



Woodstock Town Council Violence and Aggression Policy

1. Introduction

Woodstock Town Council is committed to providing a safe and respectful working environment for its councillors, employees, and volunteers. While serious incidents of violence or aggression are rare, it is recognised that any form of abuse—whether physical, verbal or psychological—is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

This policy sets out the Council's approach to preventing, managing and responding to incidents of violence and aggression directed at staff, councillors or volunteers during the course of their work for the Council.

2. Definition of Violence and Aggression

Violence and aggression in the workplace includes:

- Verbal abuse (shouting, swearing, insults, threats).
- Intimidation or harassment.
- Offensive or discriminatory remarks.
- Physical assaults or threats of violence.
- Damage to property.
- Psychological abuse or bullying.

3. Indicators of Violence and Aggression

There are several signs that give warning that an aggressive or violent incident could or is about to occur. You need to be able to recognise these signs so that preventive actions can be taken before the situation gets out of control. Most communication is visual rather than verbal so changes in body language and behaviour are good indicators of how an individual is generally feeling. The eyes are particularly good indicators of mood.

Warning signs of agitation include:

- Increased body tension
- Excitability
- Reduced concentration, increase in distraction
- Fiddling with objects
- Spontaneous emotions such as crying or laughing
- Rocking, pacing and other repetitive movements
- Wringing of hands, etc.

Signs of Aggressive behaviour include:

- Verbal abuse (shouting, screaming)
- Slamming doors
- Banging objects
- Annoying other people
- Breaking things
- Throwing things at inanimate objects
- Ripping and tearing things
- Overturning furniture
- Thrashing around.

Indicators of violence include:

- Use of missiles against people (throwing things) or use of anything as a weapon.
- Removal of medical aids, e.g. Catheters, iv lines, etc.
- Cutting
- Kicking
- Scratching
- Hitting and striking
- Biting
- Head-butting
- Self-harming (head-banging, self-mutilation, etc.

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4. Legal Duties

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the Council has a legal duty to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, the health, safety, and welfare of its employees and volunteers. This includes protection from risks associated with violence and aggression. The Council is also bound by relevant equality, safeguarding and criminal legislation in managing such incidents appropriately. The stages of aggression are shown below:

- Sarcasm
- Ridicule
- Offensive language and gestures
- Personal space invasion
- Dismissive behaviour
- Innuendo and insult
- Verbal abuse
- Deliberate silence
- Vandalism
- Harassment
- Threatening gestures

5. Scope

This policy applies to:

- Council staff
- Councillors
- Volunteers
- Members of the public

It covers incidents that occur during Council business, including:

- Council meetings
- Public events
- Face-to-face, telephone, written or online communications with members of the public.

6. Risk Assessment

The Clerk (or designated officer) will carry out a risk assessment to identify:

- Who may be at risk (e.g., lone workers, council staff, councillors engaging with the public, volunteers).
- The likely sources of risk (e.g., contentious public meetings, confrontational members of the public).
- Situations where staff or volunteers may be vulnerable.

The Council will take proportionate steps to reduce identified risks, such as:

- Avoiding lone working where possible.
- Holding meetings in public buildings where assistance is available.
- Training in de-escalation techniques.
- Clear protocols for dealing with disruptive individuals.

7. Prevention and Control Measures

To minimise the risk of violence and aggression:

- Staff, volunteers and councillors will be trained, where appropriate, to recognise early signs of aggression and use de-escalation techniques.
- Members of the public will be made aware that abusive or threatening behaviour will not be tolerated.
- Where necessary, Council premises may have controlled access arrangements.
- Lone working will be discouraged for high-risk situations.

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- Record the findings and review the assessment.

When completing a risk assessment for violence, the Council must consider that violence is a potential hazard in all workplaces where there is interaction between members of the public, suppliers and employees. Some employers will also need to consider arrangements made for getting to and from work, or moving around the workplace, especially if employees are vulnerable to attack, such as:

- Late night workers.
- Lone workers.
- Workers in localities where violence is a routine occurrence.
- Working with a violent population.
- In diminished circumstances (e.g. rescue workers, security guards, social workers).
- Working with abusive members of the public.
- Working with the mentally ill.
- Working with people who have alcohol or drug-related problems.

As part of the risk assessment there should also be consultation with those workers who are at risk about the measures taken, or to be taken, and the monitoring of their effectiveness. When the consultation exercise is complete the relevant staff must be given information and instruction on the protective and preventive measures which are to be taken for their safety.

A list of emergency contacts should be provided for employees to use in the event of an emergency or violent incident, these may include arrangements to notify managers.

Arrangements should include steps to be taken after a violent incident has occurred. This may include the introduction of critical incident de-briefings and an Employee Assistance Programme for victims of workplace violence.

8. Records and Reporting Incidents.

Records of training and instruction provided for employees and managers should also be kept in personnel files or with safety management records.

Keep detailed records of violent incidents and any investigation carried out. Physical attacks should always be recorded in the **Accident Book**, and other incidents recorded as stated in Council's procedures or the Violence Prevention Policy.

All incidents of violence, aggression, or abuse must be reported to the Clerk as soon as possible. If the incident involves violence, aggression, or abuse directed towards the Clerk, the Clerk must report the matter to the Council as soon as possible. A written record of the incident will be maintained, including:

- Date, time and location of the incident.
- Name of the person(s) involved.
- Details of what occurred.
- Action taken at the time and afterwards.

Serious incidents will be reported to the police.

9. Support for Staff, Councillors and Volunteers.

The Council takes all incidents seriously and will provide appropriate support, which may include:

- Debriefing after an incident.
- Time off work if necessary (only with medical advice).
- Referral to counselling or support services.
- Assistance in liaising with the police if required.

10. Zero Tolerance Statement

Woodstock Town Council operates a zero-tolerance approach towards violence, aggression or abuse. Members of the public who behave in such a manner may be:

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- Asked to leave meetings or premises.
- Banned from attending further meetings or council offices.
- Prohibit them from contacting staff directly.
- The Council can issue a warning letter or a behaviour agreement.
- Reported to the police.
- Subject to legal action where appropriate.

The council has a legal duty under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, Employment Rights Act 1996 and other relevant laws.

11. Responsibilities

- The Clerk is responsible for ensuring this policy is implemented and reviewed.
- Councillors, staff, and volunteers working on behalf of the Council must comply with this policy and report any concerns.
- All individuals must act to protect themselves and others by following de-escalation techniques and seeking help when needed.

12. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually or following any serious incident to ensure it remains effective.

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