

CITIZENS ADVICE REIGATE AND BANSTEAD SAFETY AND SECURITY OF LOCAL CITIZENS ADVICE STAFF AND PREMISES

1. Introduction

Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead staff and volunteers may, in the course of their work, face risks to their personal safety. Evidence shows that the more contact a worker has with the general public, the higher the risk of encountering aggression and violence.

Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead are open to the public, are at risk from theft, burglary, vandalism, arson, and attacks from far-right and extremist groups.

Statistically the risk is low but the CEO, trustees, staff and volunteers need to be aware of the risks and take action to reduce them as far as possible.

2. Employers' duties

Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead has a legal duty to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all employees and others who work from the premises. See the Health and Safety Policy and local information sheet.

3. Training and information

Training should be provided for staff and volunteers on how to spot early signs of aggression and either to avoid it or cope with it. They should fully understand any systems set up for their protection.

Information should be provided to identify clients with a history of violence or to anticipate factors which might make violence more likely.

4. Personal safety of staff and volunteers

4.1 Basic rules

- If something or somebody makes you feel uneasy, take it seriously
- Be alert and appear confident
- Plan ahead and avoid taking risks
- Get away from danger as quick as you can
- Only attempt to defend yourself if escape is impossible
- Report every incident as to not do so may put others at risk

4.2 Reducing the risk of aggression

- Remain polite and calm
- Speak gently and clearly
- Do not return verbal abuse or become involved in an argument
- Avoid body language that could be interpreted as aggressive such as; crossed arms, hands on hips, finger pointing
- Keep your distance and do not touch somebody who is angry
- Avoid moving quickly or suddenly
- Tell the person who you are and ask their name
- Talk your way out of problems - try and remain calm, placate, don't provoke
- Alert others to your fears or concerns as early as possible and remove yourself from the situation as soon as you feel uncomfortable
- Allow the aggressor a way out; make sure that they can leave unimpeded

4.3 Physical attacks

- Move away as fast as possible and head for a place where you know there will be people

- Shout 'Phone the police' - people are more likely to respond to a specific instruction than to 'Help'
- If there is a panic button in the room or you have a personal alarm, use it
- Use self-defence only as a last resort
- Report the incident as soon as possible

5. Personal possessions

In the local office:

Keep bags and other personal possessions in a locked cupboard or drawer

Outside the local office:

- Keep valuables such as wallets in a secure inside pocket, or use a money belt
- Keep your mobile phone out of sight and use discreetly
- In public places keep your bag on your lap - if you have to put it on the floor or in the (overhead) luggage compartment, ensure the bag is securely closed and insight if possible

6. Travelling and transport

6.1 Travelling on foot

- Avoid walking alone at night
- Keep to busy and well-lit roads
- Know where you are going and walk purposefully
- Walk facing oncoming traffic - If you are walking in the same direction as traffic and a car stops, turn and walk the other way and note the registration number
- If you think you are being followed, cross and recross the road; and head for a busy area or open shop and ask someone to call the police if you're still being followed
- Be wary of a car parked with its engine running
- Avoid using head or earphones as they can reduce your awareness of what is going on around you

6.2 Using public transport

- Use bus stops in busy well-lit areas
- In an empty bus, or after dark, sit downstairs near the driver and avoid empty train compartments
- Notice where the emergency alarm is
- If you feel threatened, make as much noise as possible to alert the driver or guard, and raise the emergency alarm

6.3 Driving

See the separate BMIS item: [Car use and driving on local office business.](#)

- **Home visiting safety guidelines**
- Any local Citizens Advice offering home visits should have clear safety guidelines for home visitors
- A first visit should be made by two workers; If there is any record of violence, a home visit should not be made
- No worker should be required to make a home visit on their own if they do not wish to do so
- Plan the route beforehand
- Inform the chief officer or deputy of your destination, contact telephone number and estimated time of return
- After the visit, either return to the office or telephone/text/email to report that the visit has been completed

- Make a note of the visit in the local Citizens Advice home visit records
- If the worker does not return on time and can't be contacted, call the police
- If the manager is unsure about contacting the police then they can contact the next of kin if there is an agreement in place for such a step. However, if this is done, the manager must ensure that they do not unduly alarm the next of kin
- The local Citizens Advice manager must not spend an excessive amount of time trying to contact the next of kin
- The manager should remind home visitors of their responsibility to contact the office once a visit is complete.
- Local Citizens Advice should take reasonable measures to keep in contact with the staff or volunteer who is making a home visit, as if they are in trouble they might not be able to raise the alarm for help
- If a visit must be made outside the usual opening hours, home visitors must contact a named local Citizens Advice manager to report that the visit has been completed
- Travelling to the appointment: see notes on walking, public transport and driving above
- On arrival show your identity card and explain who you are and the purpose of the visit
- Do not enter the house if the person you have an appointment with is not there
- Do not enter the house if you have any concerns for your safety, for example if somebody in the house appears to be aggressive or under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Wait to be invited in, or ask if you may go in; let the client lead the way
- Sit in a position where you can easily reach the exit door
- Do not sit too close to the other parties
- Do not turn your back
- Do not give your home address or telephone number to clients
- If you are worried about your personal safety, leave immediately
- If the client refuses to let you leave, stay calm and try to control the situation; be assertive and tell the client you wish to leave and that the office knows where you are
- See physical attacks above for what to do if violence does occur.
- After a home visit, report promptly to the chief officer any incidents or concerns regarding personal safety issues, including harassment
- Carry a personal alarm on home visits.

7. Outreach safety guidelines

Any local Citizens Advice operating an outreach service should provide clear safety guidelines for the staff involved. Depending on local circumstances, these may need to cover many of the same issues as [home visiting guidelines](#).

8. Mail handling precautions

Response plans in the event of receiving a suspect letter or package, and the plans should be regularly rehearsed.

What to look out for:

- Discolouration, crystals on surface of package, unusual smells, oily stains.
- Powder or powder-like residue on envelope.
- Excessive use of tape or string.
- Unusual size, or weight in relation to size.
- Oddly shaped or lopsided envelope.
- Postmark that does not match return address.
- Excessive postage.
- Anything else which seems unusual.

- **What to do if you receive a suspicious package or letter**
- Do not touch it again, or move it.
- Shut windows and doors in the room where the package is, and leave the room.
- Notify the police immediately using 999.

9. Bombs and bomb threats

Periodic checks for suspicious bags or parcels left in public areas such as the waiting room and toilets should be made. On discovery of a suspicious package the police should be informed and emergency evacuation procedures activated.

Specific advice can be obtained from the local police Crime Prevention Department, contacted the local police station and also from the HSE website (see [further information](#) below).

10. Fire

Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead comply with all legal requirements regarding fire precautions. See Health and Safety Policy and Procedure and local information notes

11. Malicious telephone calls

BT advice on dealing with malicious or nuisance telephone calls: Telephone: 0800 666 700 for recorded advice, or 150 to speak to an adviser.

12. Security of premises

13. Confidentiality

- the premises are segregated into clear public and private areas and that confidential information is never on display in public areas.
- Confidential information in any form must always be stored securely when people are not at their desk to supervise it.
- follow the clear desk policy.
- screen-lock computers prior to leaving desk unattended.

14. Theft and burglary

14.1 Prevention

- Money and other personal possessions of staff should be kept in a locked cupboard or drawer.
- Do not leave valuable items on view.
- When you throw away packaging for newly delivered valuable items, such as computers, ensure it is not left on public view.
- If the local Citizens Advice uses donation boxes, empty them frequently.
- Do not leave packages lying around.
- If the waiting room is not staffed, a notice reminding clients that the local office is a charity may help to deter theft.
- Make it difficult for members of the public to wander round the local office

14.2 Police enquiries after thefts or burglaries:

After thefts or burglaries in local Citizens Advice the police may make enquiries which could compromise client confidentiality. Occasionally requests for information from the police are made citing Section 29 of the Data Protection Act. In this situation please see:

Citizens Advice service confidentiality policy > [S29 Data Protection Act](#)

13. Security equipment

- Advice from local police Crime Prevention Department
- Good quality locks to all doors and vulnerable windows.
- Alarm system installed to BS4737 standard.
- Good exterior lighting to deter burglars.

14. Insurance

Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead make their own arrangements for insurance against theft, fire and other risks.

15. Further information

Suzy Lamplugh Trust

National charity for personal safety: publications, videos and training

www.suzylamplugh.org/home/index.shtml

020 8876 0305

www.gov.uk/contact-council-crime-prevention-community-safety

Contact your local council about crime prevention and community safety in your area

www.hse.gov.uk

Health & Safety Executive

www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg69.pdf

HSE guidance on violence at work (PDF format)

See also the following BMIS documents, which include relevant information:

- [Health and safety section](#)
- [Violence in local Citizens Advice](#)
- [IT security](#)
- [Health and safety](#)
 - [Health and safety: overview](#)
 - [Violence in local Citizens Advice](#)
 - [Contagious or infectious diseases and illnesses](#)