



VHA Policy Document

LONE WORKING POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Reviewed: December 2024

Next Review Due: December 2027

VHA LONE WORKING POLICY AND PROCEDURE

A. THE POLICY

VHA recognises the right of its officers to perform their duties in safety.

We do not expect staff to work alone where there are reasonable grounds to presume that this will give rise to unacceptable risks with regard to their personal health, safety and security.

We will take all practical steps to ensure that all staff whose responsibilities and duties occasionally require them to work alone are properly equipped and trained in respect of personal safety.

A duty is placed on all staff to act in such a way so as not to place themselves or their colleagues at risk. Where staff work alone, VHA places an even greater trust in them to act responsibly and safely.

VHA has developed the following procedures to support its officers in circumstances which may compromise their health, safety and security.

B. PROCEDURES

1. Security and Prevention

Staff should be aware that in the normal course of their duties, potentially dangerous and aggressive situations may occur. This is particularly true where they have direct contact with the public, including tenants, some of whom may be experiencing traumatic events in their lives and may often feel frustrated or angry. It is important that staff, recognise this and deal with situations tactfully in order to avoid the matter getting out of control, and possibly leading to aggression and assault.

In particular staff should:

- **Be Aware** and trust their intuition. This means if staff members feel scared or uncomfortable, they should not be afraid to act on it.
- **Be Alert** to their surroundings, and of people's body language and behaviour.
- **Take Action** if in danger. Staff should walk away, rather than confront or provoke, directly or indirectly, a potentially dangerous situation.
- **Report** any concerns or incidents to the line manager immediately.

All staff are required to complete an individual lone worker risk assessment form annually and have these signed off by their line manager and submitted to the Chief Executive.

Essential Requirements for Operational Situations

- a) To minimise the risk of assault, VHA will ensure that all staff who have direct contact with the public receive adequate information, instructions and training in recognising and dealing with potentially aggressive situations.
- b) All staff working out of the office should, **as a matter of course carry an identity card and a charged mobile phone at all times**. Individuals are responsible for ensuring that mobile phones are charged and are otherwise fully functional, before leaving the office. **Sky Guard alarms are also available and must be carried at all times in lone working situations.**
- c) Interviews, however brief, should not be conducted alone if there is any doubt as to the mood or behaviour of the interviewee.
- d) Staff must complete details of appointments and planned visits on their electronic diaries. **This is an absolute requirement and failure to do so could result in disciplinary action being taken.**

It is essential that the time anticipated for staff returning to the office be clearly shown. Lone visits should not be conducted outside of office opening hours unless in emergency. Extra care must be taken when undertaking visits after dark. The Chief Executive or line manager must be informed in such circumstances.

Given the practical working requirements of maintenance staff, certain exceptions to these general rules are considered acceptable, as follows:

In circumstances where out-of-hours activity is undertaken the officer involved should provide text notification to their line manager or the Chief Executive to indicate that they have been called out to an address and the nature of the call-out. They should also confirm when they have completed the call-out and have returned home.

In every other respect, the rules apply to **all** staff.

- e) It is each staff member's responsibility to advise their manager if they are delayed more than 20 minutes after the stated return time. (See also section 3.)
- f) Should staff conduct an unplanned visit, they must advise their manager accordingly.
- g) If staff do not intend to return to the office that day they must advise their manager on completion of all visits and confirm that they are safe. Should such a call not be received the manager must report to the Chief Executive immediately.

- h) Where there has been an incident of actual or threatened assault, or where a partner agency has advised of potential violence, in respect of a tenant of the association, a suitable identification measure, known to all staff, must be applied to the Omiledger record, highlighted by a pop-up to alert the need for caution. On no account should the tenant be visited alone thereafter if such indication appears on the file.
- i) Staff should be aware of the location, and use, of panic buttons, and in the event of an emergency these should be activated.
- j) Key holders should not enter the office building alone should they be called to the office following activation of the alarm.
- k) Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HSW Act) and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (MHSW), VHA will complete a Lone Worker Risk Assessment for all employees.
- l) All lone workers will be given access to first-aid kits suitable for minor injuries.

2. Lone Working in the Office

VHA has a small number of staff. It is recognised that on occasions the offices will be understaffed. It is the responsibility of the managers to ensure that such occasions are minimised, by proper co-ordination of appointments. During office opening hours at least two members of staff should always be in the building, and if necessary, appointments may have to be postponed.

The offices must be closed and all external doors locked, if for any other reason there is only one employee present.

Staff working alone outside normal office hours may do so with the prior agreement of their line manager. In such circumstances, all external doors must be kept locked, and access denied to any personal callers.

3. Failure to Return

Should a member of staff not return to the office within 20 minutes of their expected arrival, and has failed to advise of a delay, the following procedure will apply:

- a) The relevant manager will attempt contact by mobile phone.
- b) Following continued failed attempts to contact by mobile phone, over a period of 15 minutes, contact should be made with appointees to establish the whereabouts of the staff member, and the Chief Executive will be alerted.
- c) Should whereabouts not be established, the Police will be informed of the situation and, in liaison with the Police, the staff member's next of kin will be contacted.

- d) The Chief Executive must be fully informed and involved. In the absence of the Chief Executive, a manager, the Chair of the Association, or any available member of the Board should be informed, with authority to act.

4. Request for Assistance

Should any staff member receive a telephone call from a lone worker requesting help and Police assistance the following procedure will apply:

- a) Should a lone worker requesting such assistance feel that direct contact with the Police could aggravate a situation they should use the Sky Guard unit to summon assistance.
- b) The recipient of the call should try and establish the caller's whereabouts and inform the Police immediately, and then alert the Chief Executive (or as described above under 3.d).
- c) The Chief Executive will inform the Police of the situation and, in liaison with the Police, the staff member's next of kin will be contacted.

5. Assault / Violence

The Health and Safety Executive's definition of work-related violence is:

'any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances related to their work'

Verbal abuse and threats are the most common types of incident. Physical attacks are comparatively rare. The health and well-being of the staff member is the primary consideration. Should such an attack occur the following procedure will apply:

- (a) Should it be deemed necessary, obtaining medical assistance must be the first priority.
- (b) The member of staff involved should contact the Police and/or Ambulance Service immediately by dialling 999 (landline) or 112 (Mobile), notify the office, and if possible speak to the Chief Executive. If unable to contact in person, the victim should, if at all possible, request someone to contact the office on his or her behalf.
- (c) The Chief Executive (or deputy under 3.d) will assess the circumstances, and if deemed necessary, attend the person who has been assaulted, accompanied as also deemed appropriate. If that person does attend they must ensure that all known details of the incident are left with another member of staff.
- (d) An Incident Report Form must be completed by the victim of the assault as soon as is practicably possible.
- (e) The incident must be recorded on the **Violence Incident Report Form** (Appendix 4), and in the case of a tenant a copy of the report form should be place on their Omnidledger record.

- (f) The Chief Executive is responsible for appropriate action taken following such an incident. At the very least, the Chair of the Association, or any other available member of the Board should also be informed.
- (g) VHA recognises that the victim may in such circumstances need to take leave until he or she is able to return to work, for which purpose a medical report may be sought. Such leave would be fully paid.

Should an incident of assault occur in the office the Chief Executive should be called immediately and the same procedure followed from (d) onwards.

6. Threat of Assault

A “threat of assault” is deemed to be the same as any verbal abuse or threat of violence, if an officer feels threatened, or at risk.

- a) If a staff member experiences difficulty in handling a threatening or abusive telephone call they should either forward the call to their manager or give the caller warning, and terminate the call. Any such termination should be reported to the relevant manager.
- b) Should a threat be made in person out of the office, the member of staff should immediately retreat. If necessary they should call the office for assistance or return to the office without delay and report the incident to the Chief Executive.
- c) If violence is threatened within the office the staff member should withdraw immediately and seek assistance. Where necessary the panic button should be activated. The Chief Executive must be informed and he or she should request that the person leave the office. Such action should be taken in the presence of another member of staff. If the person fails to leave, the Police must be called.
- d) All threats should be reported by completion of a **Violence Incident Report form (Appendix 4)**, and in the case of a tenant, a copy placed on the Omnidledger record.

7. Sexual or Racial Harassment

Members of staff working alone who feel that they have been either sexually or racially harassed, by any person with whom they meet or talk on behalf of the Association, must be free to have no further contact with that person. A report should be made to the Chief Executive and alternative arrangements made.

8. Monitoring / Reporting

All incidents of threatened or actual assault will be reported to VHA’s Board of Management.

9. Legal Action

Both criminal and civil legal remedies may be available to a staff member who is assaulted in the course of their employment. VHA will support any staff member who undertakes any such action.

Where appropriate we will consider taking civil proceedings to obtain an injunction against an assailant, if there is a continuing threat of assault or harassment.

10. Training

All staff are required to be properly and professionally trained in the handling of aggressive behaviour, and other behaviour likely to cause risk of personal injury.

VHA will ensure that such training is provided.

Any member of staff not so trained should advise their manager accordingly so that arrangements can be made to correct the situation.

C. NOTES FOR STAFF:

Appropriate forms associated with the foregoing procedures are attached to this document.

All staff are required to familiarise themselves with the detail of this policy and procedure document, and to sign the declaration at the end confirming that they have done so.

The document will be reviewed at least annually, and amendments made if and when found necessary, for which the Chief Executive assumes responsibility. Staff are expected to understand current procedure at any given time, and any revisions should also be signed off as read and understood by staff.

STAFF DECLARATION FORM

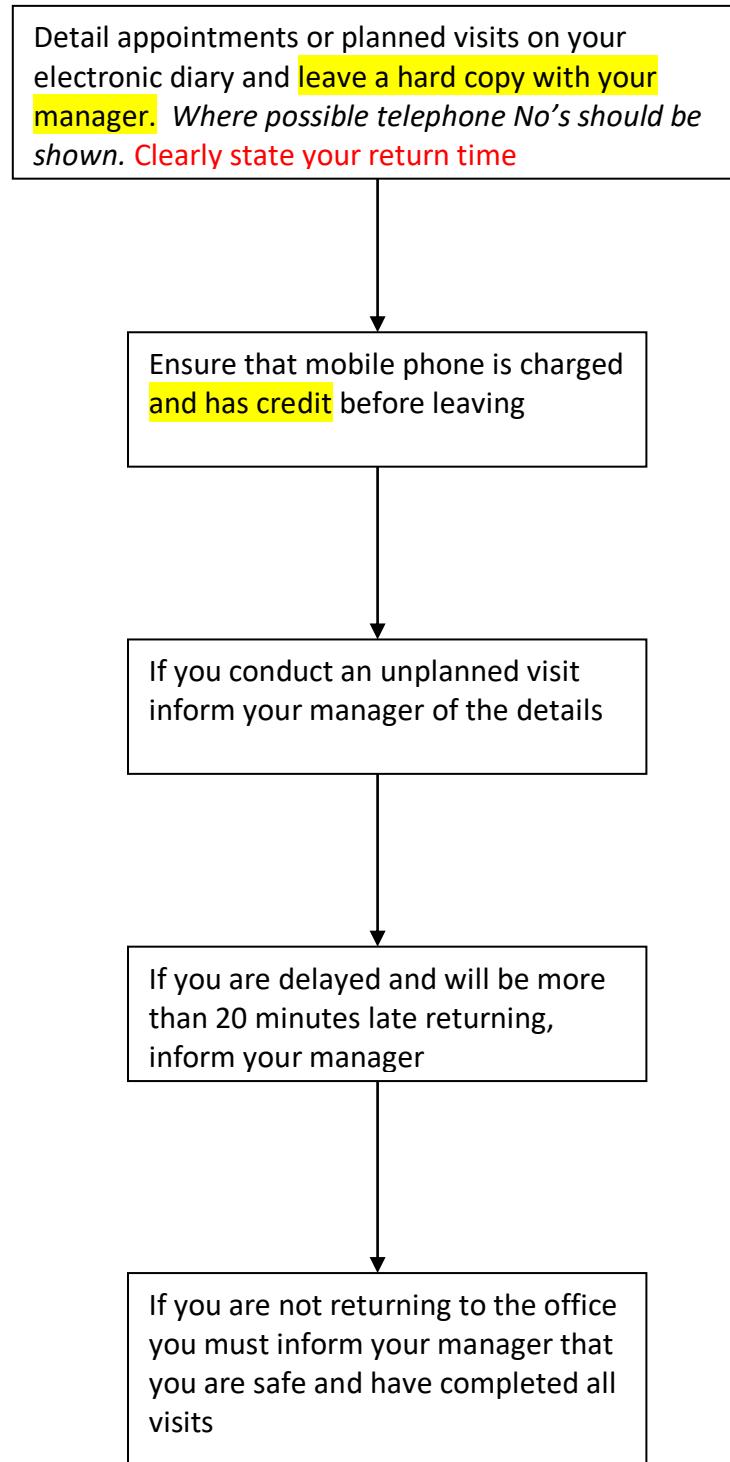
I have read and fully understand the above Policy and Procedure for Lone Working.

Signed: Date:

Name:.....

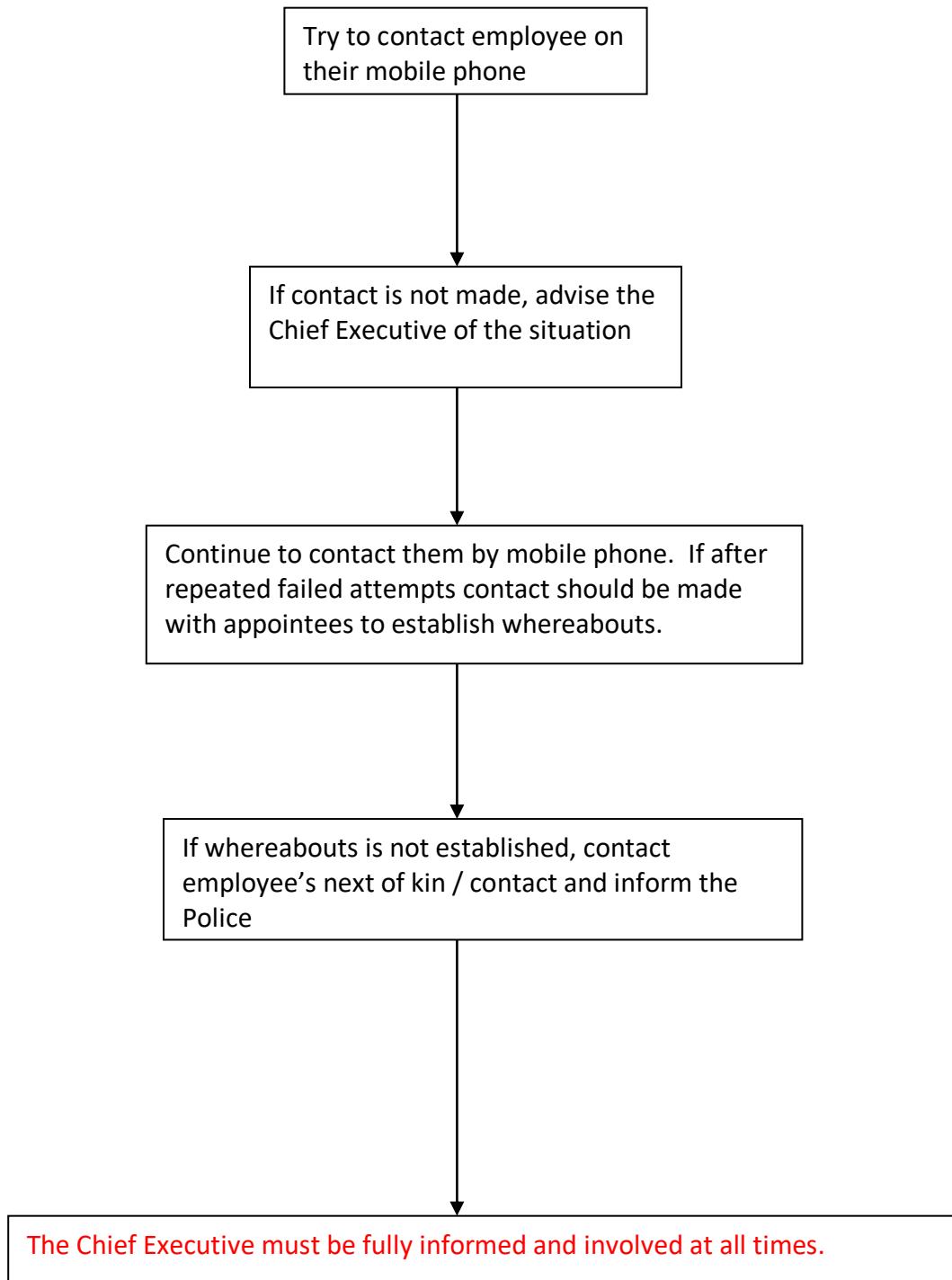
Position:.....

Appendix 1 - Lone Working (Out of Office) Procedure



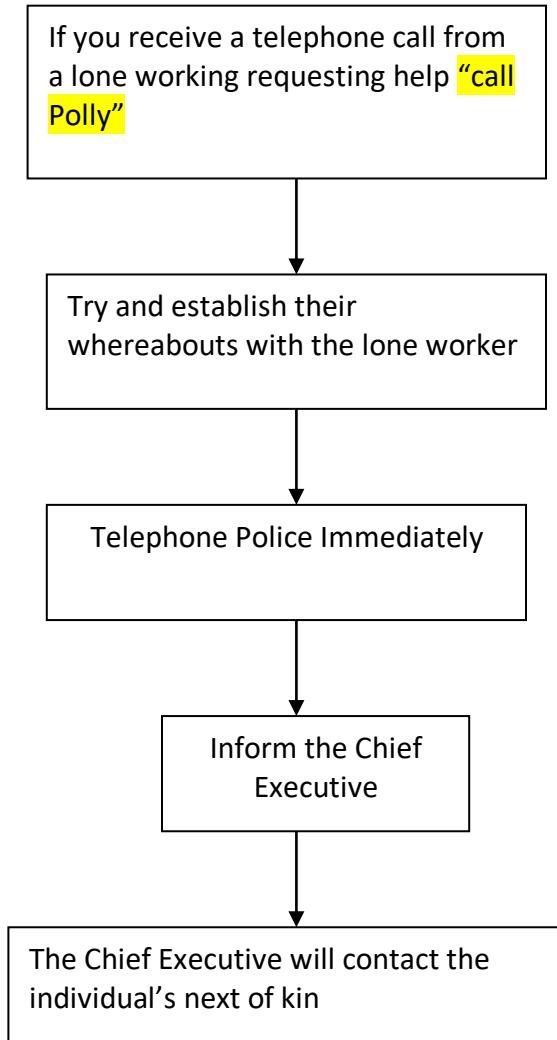
Appendix 2 - Lone Working (Out of Office) Procedure 2

Failure to Return or Contact



Appendix 3 - Lone Working (out of office) Procedure 3

Help Required



Appendix 4 - Violence Incident Report Form

To be completed by Employee

Name:	
Position:	
Date of incident:	
Location of incident:	
Name of assailant(s):	
Address (if known):	
Name of witness(es):	
Address (if known):	
Your account of the incident:	

How did the incident affect you?	
Signed:	
Date:	

To be completed by Manager

Date of interview:	
Location:	
Outcome of incident (including working time lost):	
Action to be taken:	
Signed:	
Position:	
Date:	