



Domestic Abuse Workforce Policy

Policy Agreed	
Document Type:	Corporate Policy
Document Name:	Domestic Abuse Workforce Policy
Document Location:	ewokplus
Effective Date:	tbc
Review Date:	tbc
Owner:	HR Manager
Consultee:	Unison, CMG, Community Safety Team
Approved by, date:	
Related documents:	None
Keywords:	Domestic Abuse Workforce Policy
Equality Impact Assessment in place:	Yes
Relevant external law, regulation, standards:	<p>The health and safety of employees under the Health and Safety at work Act 1974</p> <p>Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults under the Children Act 2004 and the Care Act 2014</p> <p>The Serious Crime Act 2015</p>

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1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 Everyone has the right to a life free from abuse in any form. Domestic abuse is wholly unacceptable and inexcusable behaviour and responsibility for domestic abuse lies with the perpetrator. Woking Borough Council strives to create a working environment that promotes the view that abuse against people is unacceptable and that such abuse will not be condoned
- 1.2 Woking Borough Council is committed to supporting employees who are experiencing domestic abuse and providing guidance for employees and management to address the occurrence of domestic abuse and its effects on the workplace.
- 1.3 The principles and standards described in this policy apply to employees and temporary workers whilst working for, and on behalf of the Council.
- 1.4 This policy provides advice and guidance on how to recognise and support employees who are victims of domestic abuse and how to manage employees who are perpetrating domestic abuse.

2.0 What is Domestic Abuse? The Legislative Framework

- 2.1 The UK Government definition of domestic abuse is:

“Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional
- verbal

For definitions see Appendix 1.

- 2.2 The Serious Crime Act 2015 received royal assent on 3 March 2015. The Act creates a new offence of controlling or coercive behaviour in intimate or familial relationships (section 76). The new offence closes a gap in the law around patterns of controlling or coercive behaviour in an ongoing relationship between intimate partners or family members. The offence carries a maximum sentence of five years' imprisonment, a fine or both.

“Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim”.

“Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour”.

- 2.3 Domestic abuse can go beyond actual physical violence. It can also involve emotional abuse, destructive criticism, pressure tactics, disrespect, breaking trust, isolation from

friends, family or other potential sources of support, control over access to money, personal items, food, transportation and the telephone, and stalking. It can also include abuse inflicted on, witnessed by or threatened against children.

- 2.4 Any children within the household or linked to relationships will be adversely affected by seeing or hearing such abuse. They will be affected emotionally and may be injured as part of the abuse or because of intervening during such episodes.
- 2.5 The Council must also consider its other responsibilities and duties under other legislation in connection with domestic abuse. This includes:
- The health and safety of employees under the Health and Safety at work Act 1974
 - Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults under the Children Act 2004 and the Care Act 2014.

3.0 Woking Borough Council and Domestic Abuse

Our commitment

- 3.1 Domestic abuse can have a serious impact in the workplace, affecting morale, health, wellbeing or the self-confidence of an employee. It can affect performance at work and can result in:
- absenteeism and staff retention
 - frequently arriving at work late or needing to leave early
 - reduced productivity
 - uncharacteristic displays of anxiety, depression, distraction or poor concentration
 - significant changes in employees dress sense
 - obsession with time
 - receiving upsetting phone calls, text messages, emails or being the victim of vandalism or threats.
- 3.2 The Council recognises the damaging impact of domestic abuse and that it has a significant leadership role in raising awareness and having well equipped managers to deal with any cases of domestic abuse within the Council.

It will do this by:

- adopting a zero tolerance approach towards cases of domestic abuse
- encouraging employees to raise the issue at work without fear of judgement, reprisals or further victimisation or discrimination
- providing appropriate support and assistance
- promoting an environment that provides a safe workplace for all and is caring and supporting paying due regard to health & wellbeing
- ensuring all line managers are aware of domestic abuse and its negative implications in the workplace.

4.0 Training

4.1 To ensure employees are aware and competent in dealing with and/or identifying incidents of domestic abuse it is good practice for managers and staff to undergo training. This includes:

- new and existing managers – various training courses are provided by Surrey County Council.
- HR Staff (they may have a specific role in supporting and signposting employees and managers). Training and awareness sessions provided by SCC and yourSanctuary.
- all employees receive information on domestic abuse as part of the mandatory e-learning safeguarding training and annual awareness raising campaigns.

4.2 Employees that work directly with victims or perpetrators of domestic abuse will undertake more specialist training relevant to their job. This will be identified through team induction and the annual PDR process.

4.3 We will do this by offering training and briefings about domestic abuse and related issues to raise awareness and understanding and provide managers and staff with the knowledge and skills they need.

This will include (but is not limited to to):

- Domestic abuse awareness
- Mandatory citizenship level Safeguarding training, includes a section on domestic abuse
- Staff briefings and updates

5.0 Confidentiality and Choice

5.1 The Council expects managers to take action and support employees affected by domestic abuse confident that they may discuss their concerns with their line manager, or someone else, if they or a colleague is experiencing or perpetrating abuse.

5.2 Managers will sign post and encourage victims of domestic abuse to seek support from other agencies to ensure they may receive the most appropriate and relevant help. See Appendix 2

5.3 Domestic abuse is a crime, however it is the victim's choice as to whether they report the matter to the police and managers and colleagues must respect their wishes.

5.4 Should a victim choose to make a police report, managers should offer them support to do so.

5.5 We will encourage victims to share information with other agencies to ensure the most appropriate and relevant support is in place and agreed by the victim and any civil or criminal actions are explored fully.

5.6 The most difficult thing is for a victim to take the initial step of speaking to someone and disclosing the issues they face.

- 5.7 Employees who do speak out and share this information must be assured their personal information will only be shared with others on a 'need to know' basis and with their consent.
- 5.8 Managers will respect the wishes of those who do not give consent to share their personal information unless they have an overriding safeguarding duty to protect children and/or vulnerable adults or where the employer needs to act to protect the safety of other employees. In circumstances where the employer has to breach confidentiality, they will seek specialist advice before doing so. If the employer decides to proceed in breaching confidentiality after having taken advice, they will discuss with the employee why they are doing so and will seek the employee's agreement where possible.

6.0 Signs of Domestic Abuse

- 6.1 Domestic abuse experienced by employees may be identified in various ways:
- the employee may confide in their colleagues or manager;
 - it may surface because of enquiries into a reduction in quality of work, a drop in performance or enquiries into significant changes in behaviour around self-confidence, isolation, anxiety and suspected use of alcohol;
 - it may be uncovered as the background to poor attendance, lateness, or absenteeism, or where victims prefer to be at work rather than at home;
 - there could also be physical indicators such as unexplained bruising or injuries or wearing excessive clothing;
 - It may become known as a result of an incident reported to the police or children's services which is referred to the Council as a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) enquiry or raised at a meeting that a council officer attends through the course of their normal duties. For example a referral to housing management or environmental health as a nuisance issue, a referral to the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) or a referral to Housing Advice.
- 6.2 It is essential to understand that any of the above may arise from a range of circumstances of which domestic abuse may be one. Sometimes a manager or work colleague may suspect that someone has a problem at home but is afraid to raise it. However, it is better to ask as research shows that victims wish someone had asked them about it. This could be their manager, colleague or other associate. If you suspect an employee may be affected by domestic abuse, you should raise this possibility with them in a sensitive way, starting with what you observed of their behaviour. See Appendix 2.
- 6.3 You may then be able to explore, if there are any problems at home or in their relationships. It is important to listen, demonstrate understanding, patience and offer practical work related support as well as signposting to specialist services and information according to the needs of the person. See Appendix 3
- 6.4 The employee might not be willing to talk straight away. If this is the case, let them know that if they want to discuss any matters that might be affecting them in future that they can talk to you or someone else in confidence and you would be happy to support them and find other sources of help. See Appendix 2

7.0 Employee disclosures of domestic abuse

- 7.1 We believe that every employee who is either experiencing or has experienced domestic abuse should be able to raise this with their employer in the knowledge that we will treat the matter sympathetically and in confidence.
- 7.2 Anyone who feels they may be experiencing domestic abuse is encouraged to speak to someone. They may choose to speak to their line manager, Trade Union Representative, to Human Resources, or to the [Employee Assistance Scheme](#).
- 7.3 Once an employee has disclosed an incident, the Council can help in a number of ways:
- by listening
 - by signposting to specialist services (see Appendix 3)
 - by providing advice and support
 - by putting in place tailored support or a work place safety plan.
- 7.4 The Council has a duty to protect the health and safety of its employees under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. It is therefore important that effective risk assessments are undertaken and safety plans put in place to manage the risks identified. This will ensure that we comply with our health and safety responsibilities.

Safety plans for employees may include:

- allowances for time off to report a matter to the police, see a solicitor or advice agency
 - permitting a colleague to accompany them to a meeting
 - agreeing to changes in their work pattern, type of duties or location where they work
 - arranging for their pay to go to a different account.
- 7.5 A safety plan is likely to be required to extend beyond arrangements to keep an employee safe in work so it is sensible to develop the safety plan in conjunction with an appropriate support agency such as Domestic Abuse Outreach Services (see Appendix 3). If an employee has a support worker, it would be good practice to consult them about the proposed measures in the work place safety plan.

8.0 Guidelines for Managers and Supervisors

- 8.1 Recognising domestic abuse may not always be obvious.
- 8.2 It is important that managers have awareness of the possibility of domestic abuse and of the signs that suggest this is taking place as it may present itself as another work issue, for example frequent absences from work.
- 8.3 Victims of domestic abuse may all react very differently to domestic abuse; some appearing depressed and withdrawn, others may be agitated and angry. Similarly, perpetrators of domestic abuse will not necessarily fit stereotypes – while some may be overtly aggressive and domineering, others may appear concerned, attentive and charming.
- 8.4 The most important factor in managers identifying that an employee is suffering domestic abuse is simply having an awareness that it may occur and acknowledging the impact that it will have on that individual.

- 8.5 Once a manager is aware of an incident of domestic abuse they are required to support the employee.
- 8.6 An initial disclosure to a manager reflects the employee's view that the manager is someone they can trust. Employing a flexible approach to managing the employee will enable the manager to support them better.
- 8.7 As a manager, you are not trained nor expected to be a counsellor. Domestic abuse specialists are best placed to provide any counselling or advice needed. It is your role to ensure that your employee, where they are a victim/survivor is signposted to appropriate help whilst sensitively providing ongoing support to the employee at work. Sources of support are listed in appendix 3.
- 8.8 If you need advice about how to support the individual you can contact a HR adviser or you can signpost the employee to the Employee Assistance Scheme for advice. It is important to recognise that an employee may find it difficult to make a positive change to their situation; they may be struggling with reconciling pressures from family, children, financial and housing issues, as well as the abuse and control of a partner.
- 8.9 On occasions, there may be times when threats and acts of domestic abuse take place at the workplace.
- 8.10 The risk assessment may be completed with support from HR or colleagues. It is important to note that good record keeping is essential to detail what, if any, decisions have been made and the reason behind those decisions and that you have the full consent of the victim/perpetrator.

9.0 An Employee as a perpetrator of Domestic Abuse

- 9.1 Employees may also be perpetrators of Domestic Abuse and this could come to the attention of the Council, in the same way as it does for victims. Managers or colleagues should not be judgemental.
- 9.2 If a disclosure is made either through a third party or directly by the member of staff, HR must be notified as it will be necessary to carry out an assessment of the situation and decide whether measures need to be put in place to support the member of staff, the victim, and the reputation of the Council.
- 9.3 When the Council becomes aware of violent or abusive behaviour on the part of an employee, they may have to decide on one or a combination of the following actions depending on the nature (seriousness and complexity) of the case:
- Encourage them to seek help from a specialist agency if they are starting to exhibit obsessive or unhealthy controlling behaviours in their relationships, eg. Respect www.respectphoneline.org.uk
 - Encourage them to continue to seek help from a specialist agency if the obsessive or controlling behaviour does not improve.
 - Take disciplinary action in cases of misuse of resources, impact on the reputation of the Council, misuse of authority or harassment or any other inappropriate behaviour, including the use of social media.
 - Report incidents to the police to facilitate a police investigation of a possible criminal offence especially when violence or the threat of violence has occurred.

- 9.4 Incidences of domestic abuse by an employee will be taken seriously particularly where the role requires a criminal records check and the post involves face to face contact with vulnerable individuals regardless of whether the incident or incidents' take place in or outside of work. In such circumstances, the matter will be investigated and/or a risk assessment conducted to determine whether any misconduct has taken place or is having impact on an employee's role. If an employee has used workplace resources such as work time, telephones, or e-mail to harass their current or former partner, the Council will investigate the facts and may consider the use of the disciplinary procedure. Depending on the finding, a hearing may result in disciplinary sanctions up to and including dismissal.
- 9.5 If an employee is cautioned or convicted of an offence where there is an allegation of Domestic Abuse, which may or may not lead to a prosecution, again an investigation and/or risk assessment will be undertaken.
- 9.6 It may be appropriate to suspend the employee pending the outcome, subject to the circumstances in each case.

10.0 Where the victim and perpetrator both work for the Council

- 10.1 Given that some people meet their partners at work, it is entirely possible that this situation could arise. In cases where both the victim and the perpetrator of domestic abuse work in the organisation, you should take extra care to protect the victim. In addition to considering disciplinary action against the employee who is perpetrating the abuse, you may need to take action to ensure that the victim and perpetrator do not come into contact in the workplace. In addition, you may need to ensure you minimise the potential for the perpetrator to use their position or work resources to find out details about the whereabouts of the victim.
- 10.2 This may include a change of duties for one or both employees or withdrawing the perpetrators access to certain computer programmes or offices where operationally feasible.
- 10.3 A perpetrator, who may be very charismatic or manipulative, may also groom work colleagues through lies and misinformation to take their side or act on their behalf against a victim.
- 10.4 The Council recognises that in certain circumstances, those experiencing and perpetrating domestic abuse in a relationship may choose to seek solutions jointly through mediation or other external avenues, and in such situations, appropriate support should be given.
- 10.5 In particular, a victim may be concerned if their partner or ex-partner loses their employment through a disciplinary process then this will adversely affect their financial position and that of any children involved and so increase the likelihood of violence against them. Managers must remain alert to the fact that they are not specialists in this area and that victim and perpetrators need specialist advice to make safe decisions about any joint interventions.
- 10.6 Managers should never attempt to mediate or agree to pass messages or property between the parties as this may increase levels of risk, imply collusion and undermine the victim.

10.7 A risk assessment may be required for when the employee is at work. Safety of the employee experiencing domestic abuse, children (if any) and other family members involved is paramount both in and out of the work place, whether they are staying in or leaving the abusive relationship. Matters relating to welfare of children in the household should follow the Council's Safeguarding Adults & Children's Policy.

Please see the Council's Safeguarding Adults & Children Policy [here](#)

11.0 Use of the Disciplinary Procedure

11.1 Employees may be subject to investigation under the Disciplinary Procedure in the following circumstances:

- if they are involved in domestic abuse related incidents that occur in the workplace or during work time, including making threatening telephone calls or misuse of the computer network
- if an employee's activities outside work have an impact on their ability to perform the role for which they are employed, or are likely to bring the Council into disrepute. This is particularly relevant for those who work with the public, with children or vulnerable adults
- if a colleague is found to be assisting an abuser in perpetrating the abuse, for example, by giving them access to facilities such as telephones, email or social media then they may be seen as having committed a disciplinary offence
- if an employee discloses confidential information about another employee or service user
- if it becomes evident that an employee has made a malicious allegation that another employee is perpetrating abuse, perhaps in relation to a custody battle
- if there is bullying, harassment or any other inappropriate behaviour where the victim and perpetrator both work for the council.

Appendix 1

Definitions:

- **Psychological** - Intimidation, threats to harm, threats to kidnap children, Blackmail, destruction of pets, property, mind games and stalking.
- **Physical** - Inflicting or attempting to injure, grabbing, pinching, biting, kicking, stabbing, weapons, withholding medications, food, funds.
- **Sexual** - Marital rape, acquaintance rape, forced sex after physical beating, fondling, forced prostitution.
- **Financial** - Maintaining control of earned income, withholding money and running up debt in the victim's name.
- **Emotional** - Undermining or attempting to undermine the victims' sense of worth, constant criticism, name calling, insults, put downs, silent treatment, repeatedly making and breaking promises, harming or making threats to harm pets.
- **Controlling behaviour is:** a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.
- **Coercive behaviour is:** an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim. (Home Office 2013).

Appendix 2

Potential Questions that can be used where an employee is suspected of experiencing Domestic Abuse. (CIPD 'A Guide for Employers April 2013')

If a manager suspects that an employee is experiencing Domestic Abuse, they should facilitate a conversation to be able to discuss this and identify and implement appropriate support.

Shying away from the subject can perpetuate fear of stigma and increased feeling of anxiety. Often employees will not feel confident in speaking up, so a manager making the first move to begin a conversation can be key.

Managers should ask the employee supportive questions, to establish a relationship with the employee and develop empathy. Below are some examples of questions that could be asked:

- How are you doing at the moment? Are there any issues you would like to discuss with me?
- I have noticed recently that you are not yourself. Is anything the matter?
- Are there any problems or reasons that may be contributing to your frequent sickness absence/under performance at work?
- Is everything alright at home?
- What support do you think might help? What would you like to happen? How?

Avoid victim blaming. It is important that managers are able to provide a non-judgemental and supportive environment. Respecting the employee's boundaries and privacy is essential.

Even if managers disagree with the decisions being made regarding an employee's relationship, it is important to understand that a victim of domestic abuse may make a number of attempts to leave their partner before they are finally able to do so.

The role of the manager is not to deal with the abuse itself, but make it clear (through our 'Domestic Abuse Workplace Policy') that employees will be supported and to outline the help that is available.

Appendix 3

Additional information and contacts

Help and support for survivors of domestic abuse

In an emergency, call the police on 999

In a non-urgent situation, you can contact Surrey Police by calling 101.

Who to contact for further help and advice:

[Surrey domestic abuse helpline](#)

[Outreach Services in Surrey](#)

[Surrey Against Domestic Abuse website](#)

[Victim Support](#)

[Websites offering help and support](#)

Surrey domestic abuse helpline

Helpline: 01483 776822 (open 9am-9pm)

Website: www.yoursanctuary.org.uk

'yourSanctuary' is a local charity that provides a range of services which offer emotional and practical support to people and their children who are experiencing or have experienced domestic abuse. They work to prevent domestic abuse and undo the damage it does, by providing comprehensive prevention, advocacy and educational programmes. Their helpline 01483 776822 offers immediate emotional support, as well as confidential advice and information that can also be found on their website.

How to view the Internet safely -The yourSanctuary website has advice on [covering your Internet tracks](#) from an abuser.

Outreach Services in Surrey

They offer an independent, confidential, listening service to anyone affected by domestic abuse.

East Surrey Outreach Service - 01737 771350 (Serving Reigate and Banstead, Mole Valley and Tandridge)

YourSanctuary Domestic Abuse Outreach Service - 01483 776822 (Serving Woking, Runnymede and Surrey Heath)

North Surrey Outreach Service - 01932 260690 (Serving Epsom and Ewell, Elmbridge, and Spelthorne)

South West Surrey Domestic Abuse Outreach Service - 01483 577392 (Serving Guildford and Waverley).

They are free and impartial services, who can assist by giving practical help and emotional support as well as providing information on a wide range of matters, including housing matters,

benefits, safety planning and the needs of children affected by domestic abuse. They can also assist with accessing refuge accommodation if you need to leave your home in order to keep yourself safe.

Support can be given by telephone or, where appropriate and safe, with one to one meetings. Outreach services offer anything from a one off opportunity to talk, to longer term, ongoing support and assistance. They will also help you deal with other agencies, in an advocacy role, to help you get the services or information that you need. This means they will support you in talking to the police, legal services, housing or benefits agencies etc, according to your wishes and needs. Outreach services are also able to talk to you about how to get appropriate legal information and advice.

Surrey Against Domestic Abuse website

Website: www.surreyagainstda.info

The Surrey Against Domestic Abuse website offers help and support for anyone in the county affected by domestic abuse and professionals working with those affected by domestic abuse. Visit www.surreyagainstda.info for more information.

Victim Support

Tel: 0845 38 99 528 Website: www.victimsupport.org.uk

VSS offer support, information and advice to all victims of crime. Surrey Police put all reporting crime in touch with them. Victim Support also offer support and information to those who have or are experiencing domestic abuse or are worried about someone they know. Find out more on the [Victim Support website](#) or contact them on: 0845 38 99 528.

Surrey Police

[Surrey Police -Domestic Abuse -www.surrey.police.uk/advice/protect-yourself-and-others/domestic-abuse/](http://www.surrey.police.uk/advice/protect-yourself-and-others/domestic-abuse/)

Safeguarding Children

The Council's Safeguarding Policy [is available here.](#)

Surrey Safeguarding children Board www.surreyscb.org.uk

Adults

Surrey County Council Safeguarding Adults Board -www.surreycc.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/contacting-social-care/surrey-safeguarding-adults-board

Surrey County Council Care and Support for adults -www.surreycc.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/care-and-support-for-adults/raising-concerns-and-staying-safe

Other Websites offering help and support

Rights of Women (ROW)

Rights of Women is an organisation committed to informing, educating and empowering women on the law and their legal rights.

- Family law advice line 0207 251 6577 (Tuesday to Thursday 7pm–9pm Friday 12–2pm)
- Website www.rightsofwomen.org.uk
- Email info@row.org.uk

Men’s Advice Line

Managed by Respect, the Men’s advice line provides support for men experiencing domestic abuse.

- Phone 0808 801 0327
- Website www.mensadvice.org.uk
- Email info@mensadvice.org.uk

Respect

Respect is the UK association for domestic abuse perpetrator programmes and associated support services. Domestic abuse is most often perpetrated by men against women, but does also occur in same sex relationships and in a small number of cases from women to men. The Respect phone line specialises in providing services to male perpetrators, but is also available for female perpetrators and those in same sex relationships.

- Phone 0845 122 8609
- Website www.respect.org.uk
-

DV men

Provide advice and guidance to men who are victims of domestic abuse, including details of men’s refuge accommodation.

- www.DVmen.co.uk
- admin@DVmen.co.uk

GALOP

The LGBT+ anti-violence charity

- Phone 0800 999 5428
- E mail help@galop.org.uk
- www.galop.org.uk

Stonewall

A charity providing advice and guidance on all issues to lesbian, gay and bisexuals

- Phone 08000 502020 (Monday to Friday 9.30am–5.30pm)
- www.stonewall.org.uk

Samaritans

Provide confidential and non-judgemental, emotional support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair.

- Phone 08457 909090 (24 hours)
- Email jo@samaritans.org
- www.samaritans.org