

Work Place Domestic Abuse Policy

1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 This policy forms part of the ongoing commitment to promoting dignity at work and the Councils responsibility for health, safety and welfare at work for all employees.
- 1.2 It is designed as a tool to provide support for both managers and employees to minimise the risk to employees whilst at work.

2. Aims

- 2.1 The aims of the Domestic Abuse Policy are to:-
 - Minimise the risk to employees from domestic abuse whilst at work
 - Assist and support those who are experiencing domestic abuse - both employees and elected Members
 - Prevent and minimise any impact on the delivery of Council services
 - Raise awareness of domestic abuse, its affect in the workplace and to provide advice and guidance to managers
 - Provide a confidential reporting and advice service for employees and elected Members

3. Definition

- 3.1 People experience Domestic Abuse regardless of their social group, class, age, race, disability, sexuality, lifestyle and gender. The abuse can begin at any time - in new relationships or after many years spent together.
- 3.2 Domestic Abuse can take many forms such as physical assault, sexual abuse, rape and threats. In addition, it may include destructive criticism, pressure tactics, disrespect, breaking trust, isolation and harassment.”
- 3.3 The Home Office has defined Domestic Abuse as:-

"Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.”¹

¹ Domestic Violence: Break the Chain”, Home Office, Sept 2007

4. Support for Employees and Elected Members

- 4.1 Employees and Elected Members experiencing domestic abuse may seek advice and support from the internal and external support agencies listed at the back of this document.
- 4.2 Employees may also contact their line manager or a Dignity at Work Adviser in order to access appropriate support.
- 4.3 Each Dignity at Work Adviser will receive training on issues related to domestic abuse, including information on appropriate support agencies. Publicity will be distributed across the authority to advertise the name and location of contact officers within departments. Dignity at Work Advisers will provide a confidential reporting facility and will be able to refer the employee to the appropriate support agency or manager. Dignity at Work Advisers will not however be responsible for the provision of support.
- 4.4 The main features of the Dignity at Work Adviser's role are:
- to be available and approachable for those employees experiencing domestic abuse;
 - to listen, support and signpost individuals to the appropriate support agency;
 - to keep any information confidential (subject to the requirement to disclose where there is a risk to the health and safety of the employee and others);
 - to respond in a sensitive, non-judgmental manner;
 - to ensure that the employee is aware of the support available to them and remains in control of the situation;
 - to encourage the employee to seek the advice of other relevant agencies

5. The Manager's Role

- 5.1 An employee who is experiencing domestic abuse may tell people at work of their situation or approach their manager of their situation. It may also be the case that the manager will become aware of the situation through associated issues such as absence monitoring or poor performance. As with other welfare issues, identifying that an employee is experiencing difficulties at an early stage will lead to appropriate help being offered. This in turn could mean that the member of staff is able to deal with their situation with the correct support.
- 5.2 Managers and dignity at work advisers need to develop a sensitive and non-judgmental approach when dealing with employees who are experiencing domestic violence, to explore what support is available, and support the employee in whatever they then decide to do however they cannot insist on a course of action the employee should take. This should include:

- Taking the employee seriously, taking time to listen to them and believing what they tell you. Domestic abuse is chronically under-reported, but research shows that domestic abuse accounts for 25% of reported violent crime.
- Ensuring that any discussion about the employee's situation takes place in privacy and that you respect their confidentiality as far as possible (please see Section 5 for further guidance).
- Be non-judgmental - the employee may need some time to decide what to do and may try many different options during this process. Research has shown that it can take a long time to resolve or leave a violent relationship. You should not assume therefore, that because an individual stays in, or returns to a violent relationship that the violence was not severe or did not take place.
- If an employee does not wish to speak to their line manager, they should be advised of the difficulties which may arise if the manager is not aware of the relevant facts and circumstances (for instance if there is a potential health and safety issue or if other action is being taken on performance or absence monitoring).
- Be aware that there may be additional issues faced by the employee because of their age, gender, sexuality, ethnic background, disability etc.
- Be aware of the free support that is available and explore these options with the employee, (support agencies for both women and men are listed at Section 11,12 and 13 of this policy). However, if the employee does not want you to contact other agencies, you must follow their wishes, subject to Section 5 below.

5.3 Managers may receive requests for time-off from employees who are experiencing domestic abuse, to arrange appointments during the normal working day. These requests should be treated sympathetically.

These appointments could include:-

- Appointments with support agencies such as HARBOUR, Social Services or counsellors;
- Arranging rehousing;
- Meetings with solicitors;
- Making alternative childcare arrangements, including meetings with schools.

5.4 Managers should also explore other measures supportively, such as a temporary change in hours, where requested, by employees experiencing domestic abuse.

- 5.5 Additionally, if there are circumstances where an employee is attending court and is seeking an injunction or order in cases of violence or harassment, reasonable time-off with pay should be considered. Employees may request special leave with pay to attend hearings as a witness in either the civil or criminal courts if they have been called under a subpoena or a witness summons.
- 5.6 Managers should record absences or applications for special leave in accordance with HR procedures. However, where these incidents relate to domestic abuse, these records can be placed in a sealed envelope within the employee's file and marked "For manager's access only".
- 5.7 Individuals leaving an abusive relationship may face considerable financial hardship or have concerns about finding suitable accommodation for themselves and their family. HR advice should be sought about what appropriate measures can be taken to help employees in these circumstances, for example referring employees to appropriate agencies for confidential and sympathetic financial advice and assistance.
- 5.8 If the employee has disclosed that their partner has access to their finances or is exerting economic pressure upon them, the Employee may approach the HR/Payroll section to request a change the method of salary payment.

6. Confidentiality and the role of the Dignity at Work Adviser

- 6.1 Any disclosure of domestic abuse by an employee will be treated in the strictest confidence. However, in certain circumstances it may be necessary to breach confidentiality, for example where there maybe an issue involving child protection or harm to a vulnerable adult or where there is a risk to an employee in the workplace. In these circumstances, the manager should inform the employee that they will seek further advice from an appropriate agency i.e. Health and Social Care or the Child Protection Team. It is important that the employee is made aware of issues relating to disclosure at the beginning of any discussions.
- 6.2 Information may only be disclosed to another manager or member, staff or external agency with the permission of the employee, however, where maintaining confidentiality could result in injury or death or risk to the employee and others in the workplace, information should be disclosed without the employee's consent.
- 6.3 Managers have a duty to maintain a secure environment for all staff and this could be made easier if relevant colleagues are aware of potential risks. However, it is essential to gain agreement with the individual concerned on what information will be shared with colleagues minimising risk.
- 6.4 Colleagues need to be made aware that information of this nature provided in confidence must be treated in the strictest confidence and that any unauthorised breaches of confidentiality could lead to serious repercussions for the employee

concerned and potential disciplinary action for failure to treat the information in confidence.

7. Minimising Risk in the Workplace

7.1 The responsibilities of employers, employees and others for the health and safety of persons at work are defined by the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. The Council has developed guidance for managers to deal with incidents where an employee is verbally abused or threatened or physically assaulted in the course of their duties. (Violence in the Workplace)

7.2 The Council is committed to taking all reasonable steps to minimise the risks to safety of its employees. It is recognised that anyone experiencing domestic abuse is particularly vulnerable whilst at work, as once a victim has tried to leave an abusive relationship, the workplace maybe the only place the perpetrator is able to locate them. Incidents may involve violent partners or ex-partners visiting the workplace, abusive phonecalls, or intimidation or harassment of an employee by the alleged perpetrator.

7.3 A workplace risk assessment should be carried out and consideration given to the following measures.

- Improvements to security measures, such as changing key pad numbers or ensuring that access to buildings is open to authorised personnel only.
- Reminding all staff not to divulge information about employees, especially personal details such as addresses, telephone numbers or shift patterns including the location of staff when they are out of the office.
- Offering temporary or permanent changes in workplace, worktimes and patterns, helping to make the employee less at risk at work and on their journeys to and from work. This could include changes to the office layout to ensure that the employee is not visible from reception points or from ground floor windows. Where possible offering temporary changes in specific duties, such as answering phones or working in reception area.
- Agreeing what to tell colleagues and how they should respond if the abuser rings or calls at the workplace. Providing information to assist relevant staff maintain security in the workplace.
- Making sure that the systems for recording staff whereabouts during the day are adequate and if the work requires visits outside the office, considering how risks can be minimised (e.g. changing duties or allowing another colleague to accompany them on certain journeys).
- Recording any incidents of violence in the workplace, including persistent phonecalls, e-mails or visits, to an employee by their partner/ex-partner. A note should be made of any witnesses to these incidents. These

records could be used if the employee wants to press charges or apply for an injunction against the alleged perpetrator. The employer could also apply for an injunction if the actions of an alleged perpetrator impinges on the health and safety of staff.

In situations involving physical violence at work anyone witnessing the incident should ensure it is reported to the police for the appropriate action to be taken.

8. Misconduct

- 8.1. Employees should be aware that domestic abuse is a serious matter that can lead to criminal convictions. Similarly, conduct outside of work (whether or not it leads to a criminal conviction) may also lead to disciplinary action against an employee because of its employment implications and because it may undermine the confidence the Council (as employer) has in the employee.
- 8.2 Harassment and intimidation by an employee of the council towards their partner or ex partner, regardless of where the partner/ex partner works will be viewed seriously and may lead to disciplinary action being taken.
- 8.3 Elected Members must not conduct themselves in a manner which could reasonably be regarded as bringing their office or Authority into disrepute. The Code of Conduct also requires Members not to bully any person. Complaints about Members' conduct should be made in writing and addressed to the Chair of the Standards Committee's Assessment Sub Committee, c/o The Director of Law and Democracy for investigation. Advice on Member conduct can be sought from the Monitoring Officer (Director of Law & Democracy).
- 8.4 Factors to consider will be:
 - the nature of the conduct;
 - the position the employee holds within the Council;
 - the extent to which the post involves contact with other employees or the general public;
- 8.5 HR advice is available if any of the circumstances set out above are brought to a manager's attention.

9. Information and training

- 9.1 The Council is committed to raising staff awareness of the impact of Domestic abuse and its potential effects in the workplace. Ongoing training will be provided for all senior managers, supervisors, Dignity at Work Advisers and Human Resources staff to promote best practice responses to Domestic Abuse related issues and employee disclosures.
- 9.2 All employees and members, including those who are new to the Council, will be made aware of this policy by the use of a range of different measures e.g. training, induction, leaflets and posters. Managers, Supervisors and HR Business Partners will be made aware of this policy and their responsibilities through training and continuing support from Human Resources.
- 9.3 Appropriate linkages will be made to:-
- Confidential Reporting (whistleblowing)
 - Violence in the Workplace
 - Dignity at Work
 - Disciplinary Procedure
 - Employees Code of Conduct
 - Grievance Procedure
 - CRB Policy

10. Monitoring and Review

- 10.1 All records of employees who experience domestic abuse will be treated as strictly personal and confidential. This will include any referral to professional agencies.
- 10.2 Reports will periodically be presented to Human Resources Strategy Group relating to the effectiveness of the Policy. It will not be possible to identify individuals from this process.
- 10.3 This Policy will be reviewed by the Head of Human Resources in consultation with the appropriate Trade Unions in the light of experience gained from its operation and advice obtained from emerging good practice.

11. Internal Support Services

HR Contact: Julia Spittle

Monitoring Officer: David Bond (tel. no. 01642 527060)

Dignity at Work Advisers, who have received awareness training in domestic abuse, contact details:

Mohammed Abuzahra	(01642 527767)
Dawn Benomran	(01642 528205)
Martin Emers	(01642 527583)
Pat Emerson	(01642 528341)
Margaret Madden	(01642 527519)
Annette Nelthorpe	(01642 526157)
Lyn Owbridge	(01642 677600)
Jacky Stevely	(01642 526098)

Housing Options Services: Regina Harrington (01642 528324)

Welfare Rights Service: 01642 526141

Operational Safeguarding Manager CESC: 01642 527413

12. Local Domestic Abuse Services

Harbour (formerly North Tees Women's Aid) has worked for over 30 years to achieve safer communities through holistic services addressing domestic abuse. It operates across Stockton, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, and Easington and offers refuge services, adult and children's outreach, a sexual violence counselling programme and a male perpetrators programme.

Within Stockton, the following services are available:

Harbour Stockton Refuge

Telephone: 01642 553 323 (24 hrs)

Email: stocktonrefuge@myharbour.org.uk

Harbour Stockton Refuge has 7 self contained units providing accommodation for women and children who have left an abusive partner. The refuge also has a room to accommodate emergency overnight stays. The refuge can be accessed 24 hours a day and staff provide support and guidance to the women and their children.

Harbour Adult Outreach (South)

Cambridge Chambers
Regency West Mall
West Row
Stockton on Tees
TS18 1ET
Telephone: 01642 733 056
Fax: 01642 733 052
Email: outreachsouth@myharbour.org.uk

Harbour's Adult Outreach Service provides telephone, one to one and group support for men and women who have or are living with domestic abuse. They also facilitate the Freedom Programme – a free 12 week course that helps women to understand the beliefs held by abusive men and the effects of abuse upon children.

Harbour Children's Outreach

Telephone 01429 868 805
Fax: 01429 867 382
Email: childrensoutreach@myharbour.org.uk

Harbour's Children's Outreach team works with children aged 3 -16 who have or are living with domestic abuse or experiencing a chaotic lifestyle. Services include one to one support and group work sessions. The Children's Outreach Team also works with young people to promote healthy and respectful relationships.

Harbour Sexual Violence Counselling service

Telephone: 0845 602 7449
Email: counsellingprogramme@myharbour.org.uk

Harbour's counselling programme offers support to victims of sexual abuse or rape. Qualified counsellors work with males and females aged 18 and over on an individual or group basis.

Harbour Men's Programme (Perpetrator Project)

Telephone: 0845 602 7440
Email: mensprogramme@myharbour.org.uk

Harbour provides a programme for men who have been violent or abusive to a partner or ex-partner and can demonstrate their intention to change their behavior. The programme is voluntary, and after initial assessments, comprises a 30 session rolling programme of group work.

Harbour Freedom Programme

Telephone: 0845 602 7803
Email: freedomprogramme@myharbour.org.uk

The Harbour Freedom Programme is a 12 week course that will help women to understand the beliefs held by abusive men and the effects of abuse upon children. The programme aims to help participants to help themselves and increase their self confidence

13. National Domestic Abuse Services

0117 944 44 11 (enquiry line only)

National Women's Aid

www.womensaid.org.uk

0845 3030 900

Victim Supportline 24 Hours

0808 2000 247

National Women's Aid

Freephone 24 Hour Domestic Violence **Helpline**

helpline@womensaid.org.uk

020 7251 8887

Rights of Women Sexual violence legal advice phone

Rights of Women runs a sexual violence advice line and also provides free legal advice for women and produces free leaflets which you can download from their site (including ones on sexual violence and on sexual harassment). Monday 11am–1pm; Tuesday 10am–12noon. Textphone: 020 7490 2562.

www.rightsofwomen.org.uk

08452 60 44 60 (Minicom 0207 231 3884)

Broken Rainbow

Broken Rainbow supports lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people who are experiencing domestic violence. The national helpline offers a UK-wide confidential service giving information, support and advice on legal and housing options, safety and home security, and will make referrals to other services as appropriate. The helpline is available Monday–Friday 9am–1pm and 2–5pm. www.broken-rainbow.org.uk

0845 064 6800

M.A.L.E. (Men's Advice Line and Enquiries)

0800 591203

Jewish Women's Aid

020 8904 8193

Muslim Women's Helpline

0191 284 6998

24 Hour Asian Women's Helpline Panah
panahrefuge@hotmail.com

020 7008 0151

Forced Marriage Unit

Forced Marriage Unit leads on policy, outreach work and projects to raise awareness and provide support to survivors of forced marriage, as well as providing practical support and information to people at risk of being forced into marriage.

fm@fco.gov.uk