the morning or early afternoon, rather than the evening or late afternoon, in order that lone workers can avoid travelling in the dark, particularly in areas that they do not know, or may feel uncomfortable in. If this is not feasible, consideration should be given to working in pairs.
- Do not make referrals to any agency that could provide help without the adult's permission, and ideally encourage them to set up the contact, unless there are safeguarding concerns.
- Never offer 'over the counter' remedies to people on visits or administer prescribed medicines, even if asked to do so.
- Do not accept any gifts from adults other than token items, to avoid misunderstandings or subsequent accusations from the person or their family. If someone wants to make a donation to the church, put it in an envelope, mark it on the outside as a donation and obtain a receipt from the Treasurer.

Records

Make a note of the date when you visit people, report back about the visit to the agreed named person and say what is concerning or going well. They will report safeguarding concerns to the Parish Safeguarding Officer and/or incumbent or directly to the DSA if they are not available.

Clergy and church workers should keep a regular record of pastoral encounters, including details such as date, time, subject, and actions to be taken. It is important to keep factual records and separate these from any opinions expressed.

All records should be held in a secure, locked cabinet in the parish and retained in line with the guidance provided by the Church of England in line with GDPR, the Data Protection Act 2018.

Guidance Notes: Checklist

Issue	Action
Who works alone?	Identify and record all workers and volunteers who work alone either all or part of the time, including their role, the location/s they work at, their tasks and responsibilities.
What are the risks?	Identify any risks that may be associated with lone working (see below).
Are your lone workers protected from harm?	Identify the preventative and protective measures needed to ensure your workers and volunteers are not put at risk because they work alone.
What training, guidance and support do you give to lone workers?	Check what information and training your lone workers are given to ensure they understand the risks of their work. Clarify the precautions they need to take to keep themselves safe, including what they should do in an emergency.
Is there a policy on lone working?	Ensure there are written procedures in place for lone workers in the parish, as well as ongoing support and supervision.

What are the Risks?

The following list is not exhaustive but outlines some examples of potential risks of lone working.

- The remoteness of the setting
- Whether there is a safe way in or out for the worker/volunteer/visitor
- Whether the worker/volunteer visits unfamiliar persons
- Whether there is potential for verbal or physical abuse
- The vulnerability of the worker/volunteer feeling isolated, anxious, or stressed
- Whether workers/volunteers carry valuables or equipment i.e. money
- Whether equipment or materials can be managed safely by one person
- Whether the person is medically fit and able to work alone
- Whether there is access to a telephone or communication system
- How the worker/volunteer will obtain help in an emergency
- Whether or not there is adequate first aid cover
- Whether workers/volunteers conduct visits during unsocial hours

Once the risks have been identified you will need to consider whether the lone worker can safely do the work. This means considering the likelihood of harm that could be caused to the lone worker as well as the impact the risk event could have upon them or others if something happens.

A suggested way of assessing the risk is given below.

Risk Likelihood	Risk Impact
Low May only occur in exceptional circumstances.	Low The impact is small and easily managed.
Medium Expected to occur in some circumstances	Medium The risk event could have a meaningful effect upon the individual/parish in terms of cost, health, reputation, etc.
High Expected to occur in many/most circumstances	High The risk event could have a devastating effect upon the individual or parish in terms of cost, health, reputation, etc.

Safety Measures

Once risks have been identified and assessed, the next step is to decide on the preventative and protection measures for dealing with them. The approach taken should be to either reduce or remove the risk through ensuring the proper provision of training, information, supervision, and/or protective equipment.

Risk Factor	Risk Likelihood	Risk Impact	Safety Measures
Physical/Verbal abuse or threatening behaviour during a meeting/home visit	Low/Medium	Medium/High	<p>On site, install security equipment/means of raising the alarm or summoning assistance. Check room layout to limit the risk of being trapped by potentially violent person.</p> <p>First home visits to be done in pairs. Workers must carry a mobile phone and provide details to another of home visit. Incidents of concern must be recorded.</p> <p>Lone worker procedures included in induction and training. Report any incidents of violence or aggressive behaviour.</p>
Allegations of abuse or harm against workers	Low	High	<p>Safer Recruitment process followed for all pastoral/home visitors. Lone worker procedures included in induction and training.</p> <p>Good practice guidance provided and followed in relation to touch, gifts, confidentiality, etc.</p>
Accident/Falls	Low/Medium	Medium	<p>On site, means of raising the alarm or summoning assistance. Provision of first aid equipment.</p> <p>Provision of proper equipment i.e. ladders, protective clothing, and training.</p>

Guidance Notes: Pastoral Encounters

Pastoral encounters are at the heart of much of the church's ministry, undertaken by clergy and other church workers every day. However, one to one contact with individuals in the context of pastoral support must be carefully planned, risk assessed and recorded to ensure that vulnerable people are protected and that workers are not wrongly accused of abuse or misconduct.

It is essential that workers involved in pastoral care including clergy and others with a ministry, develop an understanding of themselves and how they relate to others, and always ensure they respect professional boundaries. There is also a need to ensure that adequate records are kept and retained of pastoral encounters that occur.

What is a Pastoral Encounter?

For this purpose, a pastoral encounter includes any planned visit or contact with a parishioner or church member occurring at the person's home, at the church, the vicarage, and/or in a public place, such as a hospital or café. It may take place face-to-face, by phone or through electronic contact.

It is important when leading a pastoral conversation that the other person is clear that should safeguarding concerns emerge these will need to be shared with the appropriate safeguarding lead. There is a possibility that some people consider that all pastoral conversations in a church context have the same status as confession, and appropriate steps should be taken to ensure that there is a clear understanding that this is not the case.

Recording Pastoral Encounters

Keeping accurate records of pastoral encounters is helpful and good practice. All records remain the property of, and be retained by, the church along with other parochial records. The expectation is that a note is made either in hard copy or electronically of the person seen or contacted on a particular date and the nature of the contact, e.g. baptism, bereavement, funeral. Brief remarks made in casual conversation or at worship or a social occasion need not routinely be recorded.

Example

Jim Trott mentions to Revd Geraldine Granger at coffee following Sunday Eucharist that he is looking forward to the baptism of his grandson **No record needed.**

Susan Price, Pastoral Visitor, visits Brian Jones at home to talk about the loss of his wife. **Record date, name of visitor, name of person visited and purpose of visit: bereavement.**

All records, paper and electronic, containing personal information also come under the provisions of GDPR the Data Protection Act 2018. Further guidance regarding this can be in the national guidance document 'Safeguarding Records – Joint Practice Guidance for the Church of England and the Methodist Church, 2015. Care needs to be taken to ensure records are factual and avoid value judgements, supposition, or personal opinion, as they must be made available for the individual to read if they ask to do so.

Everything is confidential in pastoral ministry unless it is agreed it can be shared with the informed consent of the individual. However, if the individual's behaviour or situation threatens the wellbeing

of themselves or others, disclosure to a relevant authority may be a necessity, and in some cases a legal requirement, particularly regarding the safety of vulnerable groups.

Responding to Safeguarding Issues

A safeguarding issue is one where an individual, child or adult may appear to be at risk of abuse or may present a risk to others. Such issues cannot be kept confidential. They must be raised with the Diocesan Safeguarding team and may have to be reported to statutory authorities. If a person discloses or discusses matters on which action needs to be taken a fuller record must be made of what it was, and what action was taken.

Example

Letitia Cropley, an elderly lady with restricted mobility tells Fr Peter Clifford on a pastoral visit that she has stopped coming to church because of the behaviour of Owen Newitt who had been giving her lifts.

Record: Date, name of visitor, name of person visited and purpose: pastoral visit: See separate file note.

File Note:

4pm: Visited Letitia Cropley who is becoming housebound. She has been relying on lifts from Owen Newitt, but she told me she had stopped coming to church because he had been 'getting too personal.' I asked her what she meant, and it appeared he had been touching her and, on occasion, kissing her. She said: I don't want to get him into trouble and I'm sure he's just being friendly, but it doesn't suit me, I'm old fashioned.' I reassured her that we considered this to be inappropriate contact and said I was sorry it had happened. I offered to find her another driver so she could come to church, and she said she would like that. Contacted the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser. See e-mails confirming advice given and action taken.

Fr Peter Clifford, Vicar, St Mary the Virgin Church

Is this guidance mandatory?

This guidance is recommended as best practice. It is therefore expected that the PCC ensure that all those involved in pastoral care are aware of the importance of these guidelines.

Good record keeping, particularly in the areas of pastoral ministry and safeguarding, also demonstrates the Church's wider accountability to society in relation to its activities and is an essential part of its care and responsibility for those who serve the church.

Where and for how long records of pastoral encounters be kept?

Where records of pastoral encounters are kept will be a matter for local decision, however they must always be stored safely and securely and should be easily accessible within 24 hours to those who may have a need to know this information, i.e. the Incumbent or Parish Safeguarding Officer. All records must be retained in line with current Church of England Guidance.

