

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

# **Domestic Abuse Policy**

## Overview

Domestic abuse is a generic term to describe a range of behaviours used by one person to control and dominate another with whom they have had, wanted to have or are in a close, intimate, family or other type of relationship.

Domestic abuse can be actual violence, the threat of violence, or sexual, psychological or emotional abuse. Its effects range from bruising to permanent injury and can result in death. It can be emotional, mental and verbal abuse, threats, belittlement, isolation or control of finance and activity. Less visible effects include diminishing self-esteem, fear, guilt, insomnia, depressions, agoraphobia and difficulty trusting others.

Domestic abuse occurs irrespective of actual or perceived ethnicity, class, sexuality, age, religion, gender and mental or physical ability. There is no typical recipient or perpetrator of domestic abuse, however research has shown that in the majority of cases it is women who experience domestic abuse from male partners, ex-partners or family members.

Domestic abuse can also affect men and women in same sex relationships and men in heterosexual relationships. Domestic abuse does not only relate to married or cohabiting couples, it is experienced by those who have never had a relationship or cohabited with their abuser. It often continues after a relationship has ended.

In addition to abuse from a partner or ex-partner, domestic abuse can be experienced directly or by collusion from other family members and carers.

Recent Home Office, Department of Health and Childline statistics highlighted that, nationally;

- Every minute in England, the police receive a call reporting a domestic violence incident
- 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men will be a victim of domestic violence in their lifetime with women at greater risk of repeat victimisation and serious injury
- 2 women are killed each week by an (ex)partner and 50% of murders of women are committed by an (ex)partner
- 52% of child protection cases involve domestic violence
- £1.2 billion is the estimated annual NHS costs of dealing with physical injuries caused by domestic violence
- The average age of victims was 33 and a majority of the victims were white
- 20% of victims had lost their job as result of domestic violence

## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to support and help staff who are victims or survivors of domestic abuse.
- 1.2 This policy covers all employees, and T&MBC will additionally offer support to agency and contract staff as far as possible.
- 1.3 This agreement complements, but is not restricted by, other equal opportunities and flexible working agreements.

## **2 Principles**

- 2.1 T&MBC is committed to working to ensure support is available for staff who are victims or survivors of domestic abuse.
- 2.2 T&MBC recognises the scope of domestic abuse and its share of responsibility for the well-being of staff.
- 2.3 This agreement is part of T&MBC's commitment to family friendly working, and seeks to benefit the welfare of individual members of staff; retain valued employees; improve morale and performance; and enhance the reputation of T&MBC as an employer.

## **3 Definition of Domestic Abuse**

- 3.1 For the purposes of this policy, domestic abuse is physical, sexual, mental, verbal or emotional abuse by a partner, ex-partner, family member or extended family member, or person co-habiting.
- 3.2 Anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse including women, men and people in same sex relationships. It often has a dramatic impact on individuals, who frequently hide the circumstances, and on others including their children.

## **4 General measures**

- 4.1 T&MBC will inform all staff of the issue and what support is available using noticeboards, the intranet, staff briefings, inductions and other means. This includes internal support, and local and national external organisations like Womens' Aid ([www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk), 0808 2000 247) or Womens Support Service (01622 761146).
- 4.2 T&MBC will ensure that line managers and staff are made aware of possible indicators that a member of their staff/colleague is experiencing domestic abuse - e.g frequent absences from work, personality changes (from outgoing to withdrawn) and repeated unexplained injuries.

- 4.2 T&MBC will remind staff of the importance of not divulging personal details of other employees, such as addresses, telephone numbers or shift patterns.
- 4.3 Staff suffering from domestic abuse may report it to a line manager, a member of Personnel Services, or a colleague. T&MBC will make all managers aware of the issue of domestic abuse and of appropriate responses. This will also be included in induction for new managers. Line managers will not counsel victims, but offer information, workplace support, and signpost other organisations.

## **5 Individual support**

- 5.1 T&MBC will respond sympathetically, confidentially and effectively to any member of staff who discloses that they are suffering from domestic abuse.
- 5.2 Where domestic abuse has been reported, line managers will treat unplanned absences and temporary poor timekeeping sympathetically.
- 5.3 Line managers may offer employees suffering from domestic abuse a broad range of support. This may include, but is not limited to:
- With the agreement of the Chief Officer, special paid leave for relevant appointments, including with support agencies, solicitors, to rearrange housing or childcare, and for court appointments.
  - Temporary or permanent changes to working times and patterns.
  - Changes to specific duties, for example to avoid potential contact with an abuser in a customer facing role or if they a fellow employee.
  - Measures to ensure a safe working environment, for example changing a telephone number to avoid harassing phone calls.
  - Getting places on assertiveness training courses.
  - Using other existing policies (e.g: flexitime).
- 5.4 Line managers will respect the right of staff to make their own decision on the course of action at every stage.
- 5.5 Other existing provisions (including occupational health, independent counselling service, etc) will also be signposted to staff as means of help.
- 5.6 The council will also offer support to staff who are perpetrators of domestic abuse if they ask for it, accept they have a problem, and want to do something about it.

## **6 Confidentiality and record keeping**

- 6.1 All records concerning domestic abuse will be kept strictly confidential. No local records will be kept of absences related to domestic abuse and there

will be no adverse impact on the employment records of victims of domestic abuse.

6.2 Information will only be disclosed with the express permission of the individual, unless there are legal requirements to the contrary (for example domestic abuse is frequently linked to child neglect, and where a risk to children or vulnerable adults is identified the employer's responsibility for public protection may lead them to notify social services. If this happens, the individual will be informed of it).

## **7 Other Issues**

7.1 Any sanctions against an alleged abuser are a matter for the criminal justice system and not T&MBC, unless a conviction directly impacts the exercise of their duties.

7.2 If a victim of domestic abuse and their alleged abuser are both employed by T&MBC, incidents at work will be dealt with under the Disciplinary or Anti-Bullying and Harassment policies. If necessary, work may be rearranged to ensure the safety of the person suffering abuse.

7.3 Abuse of provisions in this policy is a serious disciplinary offence, and will be dealt with under the disciplinary procedure.