



Domestic Abuse Policy for Employees

Author: Jodie Bartlett, Domestic Abuse Project Officer

Version: 1.0

Last updated: November 2022

1.0 Introduction and policy purpose

1.1 We believe that everyone has the right to live free from fear of abuse or violence. As an employer, we want to provide a robust and supportive response to domestic abuse, so that we can limit the threat it poses to the health and happiness of our people.

1.2 It has been estimated that there are currently 2.3 million victims of domestic abuse a year aged 16 to 74 (two-thirds of whom are women), and more than one in ten of all offences recorded by the police are domestic abuse related (Gov.uk, 2022). We recognise that the prevalence of domestic abuse means it is highly likely that we will employ people who have been, or will be, victims of domestic abuse. Similarly, we recognise that we may employ people who are, or have been, perpetrators of domestic abuse.

1.3 This policy references the support we will provide to employees who are victims of, or have been victims of, domestic abuse. It states that we will not condone or tolerate domestic abuse, and outlines how we will hold employees accountable for their actions if they are perpetrators of domestic abuse.

1.4 We recognise that there are many barriers to disclosing domestic abuse, and we want to reassure our employees that any concerns they raise will be treated empathetically, appropriately, and confidentially.

2.0 Note on language

2.1 In this policy we use the terms 'victim' and 'perpetrator'. 'Victim' is used to refer to the person/s who has been or is being abused, and 'perpetrator' refers to the person/s who is acting, or has acted, abusively.

2.2 We use these terms as they allow us to describe how the abuse affects those involved, in a context in which individual names are not available or appropriate to use.

2.3 We recognise that a 'victim' may prefer to be referred to as 'survivor', but we have chosen to use 'victim' within this policy as it allows us to clearly acknowledge that a person is or has been subjected to domestic abuse, without making assumptions about where they are within their own personal journey.

2.4 Within our practices, and particularly when engaging directly with those who are, or have been victims of domestic abuse, we will use the terms of address that they prefer where it is possible to do so.

3.0 Policy scope

3.1 This policy applies to those employed by Dacorum Borough Council, including those employed through agency contracts. If an agency contracted employee requires support that we cannot action without the agency's involvement, we will liaise with the agency. Contractors who work with, but not directly for, Dacorum Borough Council are encouraged to refer to their direct employers for advice on the workplace support that is available to them if they are experiencing domestic abuse.

3.2 When Dacorum resident/s or tenant/s are affected by domestic abuse, we will refer to our Domestic Abuse Policy for Residents, Tenants and Members. Where a person is both an employee and a resident or tenant, we will refer to both policies for guidance and tailor our response accordingly.

4.0 Our values

4.1 We are committed to demonstrating our organisational values in all that we do, including how we support employee/s who are affected by domestic abuse.

We will:

- **Be honest** about the prevalence of domestic abuse, and **act with integrity** by doing all we can to support employees who have been affected.
- Utilise the support of our internal service areas, specialist domestic abuse services and partner agencies, because we recognise that we need to **support each other and work together** to provide a co-ordinated community response to domestic abuse.
- **Be ambitious for our places and our people** by continuously seeking opportunities to improve our response to domestic abuse.
- **Be accountable to each other** and honour the trust that our employees place in us when sharing their experience/s of domestic abuse by responding respectfully, and providing guidance about how and where they can access further support.
- **Nurture and celebrate Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in everything we do**, including how we recognise and respond to domestic abuse. We will take an intersectional approach when responding to domestic abuse by considering how a person's experience of domestic abuse may be impacted by their sex, age, gender identity, race, sexuality, disability, ethnicity, pregnancy status or social background differences.

5.0 Definition of domestic abuse

5.1 This policy uses an abridged version of the definition of domestic abuse provided by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. An expanded definition is included, alongside additional information about domestic abuse, in Appendix 1.

5.2 Behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is “domestic abuse” if:

- A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other
- And
- the behaviour is abusive

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
- Psychological, emotional or other abuse

5.3 It **does not matter** whether the behaviour is a single incident or a course of actions: behaviour of this kind is domestic abuse.

5.4 More information about other forms of abuse (including those that can also be domestic abuse), is included in our Children and Adults at Risk Policy.

5.5 ‘Domestic abuse significantly impacts the lives of children and young people: one in five children lives with domestic abuse’ (Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2022).

5.6 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognises that children can be victims of domestic abuse, even when the abusive behaviours are not directly aimed at them.

They can also be victims if they:

- See, hear, or experience the effects of abuse
- Are related to the victim or perpetrator of the abuse (or both)

5.7 Further information about how domestic abuse affects children is provided in our Children and Adults at Risk Policy.

6.0 Awareness of domestic abuse

6.1 We will raise awareness of domestic abuse within our organisation by featuring it regularly within our internal and external communications, and participating in local and national campaigns. We will try to reduce the 'hidden' nature of domestic abuse by regularly acknowledging its prevalence, and encouraging our employees to make domestic abuse a regular topic of discussion in team meetings, where it is appropriate to do so.

6.2 We will encourage our employees to learn about domestic abuse by providing mandatory training, and additional training will be provided as it is relevant to employees' roles and their level of engagement with our community.

6.3 This policy will be made available to all employees, and treated as an essential part of the Induction package for our new employees.

7.0 Responding to domestic abuse

7.1 We will provide managers and those supporting staff with additional guidance and procedures to help them to support staff who are experiencing domestic abuse.

7.2 Additional information about domestic abuse, including how it may present when it affects colleagues or peers, is available in the domestic abuse section of the safeguarding hub on Dennis.

7.3 If you are concerned that a colleague or peer that you work with may be experiencing domestic abuse, we would encourage you to raise your concerns with your Line Manager/an alternative Line Manager, or a Designated Safeguarding Officer or Champion.

8.0 Support for employees who are, or have been, victims of domestic abuse

8.1 We respect our employees' right to privacy, and we recognise that it is their right to decide whether they disclose if they are, or have been, a victim of domestic abuse. We will prioritise gaining their consent before taking action.

8.2 The findings from our internal survey of Dacorum Borough Council employees that took place in autumn 2021, suggested that many of our employees would be likely to seek workplace support from their line manager if they were a victim of domestic abuse.

8.3 We encourage you to speak with an alternative line manager, a Designated Safeguarding Officer or Champion, or our Community Safety & Safeguarding team, if you feel able to. A list of Designated Safeguarding Officers and Champions will be published on Dennis.

8.4 We will ensure that these points of contact have the knowledge, tools and support they need to confidently support you by giving them additional resources, procedures, and training.

8.5 They will take a flexible and victim-centred approach to supporting you, and with your consent, will work with specialist domestic abuse agencies to take action/s to increase your personal safety. They will also consider the safety of your colleagues.

8.6 They can take action/s including:

- Agreeing whether to advise your colleagues, including level of detail you are comfortable to share, and planning how they should respond if the perpetrator/s make contact.
- Making reasonable accommodations to your working environment, duties or schedule, if it is likely to reduce the risk of contact with the perpetrator/s and/or have a positive impact on your wellbeing.
- Allowing you to work alternative or flexible working hours if this will minimise the risk of contact with the perpetrator/s.
- Agreeing changes to your schedule to allow you to attend appointments with the Police, specialist domestic abuse services, counselling and legal services et al during working hours, where necessary.
- Changing your workplace contact details to reduce the risk of harassment by phone or email.
- Arranging for your salary to be paid into an alternative account, at your request.

8.7 We recognise that an employee may wish to access support without our involvement, and we want to make it accessible for them to do so. A guide to how to access support as a victim of domestic abuse is provided as Appendix 2.

9.0 **Perpetrators of domestic abuse**

9.1 We do not condone the perpetration of domestic abuse by our employees under any circumstances.

9.2 If you have reason to believe that an employee has perpetrated domestic abuse, you can raise your concerns confidentially by using our Whistleblowing policy.

9.3 We will respond to employee perpetrated instances of domestic abuse in the interest of reducing risk to the perpetrator's victim/s and colleagues.

9.4 We will treat any allegation, disclosure or conviction of a domestic-abuse-related offence that relates to an employee, on a case a case-by-case basis.

9.5 We will complete an adverse risk assessment when we are made aware that an employee has been cautioned or convicted of a domestic abuse related offence.

9.6 We will use the findings of this risk assessment to take proportionate and appropriate action. This could include redeployment of duties and/or dismissal.

9.7 We also recognise the need to offer appropriate support to employed perpetrators, or those concerned about their own behaviour, and genuinely want to change.

9.8 We will signpost or refer employed perpetrators to support programmes, where it is appropriate to do so without increasing the risk to their victim/s or colleagues. A guide to how to access support as a perpetrator/someone concerned about their own, or as a person concerned about someone else's behaviour is included as Appendix 3.

10.0 Confidentiality and GDPR

10.1 Any information related to domestic abuse will be treated with sensitivity, and if it is recorded, it will be stored securely on our systems. We will maintain confidentiality and prioritise gaining consent from victims before making referrals or taking further action, as far as it is practicable to do so. We may have to share information with agencies such as the Police or Social Services if an adult or child is at serious risk of harm.

10.2 If an instance of domestic abuse meets the MARAC risk threshold or if there are child protection concerns, we have a legal duty to share information with relevant partner agencies in the interest of reducing risk to those concerned.

11.0 Links to other policies and policy review expectations

11.1 We involved employees from across the organisation, including those with lived experience of domestic abuse, when developing this policy.

11.2 We will review this policy, related strategy, and information sources every 3 years at minimum to ensure that it aligns with changes in research, national legislation, policies and local support and service provision.

11.3 We may also review this policy in response to: staff and tenant/resident/leaseholder feedback; local Domestic Homicide Review; Serious Case Review and Serious Adult Review recommendations and findings.

11.4 This policy can be read in conjunction with its associated domestic abuse procedures and the following relevant policies and procedures:

- Employment Handbook
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Children and Adults at Risk Policy and Procedures
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) / Data Protection Act 2018 Policy

11.5 We recognise that this policy must align with the legislative framework set out by the following:

- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Homeless Reduction Act 2017
- Serious Crime Act 2015
- Anti-Social Behaviour and Policing Act 2014
- Protection of Freedoms Act 2012
- The Localism Act 2011
- The Equality Act 2010
- Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007
- Civil partnership Act 2004

DRAFT