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Domestic Violence Policy



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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Policy statement has been produced as the Council recognises that domestic violence:
- (i) is unacceptable
 - (ii) may have an impact on the workplace, as the Council has a responsibility for the health, safety and welfare of its employees
 - (iii) can impinge on an individual's work performance, and ultimately on service provision.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

- 2.1 Employees who are experiencing or have experienced domestic violence, will be able to raise the issue with his or her Manager, in the knowledge that the matter will be treated effectively, sympathetically and confidentially.
- 2.2 This Council is committed to working in partnership with other agencies or bodies in the statutory or voluntary sector to combat domestic violence.
- 2.3 As the largest employer in Rhondda Cynon Taf, this Council will take all reasonable steps to deal with domestic violence through the support offered to its employees.
- 2.4 The core aims and objectives of this Policy are:
- to assist and support employees who approach their Manager for help in addressing problems arising from domestic violence
 - to remove fears of stigmatisation for employees who have experienced domestic violence
 - to ensure employees seeking assistance are confident that their situation will be handled seriously, compassionately and confidentially by all those involved
 - to ensure all employees are aware of the Policy and its implications.
- 2.5 To achieve the core aims and objectives, the Council will raise the awareness of domestic violence throughout its workforce by, for example, utilising the HR Intranet Site and notifying all managers of the necessity to inform all employees at e.g. team meetings. Furthermore, specific guidance dealing with domestic violence is attached to this Policy Statement, which outlines the support measures that can be taken, e.g.,

- access to confidential independent professional counselling
- special paid time off to enable employees to attend, where necessary, with support agencies, solicitors, for re-housing, to alter childcare arrangements or to attend Court.
- availability of assertiveness training, or confidence building (since domestic violence can affect self-esteem of victims)
- information on local advice and aid agencies and helplines.

2.6 The responsibility for implementing the requirements of this Policy, and for the preparation of an implementation strategy, rests with each Service Director or, Head of Service.

GUIDANCE FOR DEALING WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

1. WHAT IS MEANT BY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

1.1 For the purpose of this guidance, the following Home Office definition applies:

“The term domestic violence can be any violence between current or former partners in an intimate relationship, wherever and whenever the violence occurs. The violence may include physical, sexual, emotional or financial abuse”.

1.2 Examples of domestic violence include:

- **physical, sexual or psychological abuse** e.g. slapping, pushing, kicking, punching, stabbing, rape, verbal abuse, humiliation
- **financial or emotional deprivation** e.g. withholding money, not allowing friends to visit or phone calls
- **the use or threat of using legal sanctions against a partner** e.g. threats of deportation
- **denial of rights** e.g. denial of medical care, physical freedom.

1.3 Whilst it is recognised that it is overwhelmingly women who experience domestic violence, these guidelines equally apply to any employee who requires help and advice, including males, lesbian, gay, and bisexual people who are suffering domestic violence.

2. IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM

2.1 It is unlikely, in the first instance, that employees who experience domestic violence will inform colleagues of their situation, or approach their manager with problems. It is far more likely that the manager will become aware of the situation through associated issues such as sickness absence monitoring or poor performance. As with other welfare issues, identifying an employee is experiencing difficulties at an early stage will lead to appropriate help being offered, and allow that employee to deal with their situation far more effectively.

2.2 Managers need to develop a sensitive and non-judgemental approach when dealing with employees that have experienced domestic violence. These measures could include:

- ensuring the immediate safety, and security at work of employees
- taking employees seriously, listening and believing them
- ensuring that any discussion with an employee about their circumstances, takes place in privacy
- respecting confidentiality - the consequences of domestic violence are serious, and managers and colleagues need to respect this
- understanding employees may not wish to approach their line manager, and may prefer to involve a third party such as a colleague or trade union representative
- finding out what employees want and whether a manager, another officer or another agency can help them achieve it. Being honest about what can be offered
- being aware of the additional issues faced by employees, because of their age, gender, sexuality, ethnic background or, disability etc
- being non-judgemental - employees may need some time to decide what to do, and may try many different options during this process. Research has demonstrated that it can take a long time to break free of a violent relationship. It should not be assumed therefore, that because an individual returns or stays in a violent relationship, that the violence was not severe or did not take place
- being aware of what support is available, and exploring these options with employees (a list of support agencies for women and men is listed under Section 8 of the guidance). However, if an employee does not wish the manager to contact other agencies, his/her wishes must be paramount.

3. **ENSURING SAFETY**

3.1 The main responsibilities of employers, employees, and others for the health, safety and welfare of persons at work are defined by the Health and Safety at Work etc.1974, and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. Furthermore, the Council has also developed guidance for managers to deal with incidents where employees are verbally abused or threatened or physically assaulted in the course of their duties. This is detailed in the Violence at Work Policy - HS 13, which can be accessed from the HR intranet site or obtained from the Human Resources Division

3.2 Although Policy HS13 will apply to most situations of violence in the workplace, managers may have to consider additional factors if these incidents involve domestic violence. These incidents may involve violent partners or ex-partners visiting the workplace, abusive phone calls, intimidation or harassment of employees by the alleged perpetrator. These issues could be addressed by the following measures:

- improving security measures such as changing key pad numbers or ensuring that access to buildings is open to authorised employees only
- reminding reception/switchboard operators not to divulge information about employees, especially personal details such as addresses, telephone numbers or shift patterns
- offering temporary or permanent changes in the workplace, work times 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 point or, from ground floor windows
- offering changes in specific duties, such as answering phones or working in reception or in exceptional circumstances, redeployment to another post.
- agreeing what to tell employees, and how they should respond if the abuser rings or calls at the workplace. Providing colleagues with a photograph of the abuser, and other relevant details such as car registration numbers, which may help to maintain security in the workplace
- making sure that the systems for recording employees whereabouts during the day are adequate, and if the work requires visits outside the office, considering how risks can be minimised (eg. changing duties or allowing another colleague to accompany them on certain journeys)
- recording any incidents of violence in the workplace, including persistent phonecalls, emails or visits to an employee by their partner/ex-partner. Details of any witnesses should also be recorded. These records could be used if employees wish to press charges or apply for an injunction against the alleged perpetrator. The Council could also apply for an injunction if the actions of the alleged perpetrator impinges on the health and safety of other members of employees
- managers may have to take account of whether the measures detailed above are operationally feasible, bearing in mind that ensuring employees are safe should be of primary consideration throughout the process.

4. CONFIDENTIALITY

- 4.1 Once an employee has confided in their manager that they are experiencing domestic violence, the manager should reassure him/her that this information will remain confidential. The consequences of breaching confidentiality could have serious effects for the person experiencing domestic violence. Statistics have shown that the risk of more serious assaults, permanent injury, and even murder, takes place when a woman decides to leave home, or immediately after. It is important therefore, not to under estimate the danger or assume that the fear of violence is exaggerated.
- 4.2 Exceptions to 4.1 above are:
- where child protection issues are raised, for instance, if an employee gives information that suggests that their child or another child is at risk from abuse (whether physical, emotional, sexual or neglect). In these circumstances, the manager should inform the employee that s/he would be referring the matter to the appropriate Head of Service and the Director Human Resources.
 - with the express wish of the individual concerned. In these circumstances, employees privy to such information should be reminded that this information is confidential, and any unauthorised breaches could be subject to the Council's disciplinary procedures.

5. SPECIAL LEAVE AND OTHER SUPPORTIVE MEASURES

- 5.1 Managers will give consideration, and view sympathetically requests for special leave for employees who have disclosed they are experiencing domestic violence. These requests could include:
- appointments with support agencies such as Women's Aid, Social Workers or Counsellors
 - arranging re-housing
 - meetings with Solicitors
 - making alternative childcare arrangements, including meetings with schools
 - court proceedings involving incidents of domestic violence.
- 5.2 Managers should explore other supportive measures such as a temporary change in hours, where requested by employees who are experiencing domestic violence.
- 5.3 Managers will record leave of absence for domestic violence as special leave. These records must be placed in a sealed envelope in the individual's personal file, and marked 'for managers access only'.

- 5.4 An employee leaving a violent partner may face considerable financial hardship or have concerns about finding suitable accommodation for themselves, and their family. Managers should consider approving a salary advance if needed, (eg. to move house or to make other significant financial outlay). Additionally, consideration should be given to changing the method of salary payment if an employee has disclosed that their partner has access to their finances or, is exerting financial pressure upon them.
- 5.5 The Council will provide a Counselling and Support Service to those employees experiencing domestic violence, as follows:
- through the Council's Occupational Health and Wellbeing unit - this is an in-house Counselling Service with the Occupational Health Adviser, Tel No. 01443 494003
 - through Domestic Violence Contact Officers - refer to Section 8 below.

6 IF AN EMPLOYEE IS A PERPETRATOR OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- 6.1 Employees should be made aware that domestic violence is a serious matter, which could lead to a criminal conviction.
- 6.2 As is the case with any employee who is found guilty of a crime, if the Council views that there is conflict between the conviction for violence, and the job s/he is employed to do, some form of disciplinary action may be taken. Serious consideration should be given to whether the actions of an employee who has a criminal conviction for domestic violence, brings the Council into disrepute, and would be regarded as gross misconduct. (Reference should be made to the current Disciplinary Policy.)
- 6.3 The fact that an employee is a perpetrator of domestic violence may make certain job duties inappropriate, and justify redeployment. For example, it may not be appropriate for this person to be providing services to vulnerable women and children, and a change or a transfer, may need to be considered in such circumstances.
- 6.4 Proven harassment and intimidation of employees by their partner or ex-partner who also works for the Council will be viewed seriously, and may lead to disciplinary action being taken.

7. RAISING AWARENESS

- 7.1 The Council is committed to promoting “zero” tolerance of domestic violence against all of its employees. It is essential therefore, that the working environment promotes the view that violence against women and other vulnerable persons is unacceptable and that such violence will not be condoned or made the subject of jokes or graphics.
- 7.2 The Council will aim to raise awareness through the following means:
- inclusion of issues relating to domestic violence in relevant in-house training sessions
 - by posting information on the HR Intranet Site
 - by publicising the role of Domestic Violence Contact Officers-refer to Section 8 below
 - by publicising Local Support Agencies - refer to Section 9 below.

8. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CONTACT OFFICERS (DVCO)

- 8.1 Each Head of Service will appoint a DVCO to provide a confidential support service to employees who are experiencing domestic violence.
- 8.2 Each DVCO will receive training on issues related to domestic violence, including information on appropriate support agencies. Publicity will be distributed across the Council to advertise the name and location of contact officers within the Groups.
- 8.3 Arrangements will be made to ensure that employees are afforded the opportunity to seek support from a male or female DVCO to ensure they are made as comfortable as possible.
- 8.4 The main features of a DVCO role are to:
- be available, and approachable, for those members of employees who are experiencing domestic violence
 - listen, reassure and support individuals
 - keep any information confidential within the boundaries as outlined in section 4
 - respond in a sensitive, non-judgemental manner
 - ensure that employees are aware of the options available to them, and they remain in control of the situation
 - encourage employees to seek the advice of other relevant agencies.

9. **LOCAL SUPPORT AGENCIES**

Domestic Abuse Coordinator

(Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council)

Tel No 01443 742945

Rhondda Women's Aid

PO Box 1
Ferndale
RHONDDA
CF43 3YD

Tel No. 01443 731445

Pontypridd Women's Aid

1st Floor
3 Church Street
PONTYPRIDD
CF37 2TH

Tel No. 01443 491528

Cwm Cynon Women's Aid

PO Box 22
Aberaman
ABERDARE
CF44 6XZ

Tel No. 01685 879673

Rhondda Victim Support Scheme

Upper Floor
8 De Winton Street
Tonypandy
RHONDDA
CF40 2QA

Tel No. 01443 433641

Cynon Valley Victim Support Scheme

14a Commercial Street
ABERDARE
CF44 8HU

Tel No. 01685 879663

Taff Ely Victim Support

Room 105
The Police Station
Berw Road
PONTYPRIDD
CF37 2AA

Tel No. 01443 485202

Cynon Valley Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

Old Library
Duffryn Road
MOUNTAIN ASH
CF45 4DA

Tel No. 01443 475633

Taff Ely/Rhondda Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

5 Gelliwasted Road
PONTYPRIDD
CF37 2BP

Tel No. 01443 409963

Samaritans

75 Cowbridge Road East
Canton
CARDIFF
CF11 9AF

Tel No. 02920 344022

New Pathways RASASS (Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Service)

145 a/b Lower High Street
MERTHYR TYDFIL
CF47 8DP

Tel No. 01685 379310

Housing Advice Centre

35a Taff Street
PONTYPRIDD
CF37 2YY

Tel No. 01443 485515

Rhondda Cynon Taf Community Care Division

Tŷ Elai

Dinas Isaf East

Williamstown

TONYPANDY

CF40 1NY

Tel No. 01443 442100

MANAGERS CHECKLIST

	✓ As Appropriate	
	Yes	No
• Are you familiar with the definition of domestic violence?		
• Are you familiar with the action that needs to be taken if approached on a domestic violence issue?		
• Are you aware of the measures to take in ensuring the safety of an employee at work in a domestic violence situation?		
Are you aware of the need to maintain confidentiality?		
• Are employees under your guidance/control made aware of the supportive measures that are available to them?		
• Are employees under your guidance/control made aware of who are the Domestic Violence Contact Officers?		
• Are employees made aware of Local Support Agencies?		

Completed by: _____

Confirmed by: _____

Name: _____

Name: _____

Designation: _____

Designation: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____