

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE 17 FEBRUARY 2005

PROTECTION OF STAFF

Joint Report by Depute Chief Executive/ Executive Director of Corporate Support and the Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek the Committee's approval for the adoption of a training policy to assist employees in handling situations where conflict is possible.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council provides a number of services to the community. It is the task of Council employees to support the community of East Ayrshire whilst working within a regulatory framework that provides for their health and safety at work. The ethos of East Ayrshire Council is to respond positively and promptly to all enquiries, concerns and contacts from the people we serve.
- 2.2 It is in the nature of the work of Council employees that they deal directly with the public. This contact will often place on Council premises such as schools, libraries or within offices. Alternatively the contact may be in the community, including in the house of service users. The vast majority of such contacts are positive being based on the effective provision of Council services to the community and the natural desire of people to be courteous to one another. However, occasionally there may be the possibility of conflict between the service user and the employee. Such situations may therefore place the employee at risk.
- 2.3 East Ayrshire Council has a clear legal obligation to protect the health and safety of its employees at work. This provision includes the provision of relevant information, instruction and training to minimise risks to the health and safety of staff in potential conflict situations and is required under our current Violence at Work Policy in the Master Safety File (document B19). A number of training programmes are commercially available, but very few meet the wider diverse needs of a local authority.

3. PROPOSAL

- 3.1 Of the training packages available a number have been evaluated by a working group of employees. The result of this evaluation is that the "Non-Violent crisis Intervention" approach is favoured in meeting the wider needs of this authority. This policy has been accredited by the British Institute of Learning Difficulties (BILD). Two employees from the Department of Educational and Social Services have the training in these techniques, and are now themselves qualified instructors.

- 3.2** Full details of this approach are available in the Members' Information Point. In summary, this full package emphasises a 3-stage approach:-
- that is far better to avoid physical intervention than use it
 - when used the first step should be to protect yourself rather than react
 - physical restraint using minimal intervention may be necessary as a last resort to protect both employee and service user.
- 3.3** Matters such as the use of language or non-physical techniques such as body language are considered in detail. The problems with escalating to the use of physical restraint are emphasised. Where a defensive measure such as a parry to a blow is used, the technique requires this block followed by the withdrawal of the employee.
- 3.4** It is proposed that techniques identified in the "Non-Violent crisis Intervention" be adopted as the corporate standard of Personal Safety training. This training will be supported from within the Council and subject to external verification at regular intervals.
- 3.5** The training will be relevant to a wide range of employees who as part of their normal duties come into contact with members of the public. It is emphasised that employees would only receive training in physical techniques of self-defence to be used:
- where absolutely required as a last resort to prevent physical harm to themselves or others where there is no alternative means of escape or withdrawal; and
 - with no more than reasonable force having due regard to the circumstances of time.
- 3.6** Consideration will be given to assessing on whether the training, or elements of it, could also be made available to Elected Members.
- 3.7** The adoption of this standard of training requires formal approval in support of the techniques and potential physical contacts that may result during the course of an event. Employees that have been trained will require the support of East Ayrshire Council for the appropriate use of these recognised techniques.

4. POLICY /LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1** The Council is legally bound to exercise due care for the health and safety of all its employees and to take all reasonably practicable steps to prevent or minimise the risk of harm to employees. The provision of this proposed training would assist the Council in meeting its legal obligation.
- 4.2** The training to be provided will complement both existing policies and current training provision. It does not advocate a different approach to dealing with violent situations from that which is already set out in relevant policy documents.

5. TRADE UNIONS

- 5.1** The training and its application will be the subject of consultation with the Trade Unions.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1** Any financial implications arising from the delivery of the training course will be met from within existing departmental budgets.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1** The Corporate Governance Committee is asked to approve the adoption of the above training policy incorporating “Non-Violent Crisis Intervention” as the standard course of Personal Safety Awareness for employees of East Ayrshire Council subject to consultation with Trade Unions.

Elizabeth Morton
Depute Chief Executive/
Executive Director of Corporate Support
5 January 2005

John Mulgrew
Executive Director of
Educational and Social Services

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Nil

Anyone wishing further information should contact Martin Rose, Head of Personnel (Telephone 01563 576092) or Graham Short, Head of Service: Quality Improvement, (Telephone 01563 576089).