

Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

Lone working policy and procedures

Introduction

Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough has a legal duty to ensure the health, safety and welfare of our staff and volunteers while they are at work, as set out in our Health and Safety Policy. We recognise that at any given time staff or volunteers may be working alone, whether that is in our office space or attending events or meetings across the county.

Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough has a responsibility to assess the risks to lone workers and to take steps to avoid or control the risks where necessary. Staff and volunteers have responsibilities to take reasonable care of themselves and others in lone working situations. Lone working is not inherently unsafe and proper precautions can reduce the risks associated with working alone.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Health and Safety and Safeguarding policies including, where relevant, those of partnership organisations. The Health and Safety policy describes safe working practices to be observed during the covid pandemic, with risk assessment templates to be completed for all work activities outside of the home.

The Health and Safety Executive defines lone workers as those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision as: -

- People working separately from others in a building
- People who work outside 'normal' hours
- People who work away from their fixed base without colleagues
- People who work at home

Responsibilities

The overall responsibility for the health and safety of employees and volunteers rests with the Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Board who will ensure that adequate policies and procedures are in place and take all reasonable steps to ensure that risks are, where possible, eliminated or reduced to an acceptable level. The operational responsibility rests with the Chief Executive who will ensure that the Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Board are kept up to date with changes in legislation and that adequate procedures are in place.

It is the responsibility of all employees and volunteers to be mindful of their own safety, to follow Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough procedures for working alone and to report any concerns to their manager at the first opportunity.

If staff are anxious on arriving or being the last person at a location and feel their safety could be jeopardised, they should not take the risk of proceeding further. They should telephone their manager and advise that they are unable to attend or continue. Alternative arrangements should be made.

Procedures to be followed when working alone in an office or other venue

Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough does not expect that volunteers will be required to work alone and unsupervised in a building. However, should this situation arise then the procedure outlined below will apply.

Wherever possible, avoid working alone in a building either during or after work hours. Where this cannot be avoided, the following procedures should be followed:

- Staff should avoid working alone if not necessary and where possible the final two people should leave together
- Lock external doors, ensuring you can escape in an emergency but do not leave the key in the lock
- Do not admit members of the public to offices or other buildings after normal working hours
- Alert a colleague, friend or family members that you are working alone together with your location.

Personal Safety

1. Before working alone, an assessment of the risks involved should be made in conjunction with the Line Manager
2. Staff must inform their Line Manager or other identified person when they will be working alone, giving accurate details of their location and following an agreed plan to inform that person when the task is completed. This includes occasions when a staff member expects to go home following an external commitment
3. Staff working away from the office should ensure that they have access to a mobile phone at all times. Staff are responsible for checking that the mobile phone is charged, in working order and with sufficient credit remaining with the relevant provider.
4. Staff must not assume that having a mobile phone and a back-up plan is a sufficient safeguard in itself. The first priority is to plan for a reduction of risk.

5. Staff should take all reasonable precautions to ensure their own safety, as they would in any other circumstance.
6. Where required, staff must ensure that they sign in and out of building registers.
7. If a member of staff does not report in as expected an agreed plan should be put into operation, initially to check on the situation and then to respond as appropriate using emergency contact information if necessary.

Travelling

Staff and volunteers should take steps to ensure their own well-being and safety such as having enough fuel and making sure the vehicle is well maintained.

'Reasonable precautions' might include:

- Checking directions for the destination
- Ensuring your car, if used, is road-worthy and has break-down cover
- Ensuring someone knows where you are and when you are expected home
- Avoiding where possible poorly lit or deserted areas
- Taking care when entering or leaving empty buildings, especially at night
- Ensuring that items such as laptops or mobile phones are not visible when being carried
- As far as is practical avoid using mobile phones when alone outside.

Home Visiting

It is not anticipated that any Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough staff or volunteers will need to undertake home visits. If this need arises the staff member or volunteer should discuss with the CEO. If the visit is deemed necessary all risks will be mitigated by taking the following actions:

- Ensuring all efforts are made to obtain as much information as possible about each situation and the people involved.
- Where a visit is being made to someone who causes concern, the time and place of the visit and the name of the person should be advised to the Office Manager. The Office Manager should be advised when a visit has ended, the Chief Executive will stand in if the Office Manager is not available.
- Staff should use common sense, trust their instincts and if a situation feels threatening - leave, saying for example, that they are going back to get something from the car.

Diaries

Employees who are not normally office or centre based, must maintain a diary which is accessible by other staff members. The diary will include names, addresses and telephone numbers of any home visits or full details of persons who have appointments at the office/centre as well as the time, venue and if possible contact numbers of other meetings and events. It is the responsibility of individual employees to maintain the diary and of the line manager to ensure, insofar as is reasonably practicable, that this procedure is being observed.

Equipment

Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough will make a mobile phone available to employees who need one or will make arrangements for reimbursement of calls if necessary.

Personal information

Employees and volunteers should not give their home address or personal telephone numbers to any third parties. The main office number should be given and any message will be passed on to the employee or volunteer.

Employees and volunteers are advised to exercise caution when discussing details of their personal life with others.

Reporting

All employees and volunteers are required to report the following to their line manager:

- concerns about any instance of lone working
- concerns about these procedures
- suggestion for improving these procedures
- any incident where they feel that their health or safety has been compromised.

Training and Awareness

Training and awareness for staff and volunteers will be part of the induction process.

Approved by Healthwatch Cambridgeshire Board of Directors

Date: May 21

Responsible Officer

Chief Executive Officer of Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough