



RED FLAG

WEEKLY

ACTIONABLE INTELLIGENCE FOR SAFETY PROFESSIONALS

EDITION
20

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THIS WEEK'S BRIEFING

Housing Assaults Are Still Rising. The Duty Has Not Changed.

This edition covers 4,403 assaults on council housing staff, the existing safety duty, lone-worker alarms, 2,019 dog attacks on postal staff, and abuse on lone social-work visits.

HOUSING

01

Councils recorded 4,403 assaults on housing staff in 2025.

LEGAL DUTY

02

The 1974 duty is the same. Rising numbers test the controls.

DEVICES

03

Housing officers raised alarms when visits turned dangerous.

DOGS

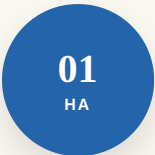
04

Royal Mail recorded 2,019 dog attacks on postal staff.

SOCIAL CARE

05

Lone visits are treated as normal, and abuse is higher.



HOUSING / WORKPLACE VIOLENCE / REPORTING

Housing Staff Assaults Rose Again in 2025

Freedom of Information returns from more than 200 councils recorded 4,403 assaults on housing staff. A housing association survey recorded 3,338 more.

COUNCILS 4,403 assaults in 2025. Up 16%	TYPE 82% verbal. 8% physical
PHYSICAL CHANGE Up 9% where councils replied both years	ASSOCIATIONS 3,338 assaults. Up 20% on 29 landlords

Inside Housing Management published the figures on 2 September 2026. The council total comes from a Freedom of Information request to every council in England, Scotland and Wales. Physical assaults were 8% of that total and rose 9% year on year among councils that responded in both 2024 and 2025. A separate survey of 29 housing associations recorded 3,338 assaults, up 20% on the year before. Many landlords linked part of the rise to better reporting. Others pointed to higher resident expectations and more complex casework. One Yorkshire council said staff are working more often with residents facing financial hardship, mental health issues and other vulnerabilities, and that this leads to more difficult interactions.

The Health and Safety Executive defines work-related violence as: 'Any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work.' That includes verbal abuse and threats, face to face, online and by telephone, as well as physical attacks. The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 requires employers to protect employees so far as is reasonably practicable. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require a suitable and sufficient risk assessment. Verbal abuse counts. A rise that is partly better recording is still a rise in known harm.

VINCE'S VIEW

These are housing officers and council staff being sworn at, threatened, and in some cases assaulted while doing the job. If your own figures are flat while the national picture is rising, ask first whether people are actually reporting. Then ask whether conflict management and lone worker training still matches the work in front of them. Better records do not remove the duty to reduce the risk.

WHAT EMPLOYERS SHOULD DO NOW

- Compare internal assault figures with this national rise before treating a flat trend as good news.
- Count verbal abuse and threats as work-related violence, using the Health and Safety Executive definition.
- Check that reporting is safe to use and that managers act on what is logged.
- Review conflict management and lone worker training against current casework, not last year's policy.



HOUSING / HEALTH AND SAFETY DUTY / CONTROLS

The Duty to Protect Staff Has Not Changed. The Test Has.

Housing providers must still protect employees from violence and aggression. The September assault figures show why a written policy is no longer enough.

DUTY Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974	STANDARD So far as is reasonably practicable
ASSESSMENT Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999	COMMENTARY Anthony Collins Solicitors, 28 August 2025

Anthony Collins Solicitors set this out on 28 August 2025, not in a new October 2026 briefing. Under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, housing providers must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of their employees. That includes violence and aggression at work. The firm said providers need thorough risk assessments, lone-working and safeguarding procedures that are reviewed, clear routes to escalate concerning customer behaviour, and training that includes de-escalation. Staff also need a usable route to support after a difficult incident.

That duty is not new. The Inside Housing figures of 2 September 2026 are. They give boards a current picture against which existing controls will be judged. A procedure that staff cannot use on the doorstep, or that managers do not back when the line is crossed, is not a suitable and sufficient control. This health and safety duty is separate from the sexual harassment prevention duty and from the third-party harassment changes that take effect on 30 October 2026.

VINCE'S VIEW

This is not new law. It is the existing duty meeting a higher volume of incidents. 'We have a policy' will not do when the figures are going the wrong way. Staff need a clear line, and managers need to back them when that line is crossed. Boundaries are controls. If each worker is left to invent the line, situations that could have been stopped will run on.

WHAT EMPLOYERS SHOULD DO NOW

- Show that risk assessments for violence and lone working are current and used, not only filed.
- Give staff a clear escalation route for concerning customer behaviour, and back them when they use it.
- Train de-escalation and withdrawal for the visits and calls staff actually do.
- Keep this duty separate from sexual harassment prevention and from the 30 October 2026 reforms.



HOUSING / LONE WORKING / PERSONAL SAFETY DEVICES

Lone-Worker Alarms Were Used When Housing Visits Turned Dangerous

Published case studies show housing officers raising a discreet alert during aggression, including a known knife risk and a smashed window.

ROLE Housing officers on property visits	KNIFE RISK Known from earlier visits. Exit blocked
SECOND CASE Window smashed. Staff took refuge	RESPONSE Alarm receiving centre. Police requested

SoloProtect has published case studies of housing staff using discreet lone-worker devices. In one, housing officer Jade pressed the alert when a man became increasingly irate, raised his voice and blocked her exit. She knew from previous visits that he had knives. The operator stayed on the call until she could leave. The source does not say he produced a knife during that visit. In another, housing officer Laura and a colleague took refuge in an office after a man smashed a window. The monitoring centre requested a police response. Police arrived and the staff left.

The same page records further cases: a threat to shoot staff after a forced entry, a physical assault after drugs were found, a worker blocked from driving away, and a worker grabbed while trying to move a tenant on. The pattern is the same. The device helped because it was being carried and someone answered. The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 still require the employer to decide where a device is a real control, and where the visit should not be done alone.

VINCE'S VIEW

Technology only works if staff carry it, can use it under pressure, and trust that someone will answer. On our conflict management and lone worker courses we practise when to raise the alarm, including violence, a hostile complaint, and an inappropriate sexual approach. A device left in a drawer is not a control. It is false comfort. Managers need to check both the kit and whether staff will actually use it.

WHAT EMPLOYERS SHOULD DO NOW

- Confirm devices are carried on the visits the risk assessment says need them.
- Practise activation under pressure, not only at induction.
- Test that the monitoring centre response is fast enough for the travel time.
- Do not treat a device as a reason to send one person into a visit that needs two.

04
DOG

POSTAL / DANGEROUS DOGS / VISITING STAFF

Dog Attacks on Postal Workers Still Average 38 a Week

Royal Mail recorded 2,019 attacks in 2025/26. A Bristol postwoman who knew the dog was off work for three months.

ATTACKS

2,019 in 2025/26. Down 8%

WEEKLY RATE

38 attacks a week

TIME LOST

3,442 days. Longest over 300

FRONT DOOR

52% of attacks. 1,048 cases

Royal Mail announced the figures on 6 July 2026. There were 2,019 dog attacks on staff in 2025/26, down 8% on the year before. That is 38 a week. The attacks led to 3,442 days of absence. The longest was still going after more than 300 days. Of the attacks, 1,048 (52%) were at the front door, up from 1,005 the year before. A further 25% were in a garden, drive or yard.

Katy Davies, a Bristol postwoman, was attacked in January 2026 on her usual round. She had known the dog since it was young. It had always been friendly. It came from behind in a shared driveway, clamped onto her lower leg and knocked her down. She had five puncture wounds, two of which needed stitches, and tendon damage. She could not walk unaided for about three weeks, could not drive for about three months, and was off work for three months. The wounds later became badly infected. The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 requires employers of visiting staff to manage this risk. A dog that has been friendly before is not a control.

VINCE'S VIEW

Knowing a dog, or having visited before without trouble, does not make the next visit safe. Familiarity is not a control. More than half of these attacks were at the front door. Staff need a safe distance and the authority to leave. Managers have to back that decision. We cover the immediate response on lone worker training. Dangerous Dogs Awareness is for staff, including local authority workers, who meet dogs as part of the job.

WHAT EMPLOYERS SHOULD DO NOW

- Treat a previously friendly dog as a live risk, not a clearance to approach.
- Give staff authority to stop at the door if a dog is loose or unsecured.
- Record every bite and near-miss and update the address the same day.
- Do not press staff to finish a visit they have judged unsafe.

05
SW

SOCIAL CARE / LONE WORKING / HOME VISITS

Lone Working Visits Are Treated as Normal for Social Workers

Half were verbally abused on a lone working visit. A later poll found 70% think their employer is not doing enough.

SURVEY

UNISON. Almost 1,800 social workers

LONE WORKING

50% verbally abused in 12 months

THE NORM

92% say bosses treat lone working visits as normal

LATER POLL

70% say the employer is not doing enough

UNISON surveyed almost 1,800 social workers between 4 February and 1 March 2026. Community Care reported the results on 23 June 2026. Half had been verbally abused on a lone working home visit in the previous 12 months, compared with 40% on a joint visit. Physical abuse was 7% on lone working visits and 5% on joint visits. Online harassment was 13% after lone working visits and 7% after joint visits. Eighty-six per cent carried out lone working visits daily or weekly. Ninety-two per cent said their bosses regard lone working home visits as the norm.

On 5 October 2026, Community Care reported a poll of just over 1,000 practitioners. Seventy per cent said their employer was not doing enough to keep them safe on visits. Three per cent said the measures were adequate. Twenty-seven per cent said it depended on the team. In the UNISON survey, 27% of those who were abused did not report it. Half of that group said it was part of the job. A quarter thought management would ignore them. The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 covers violence and abuse on these visits. From 30 October 2026, Employment Rights Act 2025 section 20 changes the sexual harassment test to all reasonable steps. That is not a general duty covering every form of abuse.

VINCE'S VIEW

Lone visits have become the norm. The support has not kept up. Staff need clear permission to leave, a check-in that works, and practice for the situations they meet. When people stop reporting because they expect nothing to change, you have a welfare problem and a weak risk assessment. On our lone worker courses we work on withdrawal and check-in. Lone working can be necessary. It should not be left as the worker's private problem.

WHAT EMPLOYERS SHOULD DO NOW

- Decide which visits need two people, and record why the rest are lone working.
- Give staff authority to withdraw, and a check-in during the visit.
- Ask why abuse is not being reported, and act on what is logged.
- Do not treat lone working visits as safe because it is now the usual pattern.

UNISON • Community Care

<https://www.communitycare.co.uk/content/news/half-of-social-workers-verbally-abused-during-solo-home-visits-in-past-year-finds-unison>
UNISON, 23 June 2026. Poll: Community Care, 5 October 2026. <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/content/news/employers-not-doing-enough-to-keep-social-workers-safe-during-visits-say-practitioners>

18 Days Until the Harassment Reforms Take Effect. The Steps Must Be Real.

18

DAYS FROM THIS COVER DATE
TO 30 OCTOBER 2026

The current duty comes from the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023 and Equality Act 2010 section 40A. Employers must take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment. That is not a general work-related violence duty.

The Employment Rights Act 2025 (Commencement No. 6 and Transitional and Saving Provisions) Regulations 2026 were made on 1 October 2026. Regulation 3 brings Employment Rights Act 2025 section 20 and section 21 into force on 30 October 2026. They are not in force on this cover date. Section 20 changes the sexual harassment test to all reasonable steps. Section 21 introduces third-party harassment liability, using the harassment test in the Equality Act 2010. It does not create a general violence duty. It does not bring every protected characteristic into a single new rule.

- List roles that meet harassment from customers, tenants, pupils, service users and other third parties.
- Give those roles practical training and keep the record of who attended.
- Make reporting, evidence and escalation usable on the day, and back the member of staff.
- A generic online module and a signed policy will not show that all reasonable steps were taken.

The question is no longer whether training existed. It is whether the steps were role-specific and worked in the real workplace.

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ACTIONABLE INTELLIGENCE FOR SAFETY PROFESSIONALS

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Safety Solutions Training Ltd delivers practical, role-specific training for housing associations, councils, charities, shops, schools and other public-facing organisations.

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