



Employee Domestic Abuse Support Policy



Employee Domestic Abuse Support Policy – V1

Wokingham Borough Council recognises and acknowledges that our employees may be affected by domestic abuse, and should this situation occur the Council are committed to fully supporting employees through this difficult time.

Everyone has the right to a life free from abuse in any form. Domestic abuse is wholly unacceptable and inexcusable behaviour, and our working environment must reflect this.

This policy sets out our approach to supporting employees who are experiencing or have experienced domestic abuse. It also sets out the approach we will take if there are concerns that an employee may be the perpetrator of domestic abuse. We commit to:

- Ensuring that employees experiencing Domestic Abuse feel supported in making a disclosure at work.
- Ensuring line managers understand their responsibilities and take reasonable measures to facilitate needs in the workplace.
- Provide all employees with access to information about domestic abuse, in a format that is easily and discretely accessible within the workplace.
- Provide adequate access to support within the workplace for all employees, whether they be a victim-survivor or where there is concern about the impact of their behaviour on others.

We understand that there are many barriers to reporting domestic abuse, but encourage employees affected to raise the issue in the knowledge that we will treat the matter empathetically and confidentially. You can report domestic abuse or seek support from your line manager; a colleague; a member of the Human Resources Team; a Mental Health First Aider or, a union representative.



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Scope of this Policy – who this applies to

This policy applies to direct employees of Wokingham Borough Council.

This does not apply to the following:

- Agency workers. If you are an agency worker, you should contact your agency direct to discuss the appropriate procedure.
- Schools based colleagues for whom separate policies and procedures apply.
- Contractors, consultants, or any self-employed individuals working for the Council, who should speak to their main point of contact in the council if they have any concerns.

Further Guidance

This policy should be read in conjunction with our Domestic Abuse Guidance document which includes further advice and guidance to support colleagues who are the victims of domestic abuse, how to manage allegations that someone is a perpetrator of domestic abuse and contact information of other organisations who can provide support and guidance.

Should you require any further advice, please contact a member of the Human Resources team.



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Introduction

Domestic abuse has a devastating impact on individuals and their families. Being a great place to work includes supporting employees who may be experiencing domestic abuse currently as well as those whose previous experiences continue to impact on their physical or mental wellbeing.

Each year over 2 million people in the UK experience some form of domestic abuse, with an estimated one in four women and one in six men affected during their lifetime. Research has shown that for those who share a protected characteristic or have complex needs, accessing help can be even more challenging and we want to send a clear message that we understand that domestic abuse can affect anyone, regardless of gender, sexuality, disability, economic means, ethnicity, religion or culture and will work with you to ensure support is accessible and meets your individual needs.

There are different kinds of abuse, but it is about one person having power and control over the other person.

The workplace can be a lifeline for people experiencing domestic abuse. A steady income is often key to a victim-survivor's economic independence and their opportunities to escape from an abusive relationship.

Engaging and interesting work can also provide physical and mental health benefits. Providing opportunities for employees who are affected by abuse to remain in work can support their well-being over the long term, as well as ensuring Wokingham Borough Council retains its talent and gets the best out of our employees.

It can take a huge amount of courage for someone to seek help. We want to make sure that if an employee shares their experience of abuse to someone in Wokingham Borough Council be it their manager, a trusted colleague or someone in HR, we get the response right, first time.

All employers have a duty of care. Health and safety laws ensure workers have the right to work in a safe environment where risks to health and well-being are considered and dealt with efficiently. This policy will help to ensure that Wokingham Borough Council is complying with these laws.

Purpose of this Policy

This policy is designed for all colleagues, so you know where to turn and what to do. This document is intended to help line managers and colleagues recognise and support victim-survivors of domestic abuse and; know what actions to take when an employee is suspected, or known to have, perpetrated domestic abuse.

Separate Domestic Abuse policies are in place for customers and residents experiencing domestic abuse.

Raising awareness of this policy

All employees, including line managers, will be made aware of this policy through:

- new starter inductions
- awareness sessions for Mental Health First Aiders
- awareness-raising events throughout the year
- promotion via the staff intranet
- communications from equality champions.



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In raising awareness of the policy, all communications will remind employees of the methods for reporting domestic abuse, the support available and the importance of not divulging personal details of other members of staff in the course of ordinary business.

Training

We will widely publicise information to raise awareness about domestic abuse and how to get help when needed.

We will carry out a rolling programme of employee and manager training to ensure that they know how to support colleagues experiencing domestic abuse. Information and briefings will make sure that line managers and relevant employees are able to:

- Identify if an employee may be experiencing difficulties because of domestic abuse
- Respond to disclosures and suspicions of domestic abuse in a sensitive and non-judgemental manner
- Provide initial support, tailored to the employees individual needs
- Be clear about available workforce support
- Discuss how Wokingham Borough Council can contribute to safety planning, making reasonable adjustments as needed

We'll inform employees of the importance of confidentiality in the workplace. This might include not divulging personal details of other employees, their work hours or location or contact details.

Reviewing this Policy

Wokingham Borough Council will review this document every 3 years so we can gauge how it is working for us as an employer and for our managers and employees. We recognise that it may be difficult to monitor uptake because of the need to maintain confidentiality. Updates may also be made ad-hoc following feedback from policy users.

Equalities considerations

We have completed an equality impact assessment for this policy.

We'll provide a variety of ways that employees can talk about domestic abuse to people they feel comfortable with – this could include discussions with line managers, HR, Mental Health First Aid Champions which could take place face to face or remotely, in a confidential meeting space or place you feel safe.

We recognised that victim-survivors' experiences of domestic abuse may in part be defined by their background, for example economic status, gender, sexual orientation, ability, age, religion, ethnic group, immigration status. We'll recognise this intersectionality and understand that individuals may face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. We'll consider each individual's needs when tailoring our approach.



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Identifying domestic abuse

Domestic abuse can have severe impacts on the lives of those affected and we will provide a sympathetic, supportive and non-judgemental support and help to any employee we know is experiencing, or trying to move forwards with their lives following, domestic abuse.

Employees can report domestic abuse or seek support from your line manager, a colleague, a member of the HR team, a Mental Health First Aider or a union representative.

Concerns about a colleague who may be experiencing or perpetrating domestic abuse can be discussed with line managers or Human Resources in confidence.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 created a statutory legal definition of domestic abuse, the full wording of which can be accessed at [Domestic Abuse Act 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk). The Act defines domestic abuse as being any single incident, course of conduct or pattern of abusive behaviour between individuals aged 16 or over who are “personally connected” to each other because of being, or having been, intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. Children who see, hear, or experience the effects of the abuse and are related to either of the parties are also considered victims of domestic abuse.

This definition includes honour-based abuse and forced marriage.

Behaviour is “abusive” if it consists of any of the following: physical or sexual abuse; violent or threatening behaviour; controlling or coercive behaviour; economic abuse; or psychological, emotional, or other abuse. This includes incidences where the abusive party directs their behaviour at another person (for example a child). Economic abuse means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on someone’s ability to acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or obtain goods or services.

- **Psychological abuse** includes intimidation, threats to harm, threats to kidnap children, blackmail, destruction of pets, property, mind games and stalking
- **Physical abuse** includes inflicting or attempting to injure, grabbing, pinching, biting, kicking, stabbing, weapons, withholding medications, food, funds
- **Sexual abuse** includes marital rape, acquaintance rape, forced sex after physical beating, fondling, and forced prostitution
- **Economic abuse** includes maintaining control of earned income, withholding money and running up debt in the victim’s name, stopping someone from working.
- **Emotional abuse** includes 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.



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- **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.
- **'Honour' based abuse** is where an individual is punished for breaking the so called 'honour' code of a family or community.
- **Forced marriage** is where one or both individuals is coerced or forced to enter into a marriage which they don't want to.

(Family members are defined as mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister, uncle, aunts, cousins and grandparents, whether directly or indirectly related, in-laws or stepfamily.)

Support for employees experiencing domestic abuse

If you are the victim-survivor of domestic abuse, it can be difficult to talk to anyone about your situation. You may be afraid or worried about the consequences this might have on you, your family, your home, your job or your income.

We want to know that there is help and support available and that we will work with you to address any concerns you have about disclosing information about your situation.

We'll respond empathetically and confidentially if you disclose you're experiencing domestic abuse. You don't need to provide evidence for us to support you.

The person offering support won't provide counselling, but will offer information, workplace support and signpost you to specialist organisations depending on your individual needs.

We have staff who are trained to deal with reports of domestic abuse. You can contact the Domestic Abuse Coordinator for WBC, Karen Evans (karen.evans@wokingham.gov.uk), or Domestic Abuse Housing Specialist, Tanya Pellew (tanya.pellew@wokingham.gov.uk). You can also seek advice from our free and confidential [Employee Assistance Programme \(EAP\)](#). We also have Mental Health First Aid Champions are equipped to help you if you would prefer to choose someone to speak to from the list of MHFA Champions, you can find the details on our employee intranet.

Your safety is our priority and we will work with you to identify work specific safety concerns you may have to try and identify ways which these risks could be reduced. Line managers will consider incidents such as abuse in the workplace, abusive telephone calls, intimidation or harassment by the alleged perpetrator, and will address this in any safety planning. This could include addressing any risks there may be to other colleagues.

Safety planning could involve a broad range of support, which may include, but is not limited to:



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- temporary or permanent changes to your working times and patterns
- changes to specific duties, for example, to avoid contact with an abuser
- agreeing with you what to tell colleagues and how they should respond if the perpetrator makes contact
- contacting you regularly if you are working from home
- measures to ensure a safe working environment, for example, changing your work location
- Using other existing policies, including leave from work or flexible working
- Allowing access to occupational health, counselling, support services, legal meetings in paid time.

Our guidance document outlines additional practical support a line manager can offer you, contact details of our [Employee Assistance Programme](#) and contact details for several external organisations who can offer support.

Wokingham Domestic Abuse Support Service is delivered by Cranstoun and all employees of Wokingham Borough Council can access their support, regardless of whether or not you live in Wokingham Borough. For those employees who live outside the borough, it may be that more local support would best meet your needs and you can either speak to Cranstoun, contact your local service (by searching 'domestic abuse' and the area you live in) or national helplines.

Support for victim-survivors includes a helpline, safety planning with an Independent Domestic Abuse Advisor (IDVA) or outreach worker, individual and group based support, practical and emotional support. Support for perpetrators includes behavioural change programmes. Cranstoun will not notify the council of any contact you have with them and your information will be confidential (unless there are safety concerns as detailed below).

Cranstoun Domestic Abuse Support Contact details:

Telephone: 0118 402 1921; email dass@cranstoun.org.uk or www.cranstoun.org.

Other Local and National Helplines

The contact details for numerous other organisations are listed in Appendix E of the Employee Domestic Abuse Support Guidance document.

Privacy and Confidentiality for employees

It is up to you to decide how much information you are comfortable sharing. You will not be pressured into talking about things you do not wish to discuss. Whoever you speak to, their main concern will be your safety. They will ask information to help keep you safe and how you can access the support you need.

Wokingham Borough Council will not disclose information without your express permission except in some circumstances. Such circumstances may be if we believe you are at risk of serious harm, or we believe that there is a risk of harm to any children or vulnerable adults.



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Perpetrators (people who use abusive behaviour)

We don't condone domestic abuse perpetrated by employees under any circumstances.

We'll treat any allegations, disclosure or conviction of a domestic abuse related offence on a case-by-case basis, aiming to reduce risk and support behaviour change. Our response may include initial conversations with line managers or HR to gain an understanding of the situation and issues, to decide next steps.

We encourage and support employees to address abusive behaviour of all kinds and will work with the employee to be able to access behavioural change appointments and programmes, such as [Men & Masculinities](#) or 1:1 support for female and LGBT+ perpetrators delivered by [Cranstoun Wokingham Domestic Abuse Service](#). You may also be given information about [Occupational Health](#) and the [Employee Assistance Programme](#) (EAP).

We view the use of abusive behaviour by an employee, wherever this occurs as a breach of the [Code of Conduct](#) for disciplinary purposes.

We'll inform employees about how to report any concerns confidentially and sensitively, such as through our [Whistleblowing \(Confidential Reporting\) Policy](#)

Further guidance for line managers if a team member tells you they have been arrested or convicted of a domestic abuse related offence can be found in the Employee Domestic Abuse Support Guidance document.

Version Control

Version	Date	Description
1		New Policy – previous Guidance document converted to Policy.
Document Approvals		
Author:	Gail Tulett, HR Business Partner	
Director, Chief Executive Officer:		
Personnel Board:		
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