

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

06 April 2009

Report of the Central Services Director

Part 1- Public

Part 1 – Delegated

Delegated

1 POLICY ON DOMESTIC ABUSE

Summary

This report highlights the importance of recognising the employer's role in issues of domestic abuse and recommends the adoption of a policy for staff.

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 The statistics regarding issues of domestic abuse are startling but often hidden. As a borough, Tonbridge & Malling has one of the highest incidences of reported domestic abuse in Kent. If our workforce is reflective of the community, we have to assume that there is the potential for some of our staff to be affected by the issue in one way or another.

1.1.2 As an employer, T&MBC has a responsibility to provide a safe and effective work environment that responds to its employees' needs. We should make a clear statement that as an organisation we will not tolerate any form of abuse either within the workplace or outside and demonstrate a commitment to responding with sensitivity to employees who need help and support and to take action against perpetrators of domestic abuse.

1.2 Key Reasons for supporting this approach

Recruitment and Retention

1.2.1 A work place policy is felt by many (including UNISON) to be a good investment, helping to retain skilled and experienced staff and contributing to motivation and job satisfaction. An employer with family-friendly policies will be attractive to a much wider pool of potential applicants. Employers are demonstrating a powerful commitment to the principles of equal opportunities, community investment and to achieving equal opportunities for women in the workplace.

Gaining Staff Commitment

- 1.2.2 Staff will feel fully supported and confident in approaching their employer for help. This can only increase their commitment to their organisation.

The legal liability

- 1.2.3 Under the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974, employers have a duty to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their employees at work. The Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1992 also places a requirement on employers to assess the risk of violence to employees and put in place planning, organisation and control measures to ensure their health and safety. When looking at any issue affecting employees and the workplace, cost, safety, liability and productivity should be considered. Domestic abuse is no different.
- 1.2.4 By working to mitigate the risks related to domestic abuse, an organisation will also create a safer workplace for an employee experiencing abuse and will also send out a strong message that domestic abuse is unacceptable and responding to it makes good business sense.

The business case

- 1.2.5 Domestic abuse may affect the employees' productivity, emotional and physical health and well-being, and there is a possibility that there may be an increased risk of workplace violence. However, the workplace may be one of the "safe places" where victims can access the support and help they need.
- 1.2.6 Perpetrators of domestic abuse in the workplace may affect business costs, productivity, and safety.
- 1.2.7 Domestic abuse has a strong impact on an employee's working life. Many of those who are abused suffer physical injury, sleep deprivation, low morale, low self-esteem and heightened anxiety. These effects contribute towards lateness, absenteeism, poor performance and the ability to access career progression opportunities or even hold down a job.

Impact of Domestic Abuse on the Workplace

- 1.2.8 Research suggests that:

- 75% of domestic abuse victims are targeted at work, experiencing harassing phone calls, abusive partners arriving at the workplace unannounced and physical assaults.
- 56% of abused women are late for work at least five times a month. 28% leave work early at least five days a month and 54% are absent from work at least three days a month.
- The estimated cost of domestic abuse in the UK is thought to be vast, with substantial economic loss being attributed to lost wages, paid sick-leave and absenteeism linked to domestic abuse.

1.3 Legal Implications

- 1.3.1 The Council has a legal duty of care for the health and welfare of its staff and this policy seeks to compliment other employment policies that address this responsibility.

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.4.1 The financial effects of staff absence are addressed in the report. The policy will help in our efforts to avoid absence and hence increase productivity.

1.5 Risk Assessment

- 1.5.1 Not having such a policy is that some employees might be at risk of harm where T&MBC could have lent support. The policy will hopefully overcome this risk.

1.6 Conclusion

- 1.6.1 As an employer that values its employees and recognises them as a diverse group of people with differing needs, T&MBC ought to recognise the potentially damaging effect on employees who are involved in issues of domestic abuse and look to support victims and deter abusers.

- 1.6.2 Members are asked to **recommend** this policy be adopted.

Background papers:

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Nil

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