

NORTH WESTMORLAND BENEFICE

Benefice Lone Working Policy

Introduction

Lone working is an everyday and essential practice for clergy and other church workers and volunteers. This Lone Working Policy outlines the actions being taken by North Westmorland Benefice in relation to our employees, volunteers and visitors (for present purposes, a “**Worker**” or “**Workers**”) who may at any time carry out church activities alone. It also sets out the action we expect workers themselves to take in order to mitigate and manage the risks arising from lone working.

In an emergency, or where there is any immediate doubt as to a question of personal safety, the emergency services should be called on 999. All incidents of any kind, major or minor, arising in connection with lone working, must be reported to the BSO, Deputy BSO, or Priest in Charge.

A. Who works alone?

We understand lone working in two distinct senses, often (but not necessarily) presenting different risks:

- (1) Those who work alone, in the sense that their work does not involve anyone else; and
- (2) Those who work as the sole representative of the Benefice or PCC, with third parties.

Working alone may arise in a great variety of situations, such as:

- a Worker carrying out some task in a church, churchyard or other church premises, such as maintenance, cleaning, catering, preparing for services, or simply locking and unlocking;
- a Worker taking cash to the bank;
- a Worker who carries out their administrative, preparatory or study tasks at home;
- a Worker travelling by car or public transport on their own in order to reach a workplace.

Working as the sole representative of the benefice may also arise in a great variety of situations:

- a Worker such as a minister or youth worker who is alone with one or more young people, whether in a public place, in a school, or on private property;
- a pastoral visitor seeing someone in their home.

This list demonstrates that lone working is simply part of the essential practice for many church workers and may take place on church property, public or semi-public spaces such as village halls and schools, in their own home or in others’ homes. Such situations cannot always be avoided and so must be managed, with a risk-based approach.

B. The risks

Risks of lone working include the following:

- physical accident (from injury, fire, etc., such as when using kitchen or maintenance equipment when there is no one available to fetch help if necessary);
- sudden illness, when there is no one to provide assistance or raise the alarm;

- physical violence or threat of abuse in any form from a visitor or other stranger, or from the client of our services with whom the Worker was expecting to work;
- sexual behaviour or advances deemed to be inappropriate or threatening;
- accusations by a visitor of inappropriate behaviour by staff/volunteers when there are no witnesses;
- stress caused by working in isolation, or from dealing alone with abusive phone calls or digital media.

Risks may be increased when Workers operate:

- outside normal hours (such as a Worker cleaning the church at 7am or a youth minister running an evening youth group)
- when it is dark;
- in a combination of unsociable hours and darkness, such as a Worker locking a church building late;
or
- in an isolated place, or one without Wifi or mobile phone reception, such as many of our churches, churchyards and rural communities are.

C. PCC Responsibilities

Our PCCs are legally responsible for taking all reasonable steps to mitigate the risks of lone working. In particular, they should:

1. Demonstrate that reasonably foreseeable risks have been identified and assessed, such assessment to be updated regularly with appropriate action taken to mitigate the risks identified. For example, it may in some cases be wise to light a pathway from church to road through the churchyard. Other darkness-related risks may be mitigated by ensuring that keyring and other torches are available to Workers.
2. Ensure that there is adequate insurance cover for all lone working in accordance with standard practices. It will normally be sufficient for standard insurance cover from Ecclesiastical Insurance to be maintained. An accident book and other health and safety requirements should be properly observed and PCCs should be aware of and approve the nature of the work undertaken.
3. Equip staff in vulnerable positions with communication tools to ensure they can summon help when needed. For example, mobile phones (always charged up) when driving or working alone, lists of emergency telephone numbers (including church staff or members living nearby).
4. Ensure that Workers feel that the PCC has taken all reasonable steps to ensure their safety. For example, through regular checks with each Worker, with proper line management or supervision.
5. Offer appropriate training in personal safety to, and supervision of, those who work alone (and on all other issues of health and safety). Provision should be made in the event of fire or suspicion of intruders, how to exit the building quickly and safely, and where to find first aid kits. Proper records of those in vulnerable locations with next-of-kin details should be maintained.



6. PCCs should direct Workers to follow policy and guidance on good practice in safe lone working. For example, not to undertake maintenance work at heights when alone, only to visit certain clients in pairs, to complete risk assessments and not to carry out activities unnecessarily out of hours.
7. Particular attention should be given to the mental health of those who work alone, to ensure that they have adequate pastoral support, and avenues through which to raise worries, concerns and new risks. Workers should always feel able to request pastoral support in addition to that offered by their line manager.

D. The responsibilities of Workers

Workers must also take a degree of responsibility for their own safety and wellbeing, ensuring that they act in the safest and healthiest manner reasonably possible. They should:

1. Avoid placing themselves in unnecessarily dangerous situations. For example, by visiting in pairs where felt necessary, by not agreeing to meet anyone in an isolated place, and by placing themselves near an identified exit when dealing with someone who might be violent.
2. Be alert to possible dangers and to minimise risk by their own behaviour. For example, by keeping lights on until a building is completely vacated, choosing different routes at different times when taking cash to the bank, using proper safety equipment when operating machinery, providing emergency contact and next of kin details, and keeping contacts for others to hand.
3. Inform others of their movements by sharing calendars, and informing others of the time they are expected to return from potentially difficult activities or visits, with an agreed action plan should the Worker not communicate on time.
4. Inform their line manager, supervisor or other Workers of any suspicious behaviour or hazards which they have observed, or of any threats made to them.
5. Avail themselves of relevant training opportunities.
6. Drive responsibly and keep their vehicle properly insured, tested and maintained, with current breakdown insurance, and sufficient fuel in the tank.
7. Park in well-lit areas.



E. Pastoral visits

We recognise that home visits present particular risks of lone workers. These risks may come from the nature of the property, the person being visited, other people resident in or near the property, other visitors, pets or livestock.

In addition to taking the precautions outlined above, we expect all Workers to complete an online risk assessment in the ChurchSuite system before or (if that is not possible) immediately after their first visit to a client, and to update it if necessary as circumstances are discovered, or change.

We also expect all Workers making a pastoral visit to complete a short online record of the visit, using the ChurchSuite system, and to record any risks or safeguarding concerns which become apparent to them.

The BSO, Deputy BSO and Priest in Charge will review all online risk assessments and advise on any additional precautions which should be taken in connection with future visits to the client in question.

F. Assistance with risk assessments

Reference should be made to the Ecclesiastical Insurance guidance on lone working:

<https://www.ecclesiastical.com/documents/working-alone-church-health-and-safety-guide.pdf>

