

Lone working and volunteering policy and procedure

Lone working policy

1. Purpose and scope

1.1. The objectives of this policy and procedure are to:

- Ensure that we have clear guidance for those people who undertake activities on behalf of the MS Society, as part of their paid or volunteering role, in which they are alone.
- Ensure that any risks that arise from lone working and volunteering are identified, eliminated, minimised or managed.
- Ensure the MS Society complies with the law in this area.
- Contribute to the successful achievement of the MS Society's aims and excellent standards of service for people affected by MS.

1.2. This policy applies to all MS Society employees and volunteers.

Line managers are usually paid staff, but some MS Society employees, based in groups may be managed by a volunteer. The use of the term 'manager' and 'line manager' in this policy refers to both paid and volunteer managers.

Local Network volunteers should discuss lone volunteering activities with their Group Coordinator. Group Coordinators should discuss lone activities with their Local Networks Officer.

Where the policy refers to the line manager's manager, volunteers managing branch based staff should refer to the local operational manager (e.g. Local Networks Manager) or HR.

1.3. Our values have been reflected in this policy and as a reminder are:

Bold – We are brave and innovative. We are not afraid to take risks and speak out, even when it is not easy. We are pioneering and dynamic in our approach to achieving our goals. We will campaign and push boundaries, and will not give up until we have stopped MS.

Expert – As a community, we understand MS better than anyone else. Our work is built on the rich and varied expertise and experience of people affected by MS; our staff, volunteers, professionals and scientists to improve the lives of people affected by MS.

Ambitious – We do not accept the status quo. We set high standards and work hard to reach them, driving real change. We push the boundaries and are positive about stopping MS

Together – We achieve success by working with the whole MS community and others who can help us achieve our goals. We are collaborative and inclusive in our approach to succeed in delivering our goals. Everything we do shows we support and care about each other.

2. Policy principles

2.1. The following principles underpin this policy:

- Everyone is responsible for avoiding and managing any risks that arise from undertaking activities alone.
- Lone working/volunteering risks will be eliminated where possible and where this is not possible, will be limited and managed.
- Home visiting has been identified as the highest risk. **As a principle, lone home visiting should not be undertaken. See guidance for alternative options.**
- The MS Society will involve staff and volunteers in identifying risks that arise from lone working/volunteering and considering ways to manage them.
- Risk management will take into account normal working conditions and foreseeable emergency situations e.g., fire, equipment failure, illness and accidents.
- Staff and volunteers will be provided with support, guidance and where appropriate, training to assist them to stay safe.
- No volunteer or member of staff should stay in a situation where they feel at risk.
- All incidents and 'near misses' arising from lone working must be reported to a line manager and to the Head of Health and Safety for monitoring purposes. Volunteers should report any 'near misses' to their staff contact person, and Group Coordinator when they have one; the staff contact must then report to the Head of Health and Safety.
- A failure to follow agreed safety procedures may be a disciplinary offence.

2.2. Advice from HR and Health and Safety

The HR department is available to provide support and guidance throughout this process to all concerned. Advice on health and safety risk will be

provided by the Head of Health and Safety. In the event of any issues with the interpretation of this policy, the decision of the Executive Director of People will be final.

2.3. Record keeping

Line managers will keep all records of all incidents which were, or were felt to be, detrimental to an individual's health and/or safety that are reported to them. Managers will send these reports to the Head of Health and Safety, who will monitor them, passing any that need action onto the relevant Directorate and reporting on trends.

3. Lone working/volunteering definition

3.1. Lone working or volunteering may be carried out on a regular or occasional basis. Lone working/volunteering is defined as situations when staff or volunteers are undertaking activities on behalf of the MS Society by themselves without close access to colleagues or a manager. Examples include:

- Working from home.
- Working alone in MS Society offices/other premises e.g. Centre Coordinator.
- Working alone own outside of normal hours e.g. Cleaner.
- Meeting colleagues (staff/volunteers) on your own and away from your office.
- Travelling on your own.
- Staying overnight on your own.
- Meeting people on your own who have, or may have, a history of violence or aggression.

3.2. The MS Society has identified the following general risk areas (in rank order of risk level) that may arise from lone working/volunteering:

- Home visits, ***hence the principle that lone home visits should not be undertaken alone.***
- Meetings in empty/unfamiliar venues.
- Lone activities, such as early morning cleaning, taking cash to the bank, parking vehicles at night.
- Travel (car).
- Travel (public transport).
- Overnights.
- Meetings in public places.
- Meeting people affected by MS who have a mental health problem.

4. Responsibilities

4.1. It is not possible to have a specific risk assessment for every situation that an individual might come across and therefore it is only possible to give general guidance and the tools to discuss risk (see guidance below and Lone Working/Volunteering Checklist).

4.2. Head of Health and Safety responsibilities include:

- Advising HR on policy changes.
- Receiving and holding data on any lone working incidents or near misses.
- Passing on issues to the relevant directorate.
- Reporting on trends as required.

4.3. People Directorate responsibilities include:

- Ensuring that staff and volunteers are aware of the policy and guidance.
- Ensuring staff and volunteers have access to appropriate training, as necessary.

4.4. Managers' responsibilities include:

- Communicating this policy to all their staff/volunteers who undertake activities alone.
- Discussing risks associated with lone working/volunteering and how to reduce/manage them with staff/volunteers.
- Making and agreeing notes of such discussions.
- Checking that appropriate precautions are being taken.
- Reporting lone working/volunteering incidents and near misses to the Head of Health and Safety.
- Have an appropriate system in place for their particular team/directorate for buddying up where home visiting is involved.

4.5. Staff and volunteers' responsibilities include:

- Avoiding lone working/volunteering wherever possible.
- Identifying risks that may arise from lone working/volunteering. Discussing risks associated with lone working/volunteering and how to reduce/manage them their manager.
- Taking every day precautions to ensure their own safety.
- Setting up a buddy system.
- Complying with any precautionary measures agreed with their manager.
- Report lone working/volunteering incidents or near misses to their line manager/staff contact person and Group Coordinator.

Lone working/volunteering procedure

5. Discussion of risk

5.1. Safe arrangements for undertaking activities alone are based on the following process:

- An assessment of the seriousness of the risk.
- The elimination of the risk if possible.
- Controlling or managing the risk.

5.2. Line managers will discuss the potential risks of lone working with volunteers and staff, ensuring they are aware of the MS Society's policy and guidance. Using our Lone Working/Volunteering Guidance and Lone Working/Volunteering Checklist, the discussion should take account of:

- The individual's ability to carry out their activities safely on their own in their environment.
- The potential for the individual to be subject to violence.
- The individual's ability to request assistance or to withdraw safely from a dangerous situation.
- The individual's fitness to carry out the work/volunteering alone.
- Sudden illness or emergencies.
- The effects of social isolation.
- Risks related to driving.
- Fire safety.
- Any existing precautionary measures and emergency arrangements.

5.3. The above list is not exhaustive, the MS Society's guidance and lone working/volunteering checklist should also be used.

5.4. MS Support Volunteers

We also have guidance for MS Support Volunteers, which can be found on the volunteer website.

6. Safe working arrangements

6.1. Both managers and staff/volunteers have a responsibility to ensure working arrangements are as safe as possible.

6.2. Most risks from undertaking activities alone can be managed through using the lone working/volunteering checklist to do a risk assessment, good planning, communication and buddy relationships, in addition to following any agreed measures designed to manage specific risks.

6.3. The following measures must be in place. When undertaking activities alone, staff and volunteers must:

- Have a mobile phone that has enough charge for the length of time they will be alone.
- When working alone away from an office or centre, record their exact whereabouts and expected times of arrival and departure in their electronic calendar (or equivalent).
- For Local Network volunteers, ensure a member of your Group Coordinating Team knows that you are volunteering and the times of this activity.
- Set up a buddy system so that they have a colleague, friend or family member to check in with following lone working/activity.
- If the staff member does not get in touch at the agreed time, and the buddy cannot contact them, the buddy should be prepared to contact the Police.
- Stay overnight rather than drive long distances if it is not safe (e.g. due to tiredness or very bad weather).
- Ensure they carry emergency contact details in case of illness or accident.
- Secure premises when they are working or volunteering alone.
- When working at home, keep in regular contact with others by phone/email.
- Leave or not enter anywhere if they feel unsafe.
- Report any concerns, lone working incidents or near misses to their line manager.

6.4. All staff whose role qualifies for an essential car user allowance will have initial driving skills testing and follow up driving skills training if required.

6.5. All staff who drive their own car on MS Society business must comply with the MS Society car policy as regards MOT, insurance and hazard warning equipment.

6.6. Home visits must always be made in pairs.

6.7. Home workers must follow the health and safety guidance in the home working policy and homeworkers pack.

7. Reporting

7.1. Staff and volunteers must report any concerns, lone working incidents or near misses to their line manager.

7.2. Line managers must report lone working incidents or near misses to the Head of Health and Safety using the Health and Safety reporting format.

Relevant legislation

- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

Other relevant policies:

- Health and Safety Policy
- Homeworking Policy
- Car Policy
- Lone Working Checklist (for staff)
- Lone Volunteering Checklist (for volunteers)
- Guidance on staying safe for volunteers undertaking activities alone (for volunteers)

Policy agreed by EG	End 2016
Policy to be reviewed	Q1 2018