



SAFFRON WALDEN TOWN COUNCIL

Domestic Abuse Policy

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Introduction

Employers have a duty of care and a legal responsibility to provide a safe and effective work environment. Preventing and tackling domestic abuse is an integral part of this. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in new ways of working, with a significant increase in the numbers of people working from home. For those experiencing abuse, the workplace often offers a safe space and a respite away from their abuser. Colleagues and managers can often be the only other people outside the home that survivors talk to each day and are therefore uniquely placed to help spot signs of abuse.

1. Purpose

1.1 The aim of this policy is to set out the Town Council's position on domestic abuse. It sets out a clear definition of Domestic Abuse and explain the support we can offer to employees experiencing domestic abuse and how members and all employees can identify and support those affected by Domestic Abuse so they can seek the support they need.

1.2 Domestic abuse against, or by, any of our members of staff will not be tolerated. The Organisation understands the risks and consequences of domestic abuse and we will take all reasonable action to support any member of staff who is the subject of domestic abuse.

1.3 When an employee raises the issue of domestic abuse the organisation and its managers will make every effort to respond in a sensitive, non-judgmental, confidential and effective way. This includes when a member of staff recognises, they are a perpetrator of domestic abuse and wishes to seek support.

1.4 We acknowledge our duty of care towards our employees and understand that this includes a legal responsibility to provide a safe and effective work environment; we appreciate that tackling domestic abuse is an integral part of this.

1.5 We will work hard to foster a supportive workplace culture where employees can feel able to talk openly about their experiences if they wish to and can obtain the right support if they need it.

1.6 This policy extends to providing support for councillors who are affected by domestic abuse, recognising that they may experience domestic abuse or may deal with caseloads where a constituent is living in an abusing relationship

2. Definition

2.1 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 defines Domestic abuse as is any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between individuals, aged 16 or over, who are personally connected to each other. Domestic Abuse includes:-

- Physical or sexual abuse
- Violent or threatening behaviour
- Controlling or coercive Behaviour
- Economic abuse
- Psychological, emotional to other abuse

2.2 Anyone can suffer from domestic abuse regardless of gender, race, sexuality or religion. It is a criminal offence and can lead to a criminal conviction.

2.3 The Police Crime Sentencing and Courts Bill 2021 will also introduce a Serious Violence Duty on a range of authorities including local government, to collaborate to prevent and reduce serious violence in the area. The aim of the Duty is to encourage organisations to share information, data and intelligence, and work collaboratively rather than in isolation to tackle serious violence. Domestic abuse is recognised as both a causal factor in preventing serious violence and as part of the definition of serious violence

2.4 The Council adopts the principles of the 4 R's approach as the foundation to addressing domestic abuse.

- Recognise – Ensure that managers, supervisors and employees understand that domestic abuse is a workplace issues and everyone can play a part in tackling it. We will support all managers and employees to recognise the signs of domestic abuse and create the opportunities where a person feels they have the trust and confidence in disclosing.
- Respond – Implement policies and processes that enable a supportive workplace which will respond appropriately to disclosure.
- Refer – Provide access to internal confidential support and signpost appropriately to external organisations who can help employees that disclose abuse.
- Record – If an employee discloses abuse it is important to record the details of what is said as accurately as possible. Should the abuse become subject to criminal proceedings, this is an exhibit and may be given to the Police.

3. Signs that someone may be experiencing domestic abuse

3.1 Signs which may indicate that someone is experiencing domestic abuse may be:

- 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 the amount of make-up worn
- changes in social behaviour, for example, not turning up to work social activities
- obsession with leaving work on time.

3.2 Managers and colleagues should be alert and supportive. But they should also be respectful of employees' privacy. The Organisation respects the employee's right to privacy if they do not wish to tell the Organisation that they are or have been experiencing domestic abuse.

4. Action to be taken if employee confides in a manager in the Organisation

4.1 The manager will offer reassurance to the employee regarding the Organisation's stance towards domestic abuse and outline the support that is to be offered. The manager will not ask the employee for evidence of abuse. If requested by the employee, the manager will arrange for appropriate support by another senior officer and/or support via an appropriate external organisation. Consideration should be given to any protected characteristics of the employee. Any discussion about the abuse must take place in private.

4.2 Confidentiality is of utmost importance for managers dealing with an employee who informs them that s/he/they are experiencing domestic abuse. However, sometimes, the manager may need to discuss with the employee disclosing the information confidentially to an HR or more senior manager so that they can provide more support. Information may also be disclosed with care to protect a child or if required by law.

4.3 The manager should not directly involve themselves in the situation by, for example, confronting someone accused of being abusive. This could make the situation more difficult for the employee. Instead, the role of the manager in this situation is:

- to provide support to the employee in the workplace
- to help the employee find professional help.

4.4 In terms of practical assistance and subject to consultation with the employee, the manager may consider the following:

- arrange for the employee's telephone extension and/ or number to be changed if the employee is receiving harassing telephone calls
- improve security measures such as changing security door codes and reminding other staff not to disclose staff contact, personal details or work patterns to others
- agree with the employee how they should respond if the perpetrator attends the workplace
- ensure that the employee does not work alone or in an isolated area
- check that the employee has arrangements for safe travel between home and the workplace
- keep a record of incidents which occur in the workplace, eg harassing telephone calls or visits
- consider a temporary change to the employee's working patterns so these are not predictable to others
- consider providing other staff with details of the abuser so they can provide an alert if the abuser attends the workplace
- discuss whether the employee needs any time off to attend professional services etc (see 4.6 below)
- discuss with the employee what further reasonable temporary changes might support them

4.5 Managers should:

- not blame the person experiencing domestic abuse
- be non-judgmental and supportive and
- respect the employee's privacy.

4.6 It may be helpful in this situation if the employee is encouraged to speak to a professional support organisation. Depending on the employee's situation, they may also need to attend meetings with advisors and to arrange new accommodation and education for their children. The line manager may help by allowing reasonable [paid] time off work for visits to take place confidentially to any suitable organisation and for time off as required for court hearings, legal meetings and/or to arrange housing/alternative education provision etc. Where possible the employee should request time off in advance with their line manager. [It is at the Organisation's discretion how much of the time off provided can be paid and this should be discussed in advance].

4.7 **Clare's Law** - The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS), also known as "Clare's Law" enables the police to disclose information to a victim or potential victim of domestic abuse about their partner's or ex-partner's previous abusive or violent offending.

4.8 There are two parts of Clare's Law:-

- **The Right to Ask** - an individual or relevant third party (for example, a family member) can ask the police to check whether a current or ex-partner has a violent or abusive past.
- **The Right to Know** - enables the police to make a disclosure on their own initiative if they receive information about the violent or abusive behaviour of a person that may impact on the safety of that person's current or ex-partner. This could be information arising from a criminal investigation, through statutory or third sector agency involvement, or from another source of police intelligence.

4.9 Managers, employees and members should be made aware of Clare's Law and if working with a person who they believe may be affected by domestic abuse, support them to use the Disclosure Scheme. A disclosure request can be made by visiting:- [Request information under Clare's Law: Make a Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme \(DVDS\) application | Essex Police](#)

5. Action to be taken if the manager suspects that an employee is being subjected to domestic abuse

5.1 Suspicions that an employee is experiencing domestic abuse must be treated in a careful, balanced and sensitive manner where the employee has not raised this. The line manager should facilitate a conversation to discuss the issue on a general level. If the employee confirms that s/he is experiencing domestic abuse, the manager should follow those guidelines set out above.

6. Professional help

6.1 The line manager should encourage the employee to seek professional help as follows, but should not do this on the employee's behalf. Seeking professional help may include reporting instances of violence to the police, or seeking help from specialist organisations such as:

- **Essex Compass** – Domestic Abuse Helpline – 0330 333 7 444
- **National Domestic Violence Helpline**, run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge Freephone 0808 2000 247
 - www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk
 - www.refuge.org.uk
- **Safer Places** is an independent, local charity which provides a comprehensive range of services to adults and children affected by domestic abuse. Their phone line is answered 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call 03301 025811 www.saferplaces.co.uk
- Uttlesford Citizens Advice can help with problems concerning benefits, housing, money, immigration and relationship issues.
- Visit www.uttlesfordfrontline.org.uk to find details of all local health and wellbeing services.
- Male victims advice line 0808 8010327

NOTE - If you're a victim of domestic abuse, or know someone who is, and there's an emergency that's ongoing or life is in danger, call **999**. If you or the employee you are supporting has a hearing or speech impairment, use our textphone service 18000 or text us on 999 if you've pre-registered with the [emergencySMS service](#).

6.2 The line manager may assist by allowing time off work for the employee to visit specialist organisations, as set out above.

7. Perpetrators of domestic abuse

7.1 SWTC will not tolerate domestic abuse by its employees, nor the use of any of our equipment to carry out such abuse and this will be made clear to the perpetrator if the Organisation becomes aware of this. Whilst SWTC will take a proportionate response, it will take seriously any allegations towards an employee of domestic abuse and investigations may lead to disciplinary action being taken in line with the Council's disciplinary policy.

7.2 When speaking with an alleged perpetrator of domestic abuse, a manager should, if considered necessary, take measures to ensure their own safety such as taking another member of staff to a discussion.

7.3 If an employee who is a perpetrator of domestic abuse informs the Council about their abusive behaviour, the Organisation will provide information about professional services and support available to them and encourage them to seek support and help from such services, if it is evident that they want to address their behaviour.

7.4 If both the individual experiencing domestic abuse and the perpetrator work for the Council, measures will be taken to reduce the impact after discussion with the individual experiencing the abuse, such as:

- reassigning duties/roles and place of work and
- restricting the perpetrator's access to information about the person they are targeting.

7.5 Managers will keep confidential records of any disclosure or action taken in relation to an alleged perpetrator of domestic abuse.

Specialist support for perpetrators can be found by contacting:-

The Change Project - 01245 258 680 • 0845 372 7701 or,
via their website www.thechange-project.org

8. Implementation

8.1 To achieve the aims of this policy the Organisation will:

- Publicise the policy
- Enable staff to attend relevant training
- Publicise contact details of local support agencies