RED FLAG WEEKLY

ACTIONABLE INTELLIGENCE FOR SAFETY PROFESSIONALS

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THIS WEEK'S BRIEFING

Staff Safety: What Happens After an Incident Matters

When an employee experiences threats, violence or harassment, reporting the incident should be the beginning of an effective response, not the end of it.

This week's Red Flag Weekly examines how employers respond to abuse, the lasting impact of sexual harassment, the risks facing staff who visit people at home and what recorded assaults can tell us about workplace safety.

The legal responsibilities of employers have also changed. Since 30 October 2026, the Employment Rights Act 2025 has strengthened the duty to prevent sexual harassment and introduced new protections against harassment by third parties.

These changes are particularly relevant to organisations whose staff regularly deal with patients, tenants, residents, customers and members of the public.

Across the four substantive safety stories, one question stands out:

Are the arrangements intended to protect staff actually working when they are needed?

AMBULANCE 01
462 reports of sexual abuse. Staff describe the lasting impact and the strengthened legal duties on employers.

NHS 02
A warning system gives staff a clearer response to intentional violence and abuse.

SOCIAL WORK 03
Why more than a quarter of workers experiencing abuse did not report it.

HOUSING 04
Thousands of recorded assaults. Are employers learning from the evidence?

STAFF SUPPORT 05
A message of care for colleagues and communities.

This week's five stories. This edition includes sensitive reporting about workplace violence and sexual harassment, and a message of condolence.

01
AMB

01 | AMBULANCE

462 Reports of Sexual Abuse: Ambulance Staff Describe the Lasting Impact

The incident may last seconds. Its impact can continue for months or years.

London Ambulance Service has highlighted the lasting impact of reported sexual abuse on staff, alongside its campaign figures.

The figures

462:

Reports of sexual abuse recorded by London Ambulance Service during the period described as July 2025 to July 2026.

ALMOST ONE THIRD:

Reports involving 999 call handlers and 111 health advisers.

The 462 reports were publicised in October and repeated in the service's November campaign reporting.

Reported behaviour included sexual threats, unwanted touching, indecent exposure and explicit comments.

Importantly, the problem is not confined to ambulance crews. Telephone staff also experience sexual harassment while trying to help callers.

London Ambulance Service has a dedicated Violence Reduction Unit that supports employees, helps gather evidence and works with police and prosecutors.

The law: What changed on 30 October 2026?

The Employment Rights Act 2025 has strengthened employers' responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.

Two changes are particularly important.

1. Employers must take all reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment.

Section 20 of the Employment Rights Act 2025 amended section 40A of the Equality Act 2010.

The previous requirement to take "reasonable steps" has been strengthened to "all reasonable steps".

This is a proactive duty. Employers should identify foreseeable risks and take reasonable preventive measures before harassment occurs, rather than relying solely on procedures for dealing with complaints afterwards.

2. Employers can be liable for harassment by third parties.

Section 21 of the Employment Rights Act 2025 amended section 40 of the Equality Act 2010.

It introduces employer liability where an employee experiences harassment by a third party in the course of employment and the employer has failed to take all reasonable steps to prevent it.

Third parties can include patients, service users, tenants, customers, contractors and members of the public.

The provision covers sexual harassment and harassment related to protected characteristics within the scope of the Equality Act 2010.

Not every abusive or offensive incident meets the legal definition of harassment. However, other threatening or aggressive behaviour may still require action under health and safety law.

These provisions apply in England, Wales and Scotland, but not Northern Ireland.

What does this mean for employers?

The Equality and Human Rights Commission's updated guidance makes clear that employers should consider risks associated with the work their employees undertake.

01
AMB

01 | AMBULANCE | CONTINUED

Ambulance: continued

London Ambulance Service | 4 November 2026

Depending on the circumstances, reasonable preventive steps may include:

- Assessing sexual harassment risks in different roles and working environments.
- Providing practical, behaviour-based training.
- Reviewing lone working arrangements where harassment risks have been identified.
- Establishing clear reporting and investigation procedures.
- Taking appropriate action when concerns are raised.
- Reviewing whether existing measures are effective.

The steps required will depend on the organisation, the risks and what it is reasonable for that employer to do.

Training is an important preventive measure, but training alone does not necessarily demonstrate compliance with the duty.

VINCE'S VIEW

Sexual harassment is not something staff should be expected to tolerate because they work with the public.

Whether someone is attending a patient, visiting a tenant, working on reception or answering a telephone, they should know how to report inappropriate behaviour and what support they can expect.

The strengthened legislation is important because it places greater emphasis on prevention.

In our training, we regularly discuss recognising warning signs, managing inappropriate behaviour and responding safely. But employers must also consider the working environment, reporting arrangements and what happens after an incident.

The responsibility is not simply to train employees to manage harassment. It is to take all reasonable steps to prevent it.

WHAT EMPLOYERS SHOULD DO NOW

- Review sexual harassment risks. Consider where staff may encounter inappropriate behaviour, including home visits, reception areas, telephone calls and online communication.
- Identify preventive measures. Check whether staffing arrangements, reporting procedures, training and management responses adequately address those risks.
- Keep evidence of action taken. Record risk assessments, preventive measures, staff consultation, training and subsequent reviews.

Sources and legislation

London Ambulance Service campaign reporting, 4 November 2026. Direct link withheld to avoid identifying sexual-offence complainants.
Employment Rights Act 2025, section 20: All reasonable steps
Employment Rights Act 2025, section 21: Third-party harassment
Equality Act 2010, section 40A: Employer duty to prevent sexual harassment
The Employment Rights Act 2025 (Commencement No. 6 and Transitional and Saving Provisions) Regulations 2026, regulation 3: Effective 30 October 2026
Equality and Human Rights Commission, Updated harassment guidance, 30 October 2026 | Employer 8-step guide
London Ambulance Service campaign figures, 14 October 2026. Direct link withheld to avoid identifying sexual-offence complainants.
Equality Act 2010, section 40: Employees and applicants: harassment
Equality Act 2010, section 26: Harassment

02
NHS

02 | NHS

NHS Warning System: A Clearer Response to Violence and Abuse Against Staff

Staff should not be left wondering what happens after they report threatening or abusive behaviour.

University Hospitals of Derby and Burton NHS Foundation Trust introduced a structured warning system to address intentional violence and abuse towards employees.

The trust reported more than 2,600 incidents of violent and aggressive behaviour during 2024–25.

Its staff survey also found that one in four respondents had experienced physical violence from patients, relatives or members of the public.

How the system works

The trust's approach includes verbal warnings, written warnings and, in serious or repeated cases, panel consideration of exclusion from trust premises and withholding non-emergency treatment.

A yellow-card warning can be issued formally and recorded. Where behaviour continues, a panel considers the circumstances before deciding whether further restrictions are appropriate.

A red-card decision is not automatic.

The trust says its sanctions do not apply to vulnerable patients whose complex health needs lead to aggressive behaviour for which they are not at fault, including patients with no capacity or insight into their behaviour. These patients are supported differently.

Any restrictions must protect patient safety and essential care. This is not a blanket right to refuse necessary treatment.

The trust also uses a reporting and support pathway known as DARSE: Detect, Act, Report, Support and Evaluate.

The legal responsibilities

Under section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, employers must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of employees at work.

This includes protecting staff from foreseeable work-related violence and aggression.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers to assess workplace risks and put appropriate arrangements in place to manage them.

Regulation 3 requires suitable and sufficient risk assessments. Regulation 5 requires effective arrangements for planning, organising, controlling, monitoring and reviewing preventive measures.

Where abuse amounts to sexual harassment or harassment covered by the Equality Act 2010, the strengthened provisions introduced by the Employment Rights Act 2025 may also apply.

The important distinction is that not every incident of violence or verbal abuse is unlawful harassment under the Equality Act, but it may still present a significant workplace safety risk.

Why this matters beyond the NHS

Housing associations, councils, charities and other public-facing services regularly deal with difficult situations.

Some involve frustration or distress. Others involve deliberate threats, intimidation or repeated abuse.

Organisations need clear arrangements for responding appropriately while continuing to meet their legal, safeguarding and service responsibilities.

The NHS approach provides an example of how responsibilities, warnings, decisions and staff support can be connected.

It is not a system that should simply be copied into every workplace.

02
NHS

02 | NHS | CONTINUED

NHS: continued

University Hospitals of Derby and Burton | Earlier practice, August 2025

VINCE'S VIEW

One question I regularly raise during conflict management training is what happens after a member of staff reports threatening behaviour.

Who reviews the incident? Who decides whether additional precautions are needed? And who tells the employee what has happened?

Staff should not be expected to make complicated decisions about sanctions, capacity or access to services while managing a potentially threatening encounter.

Their immediate priority is safety and following the organisation's procedures.

Managers need to take responsibility for what happens next.

WHAT EMPLOYERS SHOULD DO NOW

- Clarify who makes decisions. Staff should know who can issue warnings, authorise additional precautions or consider restrictions.
- Check repeat incidents. Make sure previous threats or abusive behaviour are considered before further contact or visits take place.
- Close the reporting loop. Check that employees receive appropriate feedback, support and information about changes to working arrangements.

Sources and legislation

UHDB, New warning system to prevent intentional abuse, 19 August 2025
UHDB, Preventing and reducing violence and aggression towards staff
Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, section 2
Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, regulations 3 and 5 | Regulation 5
HSE, Violence and aggression at work: What the law says
This is an established approach reported in August 2025, included for its continuing relevance.

03
SOC

03 | SOCIAL WORK

When Abuse Becomes Part of the Job, Reporting Starts to Fail

More than a quarter of social workers who experienced abuse did not report it. Why?

Research published by UNISON in June 2026 raises serious concerns about the safety of social workers carrying out home visits.

The survey, involving almost 1,800 social workers, found that abuse was common during both lone and joint visits.

The findings

50%
reported verbal abuse during a lone home visit in the previous 12 months.

40%
reported verbal abuse during a joint visit.

27%
of those who experienced abuse did not report it.

50%
of those who did not report abuse regarded it as part of the job.

25%
of non-reporters believed their employer would ignore their concerns.

The figures reflect the experiences of survey respondents. They are not a national estimate of abuse affecting every social worker.

UNISON also found that 92% of respondents said their employers regarded lone home visits as normal practice.

Staff shortages and increasing service demands were frequently identified as reasons for more lone visits.

The problem with unreported abuse

Incident reporting is an important part of workplace risk management.

But what happens when employees stop reporting threats because they believe nothing will change?

Managers may be unaware of repeated problems involving particular individuals, addresses or activities.

Risk assessments may then be based on incomplete information, leaving other colleagues without important warnings.

The research also identified online harassment, demonstrating that work-related abuse can continue after a visit has ended.

These findings have clear relevance for housing officers, social care workers, council employees and charity staff.

The legal responsibilities

The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 requires employers to protect employees from foreseeable risks, including work-related violence, so far as is reasonably practicable.

Under regulation 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, employers must assess the risks associated with work activities.

For home visits, this means considering the circumstances of the visit, previous incidents, available risk information and whether lone working is appropriate.

Regulation 8 also requires appropriate procedures for serious and imminent danger, while regulation 10 requires employees to receive relevant information about risks and preventive measures.

There is no general legal requirement for every home visit to involve two employees. However, where a risk assessment identifies that lone working is unsuitable, employers must put appropriate precautions in place.

The Employment Rights Act 2025 is also relevant where staff face sexual harassment or harassment by third parties that falls within the Equality Act 2010.

The strengthened duty to take all reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment means employers should consider risks arising from visits to people’s homes, not only incidents occurring on their own premises.

03
SOC

03 | SOCIAL WORK | CONTINUED

Social work: continued

UNISON research | June 2026

VINCE'S VIEW

One of the most concerning findings is that staff are experiencing abuse but choosing not to report it.

In our training, we regularly discuss the importance of recording incidents, but reporting only works when staff have confidence that something will happen afterwards.

If workers believe abuse is simply part of their job, employers may be making decisions without knowing the true level of risk.

The other important issue is lone working.

A home visit should not automatically be considered suitable for one person simply because that is how the organisation normally operates.

The decision needs to reflect the circumstances, the available information and the risks involved.

WHAT EMPLOYERS SHOULD DO NOW

- Check how joint visits are authorised. Staff should know when they can request a colleague and how decisions are made when new risks emerge.
- Ask why incidents go unreported. Speak with staff about whether they feel confident raising concerns and whether previous reports resulted in action.
- Review missed-contact arrangements. Check who responds when an employee fails to make an expected contact, how quickly action is taken and what information responders receive.

Sources and legislation

UNISON, Abuse of social workers doesn't stop when the shift ends, 18 June 2026
Community Care, Analysis of the UNISON home-visit survey, 23 June 2026
Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, section 2
Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, regulations 3, 8 and 10 | Regulation 8 | Regulation 10
Employment Rights Act 2025, sections 20 and 21 | Section 21
This research was published in June 2026 and is included for its continuing relevance to lone worker safety.

04
HSG

04 | HOUSING

Thousands of Assaults Against Housing Staff: What Have Employers Changed?

Recorded incidents are important, but the real test is whether organisations use that information to protect employees.

An investigation by Inside Housing, published in August 2025, revealed the extent of violence and abuse recorded by housing providers during 2024.

The figures

3,070
assaults were recorded by 40 UK housing associations during 2024.

37%
increase compared with incidents recorded by the same providers in 2023.

MORE THAN 3,000
incidents involving verbal, physical or sexual assault were recorded across 188 English local authorities in separate data.

The investigation also reported a 20% increase in recorded incidents among the local authorities compared with 2023.

These figures relate to the organisations that supplied information. They do not represent every housing provider or local authority.

The recorded categories include verbal and sexual incidents as well as physical assaults.

Inside Housing also identified improved reporting as one factor contributing to the increase.

This is an important distinction. More reports can reflect greater levels of abuse, improved reporting confidence or a combination of factors.

What should housing employers be looking for?

Incident records should help organisations recognise patterns.

For example, are particular addresses associated with repeated threats? Have several employees experienced intimidation from the same person? Are certain activities, such as rent arrears visits, enforcement action or discussions about anti-social behaviour, generating repeated concerns?

This information should inform risk assessments, staffing decisions, communication arrangements and training.

The legal responsibilities

Several pieces of legislation are relevant to protecting housing staff.

Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, section 2

Employers must ensure the health, safety and welfare of employees at work, so far as is reasonably practicable. This includes protecting staff against foreseeable work-related violence.

Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, regulations 3 and 5

Employers must assess risks and establish effective arrangements to manage, monitor and review workplace safety measures.

Employment Rights Act 2025, sections 20 and 21

Since 30 October 2026, employers must take all reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of employees.

Employers can also be liable for harassment by third parties where they have failed to take all reasonable steps to prevent it.

For housing associations, third parties may include tenants, residents, visitors, contractors and members of the public.

The third-party provisions apply to harassment covered by the Equality Act 2010, not every instance of rudeness, disagreement or verbal abuse.

04
HSG

04 | HOUSING | CONTINUED

Housing: continued

Inside Housing investigation | Historical evidence, August 2025

Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR)

Certain injuries arising from work-related violence must be reported to the relevant enforcing authority.

These include specified injuries and physical injuries that prevent an employee from carrying out their normal work for more than seven consecutive days (excluding the day of the incident), subject to the reporting requirements.

Not every threatening or abusive incident is reportable under RIDDOR. However, employers should still record and investigate relevant incidents through their own procedures.

VINCE'S VIEW

Housing staff regularly deal with challenging situations, often while working alone in people's homes or in the community.

An incident report should provide more than a record of what happened.

It should help the organisation recognise warning signs, identify repeat problems and decide whether working arrangements need to change.

If several employees have experienced threats at the same address, that information needs to reach the next person who may be visiting.

The value of reporting is not simply the number of incidents recorded. It is what the organisation does with that information.

WHAT EMPLOYERS SHOULD DO NOW

- Look for repeated problems. Examine recent incidents involving the same address, individual, location or type of work.
- Check information sharing. Make sure relevant risk information is available to authorised staff before visits, in line with organisational procedures and data protection requirements.
- Confirm what has changed. Identify actions taken following incidents, who is responsible and whether those measures have improved staff safety.

Sources and legislation

Inside Housing, Assaults against housing staff rise year on year, 26 August 2025
Anthony Collins, Protecting frontline staff in social housing, 28 August 2025
Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, section 2
Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 | Regulation 5
Employment Rights Act 2025, sections 20 and 21 | Section 21
HSE, Reporting and learning from incidents of workplace violence
HSE, Violence and aggression at work: What the law says
Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013, regulation 4: Non-fatal injuries to workers
Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013, regulation 6: Work-related fatalities

These figures relate to 2024 and were published in August 2025. They are included as historical evidence to inform current workplace safety arrangements.

05
HSG

05 | SOUTH WALES

Remembering a Colleague Following a Tragic Loss

We also pause to acknowledge the tragic death of a colleague working for a South Wales housing association.

VINCE'S VIEW

We are deeply saddened by this tragic loss.

Our heartfelt condolences go to the family, friends and colleagues of the person who has died.

Our thoughts are also with the wider housing association community across Wales, including the many organisations and staff we have worked alongside over the years.

We recognise how deeply such a loss can affect colleagues, friends and everyone connected with an organisation.

At this difficult time, our thoughts remain with all those affected.

24 KEY

THE WEEK'S KEY MESSAGE

Staff Protection Must Work Beyond the Policy Document

Across the four substantive safety stories, a consistent concern emerges.

Staff may understand how to report an incident, but that alone does not mean they feel protected.

Effective workplace safety depends on more than written procedures.

Employees need access to relevant risk information, clear arrangements for obtaining assistance and confidence that their concerns will be taken seriously.

Managers need to understand their responsibilities, act on reports and check whether existing precautions remain suitable.

The Employment Rights Act 2025 has also strengthened employers' legal responsibilities to prevent sexual harassment and introduced new third-party harassment protections.

Together with existing health and safety legislation, these duties reinforce the importance of identifying foreseeable risks, putting appropriate precautions in place and reviewing whether they work.

The question for every employer is straightforward: If a member of staff reported a serious threat tomorrow, would everyone involved know what to do next?

RED FLAG

WEEKLY

ACTIONABLE INTELLIGENCE FOR SAFETY PROFESSIONALS

TRAINING BUILT AROUND THE RISKS YOUR STAFF FACE

Safety Solutions Training Ltd provides practical, role-specific training for housing associations, local authorities, NHS organisations, social care providers, charities and other public-facing services throughout the UK.

Our courses are tailored to the situations employees encounter in their everyday work, helping them recognise risks, manage difficult interactions and make safer decisions.

Our training programmes

- CONFLICT MANAGEMENT
- LONE WORKER SAFETY
- MANAGING CHALLENGING PHONE CALLS
- DANGEROUS DOGS AWARENESS
- PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES
- SCENARIO-BASED FRONTLINE TRAINING

Further practical guidance

Our Safety Hub provides free workplace safety guidance, practical advice and resources for employers and frontline staff.

For organisations wishing to discuss training tailored to their teams, please contact Safety Solutions Training.

DISCUSS TRAINING

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Editorial note: This publication provides general workplace safety information. It does not replace organisation-specific risk assessments, professional advice or legal guidance. The employment and health and safety duties summarised here concern Great Britain. Northern Ireland has separate legislation.