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difference

Domestic Abuse and the
Implications in the
Workplace Policy

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ITEM NO.	SUBJECT	PAGE
1.	Policy Statement	3
2.	Aims of the Policy	3
3.	Manager's Role	4
4.	The Council's Approach to Employees who are Alleged or Actual Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse	6
5.	Equality Impact Assessment and Monitoring	7
6.	Data Protection	7
Appendix A	Professional Help Information	8

1. POLICY STATEMENT

- 1.1 Wyre Council recognises that domestic abuse is a widespread problem that cannot be ignored and that everyone has the right to a life free from abuse in any form. The council strives to create a working environment that promotes the view that abuse against any person is unacceptable, that the responsibility for the abuse lies with the perpetrator and to help and support employees involved in or experiencing domestic abuse.

For the purpose of this policy domestic abuse is defined as follows:

“Any incident of controlling, coercive, 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.”

The council acknowledges that while it is mainly women who experience domestic abuse this policy is not gender specific and applies equally to men who need advice or support.

All employees have the right to raise the issue of domestic abuse with the council in the knowledge that the issue will be treated with sympathy and confidentiality and that an effective support system will be available to them.

2. AIMS OF THE POLICY

- 2.1 To demonstrate the Council’s commitment to and support for any employee experiencing domestic abuse.
- 2.2 To provide advice about appropriate action to take should anyone be experiencing domestic abuse.
- 2.3 To publicise support for anyone experiencing domestic abuse.
- 2.4 To set out what the Council may do if an employee is found to be a perpetrator of domestic abuse.

3. MANAGER'S ROLES

3.1 A manager may become aware or suspect that an employee is experiencing domestic abuse although the employee might not feel able to raise the issue with anyone. Managers should be alert to signals such as

- frequent absence from work, lateness or needing to leave work early
- reduced quality and quantity of work or missing deadlines
- spending an increased number of hours at work for no reason
- changes in the way an employee communicates - a large number of personal calls or texts or a strong reaction to personal calls
- physical signs and symptoms such as unexplained or frequent bruises or other injuries
- excessive clothing on a hot day
- changes in personal grooming practices
- changes in social behaviour, for example, not turning up to work social activities
- obsession with leaving work on time.

In these cases offering appropriate support may mean that the employee is able to deal with their situation more effectively. The issues surrounding domestic abuse can be complex and sensitive and if managers have concerns they should seek advice from Human Resources.

3.2 Managers must have a sensitive approach and ensure that employees are offered support if the issue of domestic abuse has been disclosed to them. Managers are advised:

- a) Regularly check in with the employee
- a) To ensure privacy and confidentiality as far as possible;

- b) To ensure a non-judgemental approach, taking the employee seriously and above all, listening and believing what they are told;

- c) That an employee may wish to involve a third party i.e. a friend, rather than their line manager;

- d) That additional issues such as age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race and disability may also face the employee and managers should be aware of this;

- e) To support the employee in whatever they decide to do by exploring the support and options available to them.

- f) Ensure the employee has information regarding the Council's Employee Assistance Programme and consider referring to Occupational Health.

- g) Keep confidential records of any disclosure or action taken in relation to an alleged perpetrator of domestic abuse.

- 3.3 Managers must maintain a secure environment for all employees. In cases of domestic abuse the Council's risk assessment procedure should be followed. To ensure a secure environment it may be necessary to consider, with the employee concerned, the possibility of informing colleagues of any potential risk.
- 3.4 Colleagues should always be reminded of the confidentiality of the issue and information should only be disclosed with the express permission of the employee concerned.
- 3.5 Confidentiality is of utmost importance for managers dealing with an employee who informs them that they are experiencing domestic abuse. However, there may be circumstances where confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, when there are concerns about children or vulnerable adults or where the council needs to act to protect the safety of employees. In these circumstances the manager will discuss with the employee the reason for disclosing any information to a third party and will seek the employee's agreement where possible.
- 3.6 Additional courses of action could include:
- a) reminding reception and switchboard staff in particular, but all employees in general, that personal details of employees are not to be divulged;
 - b) changing work times and patterns, along with office layout to ensure the employee is not visible through the windows or front reception points;
 - c) offering changes in specific duties e.g. removal from reception duties, or redeployment to another post if changes cannot be easily made;
 - d) agreeing what to tell colleagues and advising them what response they should give if the abuser telephones or calls at the work place;
 - e) reviewing systems for recording whereabouts of employees during the working day and minimising the risks to lone workers from outside visits/meetings;
 - f) recording all incidents of violence or threatening behaviour via the Council's Incident Reporting Procedure. Incidents can include persistent phone calls, emails or visits by the alleged perpetrator. Details of witnesses to incidents should also be recorded. If legal proceedings follow, the records could be used as evidence;
 - g) considering offering paid or unpaid leave or any other flexible working options for employees experiencing domestic abuse in accordance with the Council's Flexible Working and Work Life Balance Policy so they can visit one of the advice organisations, the police or a doctor or to address concerns, such legal, financial or housing.
 - h) changing payment arrangements;
 - i) encouraging staff to seek advice of the professionals and providing advice on useful contacts;

- j) referral, with employee's consent, to appropriate counselling services.
- 3.7 Attendance at court will be necessary if criminal charges are brought. Leave will be granted in accordance with the Council's Leave and Work Life Balance Policy.
- 3.8 Managers will reassure employees of confidentiality as far as is practicable. There are, however, some circumstances in which confidentiality cannot be assured. These occur when there are concerns about children or vulnerable adults or where the council needs to act to protect the safety of employees.
- In such cases specialist advice will be sought and the employee will be advised as to why the breach is required seeking their agreement where possible.

4. THE COUNCIL'S APPROACH TO EMPLOYEES WHO ARE ALLEGED OR ACTUAL PERPETRATORS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

- 4.1 Employees should be aware that domestic abuse is a serious matter that can lead to criminal convictions.
- 4.2 **Conduct at Work**
- Perpetrators of domestic abuse might use workplace resources such as telephone, fax or email to threaten, harass or abuse their current or former partners, and may involve other colleagues who may or may not be aware of their motives in assisting them.
- Such abuse requires an effective employer response because it could be damaging and potentially dangerous for those being abused, as well as possibly bringing the Council into disrepute if the abuse is allowed to continue.
- Similarly, proven harassment and intimidation of Council 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.
- 4.3 **Conduct Outside of Work**
- Conduct outside of work (whether or not it leads to police action/a criminal conviction) can also lead to disciplinary action against an employee because of its employment implications and because it undermines the confidence the Council (as an employer) has in the employee.

4.4 Taking Action

Acts of verbal or physical abuse by our employees on or off duty are unacceptable and impact not only on our employment relationship with those employees, but also damages the reputation and good standing of the council.

Under our normal disciplinary procedure, acts of harassment or bullying of fellow employees, clients, customers, suppliers or members of the public visiting the organisation, violent, threatening or abusive behaviour is considered to be gross misconduct and will lead to formal investigation that can lead to dismissal.

Employees should also be aware that conduct outside of work could lead to disciplinary action being taken because of its impact on the employment relationship and the reputation of the council.

We also recognise that perpetrators of domestic abuse may wish to seek help and support voluntarily. We commend staff accepting accountability for their actions and we commit to providing them with access, when appropriate, to specific support or counselling services e.g. domestic abuse perpetrator training or anger management training.

5. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND MONITORING

- 5.1 The operation of this policy will be monitored for its impact on different staff groups in line with the Equality Act 2010. This will enable the Council to assess whether any differences have an adverse impact on a particular group, such that further action would be required.

6. DATA PROTECTION

- 6.1 In implementing this policy, the Council will ensure that any personal data relating to the application of this policy will be obtained, processed and destroyed in line with Data Protection requirements.

Appendix A

Professional help

Line managers should encourage employees to seek professional help but should not make contact with them personally. This may include reporting instances of violence to the police, or seeking help from specialist organisations such as:

General

National Domestic Abuse Helpline - 0808 2000 247 (Freephone and 24 hour) / www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk

Citizens advice bureau - www.adviceguide.org.uk

National centre for domestic violence – 0800 970 2070 / www.ncdv.org.uk

Galop: 0800 999 5428 / www.galop.org.uk

For women

Women's aid - www.womensaid.org.uk

Scottish Women's aid – 0800 027 1234 / www.scottishwomensaid.co.uk

Welsh Women's aid - 0808 8010800 / www.welshwomensaid.org

Jewish Women's Aid - 0800 591203 / www.jwa.org.uk

Shakti Women's Aid (Scotland) - 0131 475 2399 / shaktiedinburgh.co.uk

Refuge - 0800 2000 247 / www.refuge.org.uk

Southall Black Sisters - 020 8571 9595 / www.southallblacksisters.org.uk

Muslim Women's Helpline - 020 8904 8193 or 020 8908 6715 / www.mwnhelpline.co.uk

IKWRO: Women's rights organisation for Middle Eastern and Afghan women - 020 7920 6460 / ikwro.org.uk

For men

ManKind Initiative: 01823 334 244 / www.mankind.org.uk

Respect Men's Advice Line: 0808 801 0327 / www.respect.uk.net

The Dyn Project (Wales): 0808 801 0321 / www.dynwales.org

For perpetrators

Respect: 0808 802 4040 / www.respect.uk.net