

Isle of Wight Council

DOMESTIC ABUSE

POLICY

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3 Scope

This policy covers all employees of the Isle of Wight Council and volunteers, agency or contracted staff working on behalf of the council.

4 Introduction

This policy has been developed as part of the Isle of Wight Council's commitment to working with its trade unions to support our workforce's health and wellbeing at work.

It covers the internal and external support available to individuals subjected to domestic abuse, as well as guidance for employees who are concerned for a colleague and managers of victims of domestic abuse. This policy also provides advice for employees using abusive behaviours who are committed to changing their attitude and behaviour and are engaging with services that can assist them.

The council recognises that anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexuality or background. The impact that domestic abuse has on individual lives, as well as children and other family members, can be devastating and can impact their work and the workplace. The benefits of appropriate assistance to staff is recognised as a fundamental part of supporting and retaining valued employees, improving morale and performance of individuals, and helping the council to be recognised as a supportive, compassionate, understanding employer.

4.1 The purpose of this policy is to:

- support individuals subjected to domestic abuse;
- support and enable individuals subjected to domestic abuse to remain productive and at work;
- provide managers with information on how to support team members subjected to domestic abuse;
- assist colleagues of those subjected to domestic abuse;
- provide assistance and signposting to employees using abusive behaviours who are committed to changing their attitude and behaviour; and
- reinforce our corporate social responsibility objectives by demonstrating that we value and will supporting staff.

4.2 What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is abusive behaviour by one person to another, where they are both aged 16 or over and they are personally connected. The abusive behaviour can be a single incident or a course of conduct.

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.

5 Support for Employees Subjected to Domestic Abuse

We understand how frightening it may be for an individual who is subjected to domestic abuse to speak to a colleague or manager within their workplace.

As an employer we want to reassure anyone who informs us of abuse that they will be listened to in a non-judgemental way and supported in the best way possible in line with this policy.

Any disclosures will be treated in the strictest confidence, however if there is risk of harm to a child or vulnerable adult the council will follow safeguarding policies.

The voice of any member of staff who is being subjected to domestic abuse will be central to any support offered.

6 Line Manager's Role

The council has a duty of care for the health, safety and wellbeing of staff, and as part of this duty, managers have a crucial role in supporting employees subjected to domestic abuse to seek help.

The workplace can often be one of the few places that a person subjected to abuse can be separate from their abuser, and therefore may be a safe space where they are able to speak about the abuse and discuss options available to them. It is therefore vital that all managers have attended domestic abuse training to understand the dynamics of domestic abuse and how to access support for employees, as they are ideally placed to offer key support to those subjected to it.

Domestic Abuse Training for all managers is available via the Council Learning Hub. Additional training to increase awareness of areas such as coercive and controlling behaviour, DASH RIC¹ Masterclass and Stalking which can be accessed through the Council's Learning Hub, following the below link. It is strongly advised that managers attend this additional training, particularly in responding to situations where domestic abuse is suspected or reported.

<https://iwc.learningpool.com/course/view.php?id=145>

It is essential to note that with the changing nature of work as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and hybrid working, more staff members are working from home, meaning those who are subjected to domestic abuse may have become more isolated and their opportunities to seek a safe place or make any disclosures may have been reduced.

If domestic abuse is known, managers should try to work with the employee to create a safe and confidential environment, whether it be virtually or in person, where the staff member feels able to speak up without fear of judgement and subsequently, take appropriate action should a staff member be forthcoming with reports of domestic abuse.

It is important to recognise that managers supporting victims may be affected themselves. Support is available via the HR Advisory Team, the [Employee Assistant Programme](#) and other support resources can be found in Appendix A and B.

6.1 The role of the line manager is to:

- To be vigilant to any changes in behaviour or character, using regular supervisions or one to ones to enquire about wellbeing, and by fostering an open management culture that enables team members to disclose sensitive issues.

NB. All employees who are subjected to abuse should be supported, regardless of gender, relationship to the perpetrator and the type of abuse. It's important not to make assumptions about what someone might be experiencing or the gender of the perpetrator.

¹ Domestic Abuse, Stalking and 'Honour' based violence Risk Identification Checklist

- Respond appropriately and sensitively to employees who identify themselves or colleagues as subjected to domestic abuse. Provide a safe and non-judgemental environment and address any immediate risks of harm to the member of staff and any other persons who may be at risk. Those who receive reports of domestic abuse should not attempt to counsel victims, but offer information, appropriate workplace support and signpost to other organisations who can provide professional assistance.

NB. Managers should be mindful of any protected characteristics that may create additional complexities to the support and intervention. Including the gender of the manager to that of the staff and the possible barriers this may cause.

- Protect confidentiality in all instances (except where there are concerns for the safety and welfare of children and any vulnerable adult); and maintain confidentiality of the situation unless circumstances dictate that the safety and welfare of the individual is such that it warrants intervention by professional services (such as Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) or police involvement).
- Review the employee's workload and support them to remain productive and at work, utilising and taking into consideration the mechanisms and allowances outlined in section 6.2 of this policy.
- Work cooperatively with union representatives to assist staff subjected to domestic abuse.
- Ensure careful consideration is given to appropriate communication with a staff member who is subjected to domestic abuse, particularly if the individual is working from home, for example, via emails and texts. Any discussion regarding the abuse should be held in person at council offices when the employee is in a relationship with the perpetrator.

6.2 Providing support and making adjustments

The council recognises the impact that being subjected to domestic abuse will have on an employee's performance and attendance. There is a broad range of support and adjustments that managers should consider and agree with the staff member. Giving due consideration to the safety and wellbeing of the employee, as well as any service delivery needs, this may include but not be limited to the following:

- Special paid leave for appointments with support agencies or solicitors, to arrange rehousing, to change childcare arrangements and for court appearances.
- A communication plan agreed by the staff member and their manager where time off is needed.
- Temporary or permanent changes to working times and patterns.
- Sympathetic treatment of distracted behaviour, poor timekeeping and unplanned absence that may result from domestic abuse whilst being mindful of policies.
- Changes to specific duties, for example to avoid potential contact with an abuser in a customer facing role or if they are a fellow employee.
- Redeployment or relocation.

- Implementing measures to ensure a safe working environment, for example: changing a telephone number to avoid harassing phone calls, parking space near an entrance, a colleague to chaperone to a bus stop.
- Using flexible working options (see the [Flexible Working Policy](#) and [Agile Working Policy](#)).
- Referral to occupation health for advice and guidance on adaptations that could be considered.
- Offer specialist intervention from the Integrated Domestic Abuse Service relating to outreach, group work and/or counselling.

Managers are expected to respect the rights of staff and treat them with dignity, enabling them to make their own decisions on the course of action they take at any stage and to act with sensitivity at all times, but will also need to ensure that the staff member understands the potential implications of any long-term failure to improve on work performance or attendance concerns should they exist.

7 Co-Workers Role

It can be difficult for someone subjected to domestic abuse to acknowledge their situation or identify themselves as a 'victim'; however, an employee with concerns for a fellow colleague can provide assistance following the below guidance:

- Seek a quiet, safe and confidential space to speak to the member of staff.
- Explain the reason you have asked to speak with them, expressing concern, ensuring the language used is non-blaming. Remember the member of staff may be embarrassed, feel ashamed or be in possible denial.
- Allow the member of staff to speak and share any concerns, whilst you listen without them feeling pressurised to reveal more than they wish to, without assumptions being made regarding them or their relationship and without them feeling judged.
- Explain that domestic abuse can happen to anyone and that they are not alone.
- It is vital staff do not tell colleagues to '*just leave*' as this is one of the most dangerous times for a victim/family. If a member of staff wants to leave you should recommend they seek support through the [Paragon Team](#) on the island to enable them to create a safety plan around this.
- Ask the colleague what they would like to happen next, would they like help to report incidents to a manager or professional services.
- It is advised that employees seek support and advice from managers or HR to ensure appropriate risk assessing and safety planning is completed with their colleague.

NB. A staff member who speaks with a colleague who is subjected to domestic abuse must remember they are not counsellors and should not make any unrealistic promises about what can be done to resolve their situation. They should also be aware that they may be putting themselves at risk, should the abuser become aware of their supportive role.

All staff are encouraged to complete IWC Domestic Abuse E-Learning to raise their awareness as well as attending Domestic Abuse Dragonfly workshops which supports the community to recognise signs and are provided with guidance with any disclosures and how/where to signpost.

It is important to recognise that employees supporting and working with colleagues who are subjected to domestic abuse may be affected themselves. The internal support resources listed in Appendix A of this policy are available to all staff members and many of the specialist local and external organisations in Appendix B also provide advice and guidance for those supporting a colleague experiencing domestic abuse.

8 Employees Using Abusive Behaviours

It is recognised that the council has a role to play in encouraging and supporting its employees to address violent and abusive behaviour of all kinds. If an employee approaches their manager about their abusive behaviour, information will be provided about the services and support available to them (as outlined in Appendix A and B) and they will be encouraged to seek support and help from an appropriate source.

Where an allegation, disclosure or conviction of a domestic abuse related offence is made, managers will consider the response required on a case-by-case basis, prioritising the safety of the victim with the aim of reducing risk and supporting change. Any individual cautioned or convicted of a criminal offence may, however, be subject to disciplinary procedures and the council also reserves the right to consider an employee's activities outside of work that may have an impact on their ability to perform the role for which they are employed and/or be considered to bring the council into disrepute.

Children are now identified as victims of domestic abuse in their own right (Domestic Abuse Act 2021), therefore in all reports of domestic abuse where there are children in the family and they are in a position where they work or volunteer with children, a referral will need to be made to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).

The LADO responds to allegations against adults who work with children and young people, and should be used in all cases where it is alleged that a person who works with children or young people has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child or may have harmed a child;
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against, or related to, a child; or
- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates she / he is unsuitable to work or volunteer with children.

Managers will need to consider the work location of employees if both the victim and perpetrator are employed by the council. The manager or respective managers should work together to consider the safest and most suitable action to be taken when considering re-location of either party. Both employees should be consulted prior to any such decisions being taken and in particular the needs of the employee experiencing domestic abuse should be prioritised and carefully considered to ensure that they are not being penalised by the circumstances.

The council's code of conduct sets out the standards of behaviour required as a Local Government employee. Staff are therefore expected to abide by these standards and demonstrate personal integrity. In return, the council is committed to ensuring that:

- Allegations will be dealt with fairly and in a way that is supportive of the needs for the person who is the subject of the allegation or disclosure;
- Staff will be directed to advice, guidance and support that is available from specialist services;
- Confidentiality will be maintained and information restricted to only those who have a need to know.

9 Confidentiality

The council and relevant trade union will ensure that any personal data collected when providing support with matters relating to domestic abuse will be processed in accordance with our [Data Protection Policy](#). Data collected from the point at which the council becomes aware of the issue will be held securely.

Information about an employee subjected to domestic abuse will only be disclosed by the council or relevant trade union with the written permission of the individual concerned, unless there are any legal implications that would take precedence, (for example where domestic abuse is linked to child neglect or where a risk to children or vulnerable adults is identified) when the responsibility for public protection may lead to there being notification to relevant professional services. If such a situation does occur then it will be necessary for the individual to be informed of the action being taken.

10 Other Issues

Employees are reminded of their duty under the [Employee Code of Conduct](#) to inform their manager of any convictions, who will then determine any necessary course of action in line with the council's policies and procedures, should this impact on the exercising of their duties.

If a victim of domestic abuse and their alleged abuser are both employed by the council, any incidents at work will be dealt with accordingly under the council's disciplinary and grievance procedures. If a serious incident occurs, the police will be called to deal with the matter. If necessary, and in consultation with their union representative should they be a member, the feasibility for work to be re-arranged subject to service delivery needs will be established to ensure the safety of the person being subjected to the abuse.

The provisions of this policy are designed to support the protection of any employee who is subjected to domestic abuse. Any inappropriate use of this policy will be treated seriously and dealt with under the council's disciplinary procedures.

11 APPENDIX A - Internal Support

The Isle of Wight Council is committed to providing internal sources of help and support for employees who are subjected to domestic abuse and any member of staff or manager who has been impacted due to a colleague disclosing or being subjected to domestic abuse, as detailed below.

- The council publicises advice, guidance and signposting relating to domestic abuse on it's the external webpages:

<https://www.iow.gov.uk/Council/OtherServices/Domestic-Abuse/About>

- The council offers access to an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), provided by Health Assured, which includes access to a telephone helpline, counselling services, and a wellbeing portal. Additionally, Health Assured are members of Employers Initiative on Domestic Abuse and are able to share lessons, resources and well-informed advice on the topic of domestic violence. The availability of the EAP resource is publicised regularly.

Confidential telephone helpline (24-hours a day and 365 days of the year):
0800 030 5182

Online access to Health Assured Wellbeing Portal (access to practical self-help information and wellbeing tools):

Log-in details are: Username: **Isle** Password: **Wight**

- The council offers access to Isle of Wight Council Mental Health First Aiders (MHFA), all of whom have received additional Dragonfly training specifically in domestic abuse. The MHFA resource is publicised regularly. To make contact with a MHFA please contact a member of the H&S Team using the below contact details.

Email: hsassistance@iow.gov.uk

Tel: 01983 821000

- The council offers Occupational Health services to staff members seeking additional support relating to physical and/or mental concerns via a management referral.
- The council is the lead for the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board which works closely with partner agencies who may be able to support. The point of contact is :

Isle of Wight Council: Children's Safeguarding 0300 300 0117 or in an emergency call 999

Isle of Wight Council: Adult Safeguarding 01983 814980

12 Appendix B - Contacts for Local and National Support Services

Paragon – IOW Integrated Domestic Abuse and Sexual Crime Service 0800 234 6266
<https://paragonteam.org.uk/teams/isle-of-wight/>

<https://hamptontrust.org.uk/>

Support for victims, children, and perpetrators of domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Police non-emergency 101 (in case of emergencies 999)

IWC Employee Assistance Programme: www.isleofwightc.helpeap.com 0800 276 1003

Refuge <http://www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk/> helpline 0808 2000 247

The helpline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week which offers women and children access to emergency refuge accommodation, information and safety planning. This is a national service for women experiencing domestic violence, their family, friends, colleagues and others calling on their behalf.

Women's Aid www.womensaid.org.uk 0808 2000 247 available 24 hours, 7 days a week

National charity working to end domestic violence against women and children, which supports a network of over 500 domestic and sexual violence services across the UK. The helpline is run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge.

RESPECT - <https://www.respect.uk.net/> - 0808 08024040

National perpetrator intervention and advice line

ManKind Initiative www.mankind.org.uk - 01823 334244 available weekdays 10am-4pm

Provides support for male victims of domestic violence or domestic abuse.

Men's Advice Line www.mensadvice.org.uk - 0808 801 0327

Provides advice and support for men in abusive relationships. The helpline is available Monday – Friday 9am – 5pm

Stonewall www.stonewall.org.uk - 08000 50 20 20

Aim to empower individuals, to transform institutions, to change hearts and minds and to change laws for LGBT people

Southampton Rape Crisis www.southamptonrapecrisis.com 02380 636313

Provides advice, information and support for anybody aged 11+ who has had an unwanted sexual experience

Southall Black Sisters – <https://southallblacksisters.org.uk/> - 020 8751 9595

SBS aims to meet the needs of Black (Asian and African-Caribbean) women, highlighting and challenging all forms gender-related violence against women, empower them to gain more control over their lives; live without fear of violence and assert their human rights to justice, equality and freedom.

Karma Nirvana – 0800 5999 247

<https://karmanirvana.org.uk/>

National Honour Based Abuse Helpline

National Centre for Domestic Violence (NCDV) www.ncdv.org.uk Tel 0800 970 2070 (24 hour helpline)

NCDV provides a free, fast emergency injunction service to survivors of domestic violence regardless of their financial circumstances, race, gender or sexual orientation.

Rights of Women www.rightsofwomen.org.uk 020 7251 6575

Rights of Women is a women's voluntary organisation committed to informing, educating and empowering women concerning their legal rights. Please check the website for opening times for the advice lines.

Jewish Women's Aid www.jwa.org.uk 0808 801 0500 (freephone)

Jewish Women's Aid (JWA) is a registered national charity run by Jewish women for Jewish women and their children who have experienced or are experiencing domestic abuse. The advice line is available Monday to Thursday, 9:30am – 9:30pm

Muslim Community Helpline 0208 904 8193 or 0208 908 6715.

This is a national organisation for women, men, youth and children to help and support, whatever your needs.

Paladin www.paladinservice.co.uk Tel 020 3866 4107

Paladin is a trauma informed service established to assist high-risk victims of stalking

Samaritans www.samaritans.org.uk Freephone 116 123

Offers 24 hour confidential emotional support for anyone in a crisis

Victim Support www.victimsupport.org.uk 0808 1689 111

Offers information and support to victims of crime, whether or not they have reported the crime to the police

Shelter www.shelter.org.uk 0808 800 44 44 (freephone)

A national organisation which works at local level to improve the lives of homeless and badly housed people

Citizens Advice www.citizensadvice.org.uk 03444 111 444

The Citizens Advice Service helps people by providing free information and advice on their legal, money and other problems in order to assist them finding a resolution.

Civil Legal Advice www.gov.uk/civil-legal-advice 0345 345 4 345

Provides free and confidential advice about debt, housing, domestic abuse, family issues, special education needs, discrimination. The helpline is available Monday-Friday 9am-8.00pm

NSPCC www.nspcc.org.uk 0808 800 5000

UK's leading charity specialising in child protection and the prevention of cruelty to children.