

**25 November, 2019**

**Training available to support frontline workers to deal with aggressive incidents**

**Ward(s)** All

**Portfolios:** Cllr Andrew – Deputy Leader and Regeneration  
Cllr Bal Chattha - Portfolio holder, Personnel and Business Support

**1. Executive Summary:**

This report sets out the training available to frontline workers who deal with aggressive incidents.

At its meeting on 29th August 2019, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report on data relating to incidents of violence and aggression against our employees. This report was requested following discussion centred on the Council's Equality Monitoring report and Councillors specific interest on how aggression in the workplace linked to protected characteristics. During the course of the August meeting, information relating to the mandatory training undertaken by First Stop Shop teams was requested and this was subsequently collated by the learning and Development team and forwarded on 4 September, 2019.

Members have subsequently requested further detailed information about the level of training that takes place within First Stop Shop, to provide assurance that the Council is taking the issue seriously.

This report details the wider training, both mandatory and optional/developmental for front-line staff within the council. It then focuses on the front-line Money Home Job team operating out of the First Stop Shop as a case study.

**2. Report**

The corporate Learning and Development Team offer a range of learning opportunities for employees in front facing roles who might, as a consequence of their work, experience incidents of violence and aggression. These learning opportunities comprise a mixture of face to face and e-learning options.

It is the role of the line manager through the APC and risk assessment processes to identify which learning opportunities should be undertaken by each employee having regard to the role and nature of the work undertaken. The manager is also responsible for identifying which learning interventions are mandatory for a specific role, and for ensuring that all such training is undertaken.

The current course titles currently being provided by the Learning and Development Team include (but are not limited to):

- Personal Safety and Lone Working – Street Safe (face to face)
- Personal Safety (e-learning)
- Customer Care (face to face)
- Resilience and Me (face to face)
- Assertive Communication (e-learning)

The range of courses has evolved in response to the gradual increase in violent and aggressive behaviour experienced by front-line officers over the last few years. In some cases, directorates and schools also decide to engage additional bespoke training to support their respective workforces where particular challenges may be faced and particular skill sets are needed. In this case the corporate Learning and Development Team supports managers by engaging cost effective external providers who can deliver at the required quality (see case study below on First Stop Shop).

In the case of schools there is a charge to access corporate learning opportunities but it is often the case that they commission their own training relevant to their organisation.

Alongside training, the Learning and Development Team also offer coaching support which can assist employees with reflecting on something which didn't go so well and perhaps got out of hand and working through how it might be handled differently next time. There is also the opportunity for employees who have experienced particularly stressful situations to speak to one of the Council's 40 trained Mental Health First Aiders (launch August 2019) who can provide immediate support/reassurance or signpost to other agencies.

### **Case Study – Money Home Job (First Stop Shop)**

The Money Home Job teams operating from the First Stop Shop who typically encounter aggressive incidents are:

- Customer Services;
- Housing and Welfare Rights;
- Revenues;
- Benefits;

From the report presented in August 2019, the groups of staff most commonly impacted are customer services and housing officers. Workforce data shows the Money Home Job team is an ethnically diverse team, containing some staff members who describe themselves as having a disability. Incident report data shows that the main type of incident is verbal abuse (with approximately 11% being racially orientated). The number of violent and aggressive incidents in the First Stop Shop appears to have increased gradually since the closure of several other face to face emergency drop in services previously offered by both the Council and other agencies i.e. social care, DWP, mental health outreach support and walk in centres. Whilst the number of incidents is high at 45 incidents to date in 2019, it is important to note, that they are perpetrated

by a total 9 individuals who visited more than once. Perpetrator data reveals that many have very complex needs (including risk of homelessness, mental/physical disability and/or alcohol/substance misuse). Approximately 30% are former looked after children. Common underlying themes are individuals expressing their frustration that they are unable to gain the assistance that they feel they need from Council or other statutory services.

As part of our culture and behaviours work, officers from Money Home Job have been proactively encouraged to report any incidents of violent or aggressive behaviour, with the aim of allowing us to better understand the patterns of behaviour of some of our frequent flyers. The information recorded is regularly reviewed, with officers taking a reflective approach, to try to understand each individual's needs and the possible root causes of behaviour, with the aim of agreeing future actions and minimising the likelihood of future incidents. Personalised risk assessments are produced where appropriate to help staff to know how best to support specific individuals. In other cases action is taken to ban individuals from the building, or in extreme cases, assistance is sought from legal services to apply for injunctions to prevent individuals from approaching the building or employees.

In response to the increasingly complex client groups, the following additional training has been identified by the Head of Service as essential to equip the various staff groups to minimise the risk of aggressive and/or violent incidents in the workplace escalating:

- Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE) – 1 day course
- Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE) – 3 day course with ongoing Reflective Practice.
- Complex Mental Health Disorder (CMHD)

Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE) training was initially commissioned as a pilot in 2017/18 to help support frontline housing officers to develop the new skills and techniques they needed to be able to engage effectively with individuals with very complex needs. It proved to be so successful that it has now been extended to run until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 and will be available to all new starters within housing in this period. It has also been extended out to all front-line value adders (team leaders) and customer services officers.

PIE uses psychological models to assist staff to develop useful understandings of challenging situations and provides a common language and framework to discuss sensitive issues. Importantly, PIE aims to enable staff and managers to develop reflection skills in order to build collaborative, compassionate relationships with their clients. Through these positive relationships with staff, clients are more able to develop the skills and beliefs they need to achieve their goals. Post training, officers receive an hour of Reflective Practice (RP) per month for the following 12 months which enables staff to reflect and discuss any issues they are facing and practise using the PIE tools and techniques with support from a qualified psychologist.

A total of 83 front-line MHJ staff have received the full 3 day PIE training to date. Staff have reported feeling more equipped to support customers with

complex needs since receiving the PIE training. The service also saw a 56% reduction in the number of police call outs when the new techniques were introduced into the supported housing project at Rivers House.

As a result of our success in Walsall, PIE training is now being rolled out to all front-line housing support officers working within the West Midlands Combined Authority Housing First Pilot. Our Housing First project is also receiving national recognition and being cited as an example of best practice by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

In response to feedback from officers in the original cohort of PIE, and feedback from the customer services team, additional training has also been commissioned in Complex Mental Health Disorder (CMHD). The full learning outcomes for the training are included in Appendix 1 and the feedback from the latest cohort of officers who attended the CMHD training is attached as Appendix 2. The CMHD training is aimed at equipping front-line officers to have a greater understanding of the traits associated with different types of complex mental health disorders. It is designed to help front-line officers to maintain a positive regard for the client, so that they are able to maintain a supportive and non-judgemental approach throughout. Feedback from staff has been extremely positive with 100% of attendees reporting that they now have a better understanding of complex mental health disorders following the training.

### **3. Reason for scrutiny:**

At its meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> August, 2019 Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report on data relating to incidents of violence and aggression experienced by our employees in relation to protected characteristics. Members have requested further detailed information about what training is available to frontline workers in the First Stop Shop to help support them to deal effectively with incidents of violence and aggression.

### **4. Recommendations:**

That Members note the training available to front line workers exposed to aggressive incidents at work.

### **5. Background papers:**

Report to Scrutiny on 29<sup>th</sup> August, 2019 – Equalities in the workforce – aggressive incidents.

### **6. Resource and legal considerations:**

Health and Safety legislation requires that employers ensure staff are competent to carry out their role safely and receive appropriate information, instruction and training.

Most of the time, legislation is not prescriptive in what training staff must have, rather it leaves it to the employer to assess training needs and ensure staff receive the training they require.

Some of this training will be very role specific and will be arranged by the service area concerned, however, there is a range of corporate training available to cover more general issues, including management of health and safety, risk assessment, accident investigation, first aid and personal safety/lone working.

**7. Council Corporate Plan Priorities:**

Internal focus – I1 – modern services and I2 – a resilient council.

**8. Citizen impact:**

The training as set out is designed to ensure our citizens receive the best possible customer experience whilst protecting our employees' health, safety and wellbeing.

**9. Environmental impact:**

There is no environmental impact.

**10. Performance management:**

The incidence and impact of aggression and near-miss accidents are monitored via health and safety committees.

**11. Reducing inequalities:**

The training detailed in the report aims to equip frontline officers to meet the needs of all residents, including those with disabilities and / or complex needs.

**12. Consultation:**

The Council's Corporate Learning and Development Team have been consulted on the preparation of this report. Frontline staff have been involved in the design and review of training programmes. Staff and customer feedback is regularly reviewed and used to help shape future training programmes to ensure the Council continues to meet the changing needs of residents.

## Appendix 1

### Corporate Training

Title	Target Audience	Learning Outcomes
Personal Safety and Lone Working – Street Safe – face to face	All employees and their line managers who are lone workers or who interact directly with the public/service users	The Law Violence and aggression – the facts and fiction What is aggression Communication The violence cycle Diffusion techniques Lone working procedures
Personal Safety – e-learning	All employees	Understand personal safety and be aware of personal safety when travelling to work Develop own personal safety strategies based on best practice Identify who may be at risk and why Reduce own and colleagues potential for becoming a victim of violence and aggression
Customer Care – face to face	All employees	Managing difficult customers and complaints Transactional analysis The power of behaviour How we communicate Stepping into the shoes of the customer Importance of delivering excellent customer care Plus others ....
Resilience and Me – face to face	All employees including wider social care workforce	What resilience means What works for maintaining effective resilience The importance of mindset Habits Time management Plus others.
Assertive Communication – e-learning	All employees	Respecting the rights and needs of others Looking for 'I win, you win opportunities' Being honest with yourself and others Saying what you want and feel but not at the expense of others Showing confidence and positive behaviour Plus others.

Money Home Job Training		
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Complex Mental Health Disorder	All front-line customer services officers; Open to all MHJ officers with development need.	<p>To understand a greater range of mental health issues and concerns that may affect our service users.</p> <p>To identify factors that can negatively impact mental health (eg, social exclusion; loss of work, home or dignity).</p> <p>To recognise how signs and symptoms of mental distress can be confused or exacerbated by substance/alcohol misuse.</p> <p>Maintain a positive regard for the client, which means that the officer is at all times supportive and non-judgemental of the client, their views or lifestyle</p> <p>Evaluate the outcomes of the process, using objective measures, wherever possible, to ensure the relationship is successful and the client is moving towards independence.</p> <p>Optimized individual and team performance. Increased motivation and a sharpened focus on appropriate solutions.</p> <p>Improved resilience.</p>
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**Feedback on Complex Mental Health Disorder Training**