

## **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham (H&F) recognises and condemns domestic violence and abuse. There are no circumstances in which domestic violence and abuse are acceptable. H&F is committed to the welfare of every person who works for the Council and will provide practicable support and assistance to any employee experiencing domestic violence and abuse. Where an employee is found to be perpetrating domestic violence and abuse then appropriate action will be taken by the Council, this could include disciplinary action and even dismissal.
- 1.2 H&F will raise awareness of domestic violence and abuse amongst the workforce and seek to develop a culture where it is recognised as being unacceptable. H&F is committed to ensuring all employees are afforded a safe environment to work in.
- 1.3 This policy covers the management of staff who are victims of domestic violence and abuse or who are the perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse.

### **2. DEFINITION**

- 2.1 This policy uses the definition of domestic violence and abuse adopted by the Home Office and used in the borough Domestic Violence Strategy 05-08:

“Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.’
- 2.2 Research shows that in the majority of cases of domestic violence and abuse within an intimate relationship it is the woman who is the victim. While we condemn domestic violence and abuse against both men and women it is women who experience a higher number of incidents of violence and abuse and who are more likely to be injured and killed as a result. We recognise that heterosexual men can be abused by their partners and other family members and that domestic violence and abuse can occur in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender relationships. Disabled women are twice as likely as men to experience domestic violence and abuse.
- 2.3 We recognise that domestic abuse can occur in any domestic environment and covers all people including (but not exclusively) people with disabilities, people in all racial, ethnic, religious and cultural groups etc. In carrying out this policy the Council recognises that various types of discrimination can affect a person’s experience and how they go about seeking and using support services.

### **3. WHY WE NEED A WORKPLACE POLICY ON DOMESTIC ABUSE**

3.1 Domestic violence (DV) is experienced by women and men in all communities, regardless of class, religion, ethnicity, age, sexuality, disability or lifestyle. It is also a crime and form of violence that historically has remained concealed within the family or relationship and victims often suffer in silence. Domestic violence has a devastating impact on survivors. Apart from the obvious physical injuries from assaults, it affects every aspect of a victim's life in terms of their mental, emotional and psychological well being. The following national and local statistics demonstrate the prevalence and seriousness of this type of violence;

- One in four women will experience domestic violence in their lifetime
- 635,000 incidents were recorded in England and Wales in 2005. 81% of victims are women and 19% are men.
- Research demonstrates that domestic violence is a very underreported crime. According to the British Crime Survey (BCS) only one in four of the worst cases of domestic violence were reported to the police. In addition the Home Office estimates that on average the victim is assaulted 36 times before calling the police.
- It is estimated nationally that DV accounts for approximately 20% of recorded violent crime.
- Two women a week are killed by a partner or former partner. 42% of all female homicide victims are killed by a partner or former partner, compared to 4% of male murder victims.
- Domestic violence is a serious issue in H&F, and accounts for 1 in 3 of all serious assaults.
- There have been two domestic violence murders in the borough over the past few years. One of these women was an employee of H&F.

3.2 As an employer H&F is committed to the safety of employees and to creating a safe and secure environment in which they can work. In producing this policy the Council seeks to ensure that as an employer it will aim to reduce the effects of domestic violence and abuse on its workforce. The Council recognises that domestic violence and abuse still too often remains a hidden issue. It recognises also that most domestic violence and abuse takes place in the home but that inevitably the effects can be carried through into the victim's working life. This can be reflected in a number of areas e.g.

- a) The domestic violence and abuse can lead to increased absences and/or a reduction in performance. Colleagues may have to increase their workloads to cover the consequences.
- b) For a victim the workplace may be the only place where they can escape the abuser. But the victim and also work colleagues can be in danger if an abuser tries to contact his/her victim in their workplace.
- c) Employees can experience stress through being aware that one of their colleagues is either a victim or perpetrator of domestic violence and abuse.

d) Employees who have previously ended an abusive relationship could still be at risk from their ex partner. In such cases consideration will be needed to ensure their long term safety in the workplace. Such a situation could impact on the employee's productivity and ability to undertake certain requirements of the post.

#### **4. AIMS**

4.1 The aims of this policy are to:

- To support employees who are victims of domestic violence and abuse
- Help managers to be aware of possible indicators of domestic violence and abuse provide them with clear advice about what action they should take with particular emphasis on ensuring the victim is not put at further risk.
- Provide guidance to employees experiencing domestic violence and abuse about how they can access help and what actions and support they can expect from their employer
- Provide guidance where appropriate to colleagues of staff experiencing domestic violence and abuse.
- Raise awareness of domestic violence and abuse and the effects it can have on people both at home and within the workplace.

#### **5. ELEMENTS OF THE POLICY**

5.1 Confidentiality

Where an employee discloses information on domestic violence and abuse to a

manager or other employee (e.g. HR staff) within H&F, this information will be treated as confidential. Information will only be disclosed with the consent of the individual. The only exceptions to this will be in order to protect children or vulnerable adults who may be involved. (more information on this is contained in the local authority's policy and procedures on Protection of Vulnerable Adults [POVA] and Child Protection policy and procedures)

All records of domestic violence and abuse must be kept confidential. No local records of absence will be recorded as domestic violence and abuse.

5.2 Support to victims

H&F will make support available to employees who are experiencing domestic

violence and abuse. H&F will provide a confidential referral route to the ADVANCE Advocacy Project which can provide crisis and medium term support to women victims. ADVANCE will where appropriate make further referrals to other agencies as required by the victims particular circumstances e.g. longer term support, counselling, specialist services for members of black and ethnic minority groups and for male victims.

Management should offer support rather than wait for the victim to ask for help. Management should discuss with the victim what support would be helpful to them.

Management could also organise a lift to and from work for the victim; phone the victim to make sure they have arrived home safely; accompany the victim to a bus stop or station; offer temporary access to a car parking space if one is available; offer the use of a phone or a computer at work during work time for the individual's personal use.

Detailed information will be available from:

- a) HR
- b) Occupational Health
- c) Counselling service
- d) Trade Union representatives
- e) Safer Communities Unit

### 5.3 Internal Guidance and Procedures

H&F have provided guidance for managers (attached as an appendix) detailing how they should proceed following a disclosure of domestic violence and abuse or being provided with information that an employee is a victim or perpetrator of domestic violence and abuse.

Where employees come in contact with victims of domestic violence and abuse records will be kept on the individual's personnel file and will be treated confidentially. Such information will only be released with consent e.g. legal services in case of legal action against the perpetrator. The exception to this will be in order to protect children or vulnerable adults who may be involved. When this occurs however, the individual will be informed.

### 5.4 Training

All H&F employees will receive information on domestic violence and abuse as part of their induction and on relevant HASAW courses.

H&F will provide all managers with information on how to deal with cases of domestic violence and abuse. The Council will provide materials and information to employees on domestic violence and abuse and will support information events to raise awareness.

### 5.5 Information and awareness

H&F will identify locations where information on domestic violence and abuse will be widely displayed and can be accessed by employees. H&F will produce and distribute materials providing employees with information for both victims and perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse and for their colleagues and relatives.

H&F will organise and support information events to raise awareness of domestic violence and abuse within the workplace and in the community.

### 5.6 Perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse

Perpetrators of domestic Violence and abuse will be actively encouraged to seek to address their behaviour. Information on how to contact the Respect<sup>1</sup> helpline will be included amongst the materials available under information provision. Perpetrators should also be aware however that where a complaint of domestic violence and abuse is received against another member of staff (i.e. the alleged perpetrator), a disciplinary investigation will be carried out which may lead to the dismissal of the alleged perpetrator.

The Council will provide, with the agreement of the individual, a referral route through to the Domestic Violence Intervention Project's (DVIP) voluntary programme for employees who want help in addressing their abusive behaviour.

#### 5.7 Monitoring, review and evaluation

The Council will monitor and review this policy **regularly** to ensure its effectiveness.

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<sup>1</sup> Respect is the UK membership association for domestic violence perpetrator programmes and associated support services. Their key focus is on increasing the safety of those experiencing domestic violence through promoting effective interventions with perpetrators.