

Management Guidance
on responding to
Domestic Violence

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1. Why do managers need to respond to employees experiencing or perpetrating domestic violence?

Domestic violence is not just an issue for agencies and organisations which provide specific services, it is not just about service delivery to the public. Domestic violence occurs throughout society, and within a workforce there will be perpetrators of violence, and those experiencing it.

Local initiatives on domestic violence are coordinated by the Greenwich Multi Agency Domestic Violence Forum, and so this document uses their definition of domestic violence:

"the emotional, physical, sexual or psychological abuse of a person by their partner, family member or someone with whom there is, or has been a relationship.

The Forum acknowledges that domestic violence essentially involves the misuse of power and the exercise of control by one person, usually a man, over another, usually a woman. For this reason, the primary focus of the Forum is male violence against women."

This guidance addresses the reality that the vast majority of domestic violence is male violence against women (British Crime Survey 1992 found that 87% of domestic violence was against women), however the good practice set out below should be applied to all domestic violence situations.

1. The extent and effects of domestic violence

Domestic violence is common and serious. The British Crime Survey estimates 500,000 domestic violence incidents per year (Home Office 1994), and in 1991 120 women were killed by their partner or ex-partner. Research in North London showed that 1 in 3 women have experienced physical violence from a partner or ex-partner at some time in their lives, and 1 in 10 reported an incident in the previous year (Mooney, 1994).

Domestic violence against women occurs throughout society, regardless of age, race, sexuality, disability, class, HIV status, nationality, marital status, religious or political beliefs. However, these factors mean that women may face a multiplicity of discrimination. Information is available from the Women's Equality Unit on the experiences of different groups of women, including a pack on "Asian Women and Domestic Violence".

There may be incidents which occur in the work place, or specifically affect work, and employers clearly need to develop clear and effective responses. However, the violence is likely to be a constant, long term factor in the employee's life, with long term effects in term of work performance, reliability, attendance, and appropriateness of duties. These are effects for the employee, and for colleagues, managers and the employer as a whole.

Because domestic violence is usually a hidden issue, these effects and costs are also hidden, and remain unidentified by most employers. However, research by Wolverhampton Council in 1990 revealed that one in six of its own female employees had experienced domestic violence. The North London research found that 20% of the women who had experienced domestic violence had had to take time off work, and for a

higher proportion the impact of the violence would affect their work performance, with 40% reporting having difficulty sleeping, 46% feeling depressed or losing self-confidence, and 51% feeling worried, anxious or nervous.

2. Health and Safety responsibilities

In addition to the employer's role in responding to the employees directly involved, there are health and safety responsibilities to be considered for colleagues and the workplace as a whole. The foreseeable risk of violence in the workplace or during the course of employment is covered by the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. The fact that the threat is from a partner or ex-partner of someone working there, is likely to increase the risks because of knowledge of work times, phone numbers, colleagues, key pad numbers etc.

3. Responding at an early stage

An employer who can respond appropriately to these issues at an early stage, and even in a general preventative way, will be developing and retaining effective employees, and a positive workplace environment. Some of the following guidance, such as training for managers, will have resource implications, though most is about a process of change which will have resource benefits in terms of work performance, reduced absences, and retaining employees.

4. Developing policies and procedures

Some employers, particularly local authorities, have developed policies and procedures to respond to domestic violence amongst their workforce. These have almost exclusively focused on employees experiencing domestic violence, where there is probably most scope for employer's action. However, employers also need to address the issue of perpetrators of violence, in the extent to which it relates to their employment.

5. The initiative in Greenwich

The Greenwich Community Safety Partnership endorses this initiative, with Greenwich Council and Greenwich and Plumstead Police Divisions developing good practice, as employers themselves, in line with this guidance. The guidance will be promoted by the Partnership to other employers.

The aims of the initiative are for employers to:

- a. develop a workplace which doesn't tolerate domestic violence.
- b. support employees who experience domestic violence.
- c. respond appropriately to employees who perpetrate domestic violence.

This publication is guidance for Greenwich Council managers. Further developments are planned within the Council (see section 7).

2. Identifying and recording domestic violence.

1. How is domestic violence identified?

Domestic violence is unlikely to be disclosed easily, by someone experiencing violence or perpetrating it. An employer who is becoming more proactive in responding to domestic violence may find that employees become more specific about acknowledging the causes of their own problems, or information which they have about a colleague.

It is more likely that problems are identified through the monitoring of sickness, attendance, and work performance, and managers have the role of investigating the background causes, such as violence at home.

2. Appropriate responses at an early stage

Identification of domestic violence at an early stage can lead to appropriate help being offered (see section 4) which can reduce prolonged or repeated sick leave, and the resultant burden on colleagues.

Integration of the response to domestic violence with procedures and policy around sickness and poor work performance, will help to avoid taking inappropriate action against staff. For example, in the management of sickness absences, domestic violence may be disclosed. Any action can be reviewed at that stage, in the light of the new information, and appropriate support offered to enable the employee to minimise future absences.

Clarification of a positive response, which would be available to any employee in such a situation, can help to reduce an adverse or resentful reaction from colleagues.

3. Identifying perpetrators of domestic violence

Managers may also receive information about a member of staff being violent or abusive in his home life. Information could be from a variety of sources and needs to be handled sensitively. It cannot be immediately assumed to have no relevance to his work - this will depend on his work duties and status - and so further investigations must be made.

There may also be indications from work behaviour, performance and absences, that domestic violence is an issue, which needs a management response (see section 5).

4. Reporting and recording domestic violence

Because of the hidden nature of much domestic violence, and the difficulties of disclosing, individuals who are seen as sympathetic may be approached, rather than the usual formal reporting structures. Managers need to recognise and respect this, whilst aiming to raise awareness and gather together information to ensure that employees receive a consistent response. Taking a proactive stance on domestic violence means developing consistency about when an employee is challenged about behaviour or attitude, and when an employee is supported through a difficult time.

Record keeping about the responses which management make will help consistency, but must be in line with formal procedures. An employee who seeks help needs to know that any informal records will not count against her in future references or promotions. Managers have a key role in being alert to the possibility of staff experiencing, or perpetrating, domestic violence, and will need some awareness of the issues, and knowledge about other sources of information and support (see section 6).

3. Making the workplace safer, and improving the workplace culture.

The public information campaign around domestic violence - "Zero Tolerance" - was held in several London boroughs in 1994, and Greenwich Council and the Greenwich and Plumstead Police Divisions were involved in promoting this. The long term aim of zero tolerance towards domestic violence requires a reduction of the current extent of tolerance in various ways. The aspect which this guidance addresses is the role of managers in reducing tolerance to domestic violence.

1. Workplace information and culture

Availability of leaflets (including this document), information on services, and display of posters all help to develop a working environment which reduces tolerance to domestic violence. Appropriate materials are available from the Women's Equality Unit, which also has a library of reference materials.

A further element in which all employees can take a part is the challenging of behaviour or comments which condone domestic violence. Office discussions, and the sharing of information and ideas between different parts of an organisation, help to spread awareness and the confidence to respond appropriately if the issue comes up. It is particularly important that new employees are made aware of the Council's commitment, and where they can obtain information.

Raising the issues within sessions on management, coaching, counselling, management of sickness absences, and other relevant topics helps to integrate concerns into mainstream good practice.

2. Responding to specific employees

A workplace culture which challenges domestic violence in general, is part of making the workplace safer for specific employees experiencing domestic violence. Women may be at risk from a partner or ex-partner who also works for the Council, so the threat is to some extent internal, or from outside the workplace or organisation.

Practical safety measures are covered in the next section (section 4), and the extent to which they are applicable will vary according to circumstances. The extent to which colleagues have a role in this will depend on how the employee at risk feels about confidentiality (and this must be respected).

The employer, however, clearly does have a role, because the foreseeable risk of violence in the workplace or during the course of employment is covered by the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. The Council's policies and procedures addressing violence to staff are therefore relevant to domestic violence issues. The fact that the threat is from a partner or ex-partner does not reduce the employer's responsibility; it is more likely to increase the risk to the employee because the threat is not an isolated incident, and the abuser may have knowledge of work times, phone numbers, colleagues, key pad numbers etc.

3. Employees in tied accommodation

There will be additional issues to consider for an employee (experiencing or perpetrating violence) whose accommodation is connected to his/her employment. The workplace is also the home, which connects the domestic violence more directly to the employment. This may make the issues for the employer about action against a perpetrator clearer (section 5), and will affect the options for an employee experiencing violence (section 4).

4. Responding sensitively to employees experiencing domestic violence, and practical measures offering support and help.

Managers may be in the role of trying to encourage an employee to disclose domestic violence, and need to develop a sensitive and non-judgemental approach. An employee may be forced into admitting her home situation because of the effect on her attendance or work record, or the fact that she has come into work with visible injuries. She may well try to play down the situation, or later deny what she said, particularly if she feels it may be held against her. Managers may need specific training and further information to deal with these situations in an appropriate way (see section 6), but these guidelines can help to raise awareness.

1. Responding sensitively will include:

- a) ensuring privacy for any conversations about the issues - using an office or room where interruptions can be avoided.
- b) respecting confidentiality - domestic violence can be fatal, and managers and colleagues need to remember this in how they deal with any information, however restricting this might feel.
- c) being non-judgemental - a woman may need time to decide what to do, and may try different short term and long term options during the process.
- d) understanding why someone might be reluctant to approach her line manager, and may involve a third party, such as a colleague, or a union representative.
- e) awareness of additional issues faced by women because of their ethnic background, age, sexuality, class etc., but not stereotyping or making assumptions based on this.
- f) offering the option of speaking to another officer who may be more appropriate, such as a female officer. It may be appropriate to involve the Personnel section, and their expertise.
- g) being proactive - offering support and information at an early stage, rather than waiting for problems in work or attendance and then using formal procedures. Information on legal rights, benefits, refuges, counselling, and local services, and how to access them, can enable the employee to make her own choices and changes in her life, and have a positive impact on her work and safety at work. Information is available from the Women's Equality Unit.
- h) focusing on the employee's capabilities, rather than taking a disciplinary approach.

Because the threat associated with domestic violence is not an isolated incident, the risk to the employee is likely to be greater than for stranger violence. However, the perpetrator is known and identifiable, so preventative measures at work can be made more effective, but only if the employee receives a sympathetic, non-judgemental, and confidential response to first disclosing the situation.

2. Practical measures to consider with the employee at risk include:

- i) offering temporary and permanent changes in workplace, work times and patterns, which can help to make her less at risk at work and on her journeys to work.
- ii) offering short term help such as lifts to and from the workplace, accompanying her to the bus stop, phoning up to check that she has arrived safely home etc.
- iii) job redeployment, or changes in specific duties in the short or long term, such as whether to answer phones, work in isolated situations, staff reception areas, or carry out duties which would be particularly difficult to deal with at the time.
- iv) agreeing what to tell colleagues, including how they should respond if he rings or calls at the workplace, and ways to alert colleagues of a problem (including alarms if appropriate). Providing colleagues with a photo and other information (eg. car registration) can help them be alert.
- v) granting of compassionate leave (and/or special leave) for sorting out practicalities, appointments, support etc. Offering this, rather than waiting for a request, is both good practice and part of reducing the stigma associated with experiencing domestic violence.
- vi) providing a salary advance if needed eg. to move home.
- vii) granting use of the office phone, whilst ensuring confidentiality, for important phone calls.
- viii) granting the use of a mobile phone (if available) for extra security whilst out of the workplace.

3. Confidentiality

Much of the protection planning would benefit from colleagues, porters, receptionists, and managers knowing something of the employee's situation, but confidentiality must be agreed and respected according to her decision.

4. Measures to consider for the workforce as a whole:

- a) ensuring that all staff are aware that personal information should not be given to anyone phoning or visiting the workplace - colleagues may know the partner or ex-partner, and perceive him as unthreatening, and forget about such procedures (which are there to protect all staff).
- b) considering whether security measures such as key pads, ex-directory numbers, access procedures need to be changed because they have become known.
- c) reviewing the adequacy of procedures for noting and recording where staff are during the day, particularly if work duties include being out of the workplace a lot.

5. Practical measures to respond to perpetrators of domestic violence.

In developing a workplace which doesn't tolerate domestic violence, the employer's response to perpetrators of abuse is a key issue. Knowledge of the situation may come from a variety of sources, from the record of a conviction to information from colleagues, people outside the organisation, or the perpetrator himself. It requires a shift of attitude on the part of most employers and managers to regard this information as relevant to the perpetrator's employment, and requiring management responses.

1. **Relevance of domestic violence to the perpetrator's employment**

There may be incidents which occur in the workplace or during work time, such as threatening or violent behaviour, including telephone calls, or misuse of access to places or information to trace and/or harass a partner or ex-partner.

If the woman experiencing the abuse is also an employee, then she may be at increased risk, and issues of confidentiality and physical access to buildings must be addressed, including coordination between departments (see also section 4).

2. **Appropriateness of job duties**

Additionally, the very fact of an employee being a perpetrator of domestic violence may make certain job duties inappropriate, and justify redeployment and or disciplinary action. For example, it is not appropriate for perpetrators of abuse to be providing services to abused women and children, so a change of duties or transfer may be required for a front-line social worker or youth worker.

3. **Bringing the employer into disrepute**

Domestic violence perpetrated, particularly by senior employees, can also be considered as bringing the employer into disrepute - in any disciplinary action the employer would have to relate the breach of the Employment Code of Conduct to the duties of the employee's job contract. For example, a criminal conviction for domestic violence could be regarded as Gross Misconduct. This would depend upon the employee's job contract and the relevant circumstances - personnel advice should be sought on each case.

4. **Misuse of access to information**

Many women and children escape domestic violence, but continue to be pursued, often for years, throughout the country and abroad. In his attempts to pursue, the perpetrator is likely to seek access to information records. If he has access to any such records during the course of his work, managers must be alert to any possibilities of breaches of confidentiality or abuses of access to information.

Managers can be proactive, if alerted to the risks, and initiate measures, such as changes in work duties and procedures, to ensure that abuses do not occur. If the woman at risk is also an employee, then coordination between sections will be necessary so that any such change does not create alternative risks.

Clear warnings to staff of the consequences of misuse of information before any incident, mean that any occurrence can be dealt with as a more serious disciplinary matter.

5. Setting up systems which prevent misuse of information

Prevention is obviously a better option. Most computer record systems can make certain records restricted access, so, for example, the new address of someone who has had to move because of domestic violence can be made accessible to only one member of staff and one manager. Within an organisation, security of payroll records are a prime element to consider, ensuring that addresses and other details are not inappropriately accessible.

Perpetrators of abuse may well get friends or relatives to try and access records, so access should be restricted to specific people, rather than restrict it from others.

6. Confidentiality and support

Perpetrators are entitled to confidentiality from the colleagues and managers who know of the situation, and there are specific rights under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act.

Information on the law, and appropriate services for perpetrators of violence should be provided, and support given if the man is endeavouring to overcome his abusive behaviour. Information can be provided by the Women's Equality Unit.

However, the safety of his partner (or ex partner) and children is paramount and must not be put in jeopardy.

6. Further local information and resources.

Awareness and good practice in responding to domestic violence are covered by leaflets, policy and training within the Council and other statutory and voluntary organisations. A range of materials is available, and all managers must ensure they have current information available for reference and to pass on to staff.

Having information easily available, such as posters with telephone numbers up on the walls, helps to overcome reluctance to seek help.

1. Local information resources

Greenwich Council produces a range of local information, available via the Women's Equality Unit, including:

Leaflets for women (available in 12 languages)

Posters for offices, reception areas etc.

"Domestic Violence Service Providers Directory" (reference pack)

"STOP Domestic Violence" (pack for working with children and young people)

List of up to date telephone numbers of agencies

"Asian Women and Domestic Violence" (information pack for agencies)

"Domestic Violence - Don't stand for it" (Government produced leaflets and posters)

Leaflets and posters are available free of charge.

2. The Greenwich Multi Agency Domestic Violence Forum

The Greenwich Multi Agency Domestic Violence Forum (GMADVF) has existed since 1991, with the following aims:

- * To improve the quality and accessibility of information, advice, protection, support and services for all women and children who have experienced, or are experiencing, domestic violence.
- * To increase awareness and appreciation of each agency's role in tackling domestic violence and encourage and maintain a coordinated response, joint action and support where appropriate.
- * To ensure that all agencies treat domestic violence seriously, appropriately and consistently.
- * To increase awareness in the community of the scale, consequences and causes of domestic violence, and the appropriate ways to tackle these issues.
- * To encourage initiatives aimed at the prevention of domestic violence.
- * To maximise the resources available to tackle, and ultimately to reduce, domestic violence.

- * To support positive action against perpetrators where the woman expresses the wish to proceed.

As part of GMADVF's work programme, priorities are identified for production of information, training etc. and members are updated on policies, good practice and services.

Further information on GMADVF, current policy, good practice and local services can be obtained from the Women's Equality Unit.

7. Future developments within Greenwich Council.

1. Implementation of this guidance

This guidance should be implemented by managers and personnel officers straight away - there has already been a process of detailed consultation with the Human Resources Group and Departmental Personnel Managers, and their comments have been incorporated.

Feedback from managers on implementing the guidance should be addressed to the Women's Equality Unit (see details at the end of this section), so that issues can be incorporated in the review and development of this initiative.

2. Integration with other employment policies

This corporate management guidance will be incorporated into the review process of all relevant Council employment policies, such as:

health & safety (see sections 1 & 3)

discrimination, harassment and victimisation (see section 5)

disciplinary and grievance (see sections 4 & 5)

preventing violence to staff (see section 4)

compassionate & unpaid leave (see section 4)

sickness & work monitoring (see section 2)

confidentiality (see sections 4 & 5)

flexible work hours (see section 4)

redeployment (temporary and permanent) (see sections 4 & 5)

salary payments, loans etc. (see section 4)

employee code of conduct (see section 5)

3. Training for Managers and Personnel officers

Managers should contact the Women's Equality Unit or Greenwich Multi Agency Domestic Violence Forum for information on training currently available, or to discuss training needs which have been identified.

Training on implementation of relevant policies will need to address the issues covered by this guidance document, such as by using domestic violence as a case study.

