

## Appendix One

### Belfast City Council

#### Workplace Policy on Domestic Violence and Abuse

Approved Date	[Insert date]
Review Date	As required.
Related Legislation / Applicable Section of Legislation	Health & Safety Regulations At Work (NI) Order 1992
Replaces	<b>Workplace Policy on Domestic Violence and Abuse 2012</b>
Policy Lead (Name, Position, Contact Details)	Christine Sheridan Head of Human Resources Ext 3242
Sponsor Directorate	City and Organisational Strategy Department
Version	v2

#### Revision record

Date	Version	Revision Description
August 2019	2	General revision and update
July 2012	1	Approval

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## 1. DEFINITION:

- 1.1. For the purposes of this policy domestic violence and abuse is defined as any “threatening, controlling, coercive behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, verbal, sexual, financial or emotional) inflicted on anyone (irrespective of age ethnicity, religion, gender, or sexual orientation) by a current or former intimate partner or family member”. (Definition taken from the DOJ & DHSSPS Strategy document: “Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence” March 2016.)**

## 2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1. Domestic and sexual violence and abuse occurs right across our society and it has devastating consequences for the victims and their families. It has no boundaries as regards to age or gender, gender identity, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, wealth, disability or geography.
- 2.2. Domestic violence and abuse is a pattern of behaviour that is characterised by the exercise of control and the misuse of power by one person over another within an intimate or family relationship, including same sex relationships. It is usually frequent and persistent. While domestic violence and abuse most commonly refers to that perpetrated against a partner, it includes violence and abuse against ex-partners, and violence and abuse by any other person who has a close or family relationship with the victim, including parents, children, and siblings. It also includes honour based violence and abuse.
- 2.3. Domestic violence and abuse does not just refer to physical violence but also to sexual, emotional and psychological, online, financial abuse and coercive control. Coercive control is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse used to harm, punish or frighten their victim. This controlling behaviour is designed to make a person dependent by isolating them from support, exploiting them, depriving them of independence and regulating their everyday behaviour. Domestic violence and abuse is, in many cases, made up of a combination of different forms of abuse. Domestic violence and abuse affects not only adults but may be inflicted on, or witnessed by children. The potential adverse effects on children living with domestic violence and abuse includes poor educational achievement, social exclusion and juvenile crime, substance and alcohol misuse, mental health problems and homelessness.
- 2.4. Belfast City Council strives to create a working environment that promotes the view that violence against people is unacceptable and that such violence will not be condoned and that everyone has a right to live free from fear and abuse.
- 2.5. The Council is committed to raising awareness of domestic violence and abuse in the community through the work of the Policing & Community Safety Partnerships (PCSP), the Belfast area Domestic and Sexual Violence Partnership and with other local organisations in the Belfast area, including PSNI, Women’s Aid and Onus, through its Safe Place initiative.
- 2.6. The Council also recognises that our employees and colleagues (and potentially their family members) may be experiencing domestic violence and abuse, that home and work issues cannot always be separated and that domestic and sexual violence and abuse can impact greatly on the working life of employees and can result in:
- A deterioration in employee performance
  - Increased and unexplained absenteeism
  - Poor timekeeping etc.

These could potentially threaten job security and prospects where the cause of these behaviours is unknown to the employer. The Council is therefore committed to providing appropriate advice and support to affected employees, while they are in work, and in addressing their circumstances outside the workplace. The Council also recognises that employees may be indirectly adversely impacted by a close family member experiencing domestic violence and abuse.

- 2.7. Domestic violence and abuse has a damaging effect on people and can have an adverse impact on their employment, e.g. increased absence levels as a result of physical injuries and/or mental health issues, victims not being allowed out of the house to attend work and performance issues when in work. However, the cause of these effects is often not talked about because victims are frightened of further attack and/or of perceived repercussions on their ability to carry out their job.
- 2.8. This policy demonstrates the Council's commitment to providing guidance for employees and managers to address the occurrence of domestic violence and abuse and its effects on the workplace.

### **3. PURPOSE**

- 3.1. The purpose of this policy is to support employees who are affected by domestic violence and abuse and to establish a framework to assist the Council in providing that support.

### **4. SCOPE**

- 4.1. Belfast City Council acknowledges that while it is mainly women who experience domestic violence and abuse, this policy applies equally to every employee of Belfast City Council, regardless of gender, gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation. In support of this, it is the Council's policy that anyone who is experiencing or has been affected by domestic violence and abuse can raise the issue, in the knowledge that we will treat the matter effectively, sympathetically and in line with our statutory obligations.
- 4.2. The Council recognises that domestic violence and abuse is not confined to the home and that it is likely that it will impact upon the employee in the workplace. The Council recognises its duty to keep an employee safe within the workplace and would encourage employees to disclose to a line manager or "Trusted Colleague" (see paragraph 8.6) if they have any concerns about their safety in the workplace, or travelling to and from the workplace. Belfast City Council will take all reasonable steps to address these concerns.
- 4.3. The Workplace Policy on Domestic Violence and Abuse applies to all Council employees (including casual workers and temporary staff). The Council will also take all reasonable steps to support all agency assignees who are placed in Belfast City Council.

### **5. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

- 5.1. The aim of the policy is to make the workplace a safe and supportive environment for all employees of the Council who are affected by domestic violence and abuse.
- 5.2. The objectives of the policy are to set out how the Council will:

- offer support to our employees in addressing problems arising from domestic violence and abuse sympathetically and in confidence (as far as possible);
- maximise the safety of our employees in the workplace;
- signpost employees to external support agencies who can carry on support beyond the workplace;
- deal effectively with perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse among our workforce, as appropriate and to challenge behaviours and attitudes through our awareness raising campaigns.

## **6. CONFIDENTIALITY**

6.1. Whilst employees experiencing domestic violence and abuse normally have the right to complete confidentiality, in circumstances of child protection or the protection of adults at risk of abuse, there may be a legal obligation on the Council to notify appropriate protection services. It is likely that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in these situations. For example, where a risk to children or to vulnerable adults is identified, then the Council may have a duty to inform social services. Where this arises the employee will be informed.

## **7. RIGHT TO PRIVACY**

7.1. The Council respects an employee's right to keep private the fact that they have experienced domestic violence and abuse within the statutory limitations outlined in paragraph 6.1 above.

## **8. PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYEES**

8.1. The Council will make every effort to assist an employee experiencing domestic violence and abuse and will consider the following actions where applicable and where the work of the Council and services to citizens will not be compromised by their implementation:

- If an employee needs to take leave from work due to domestic violence and abuse, the length of the leave will be determined by the individual's situation through collaboration with the employee and their line manager subject to balancing both service needs and the needs of the individual.
- In this context managers and supervisors are encouraged to provide a sympathetic response to requests for special paid or unpaid leave; flexible working and other work-life balance arrangements as a result of domestic violence and abuse, for example flexibility in working hours or time off when required to enable the employee to seek protection, go to court, look for new housing, enter counselling, arrange childcare etc.
- The Council will consider the requirement for a change of working arrangements on a short-term or long-term basis, as necessary. (For example, moving the employee away from the reception area or from working in a ground-floor office which is visible from the street if required; redeployment or relocation, changing shift patterns, changing hours).
- Changes to arrangements for the payment of salary, if requested (including a salary advance, if needed, e.g. to acquire alternative accommodation).

- 8.2. Belfast City Council recognises that people experiencing domestic and sexual violence and abuse are at increasing risk when they attempt to leave an abusive partner. They may become vulnerable going to and coming from work, or while they are at work as the perpetrator knows where they can be located. This can give rise to health and safety issues including the risk of violence occurring in the workplace.
- 8.3. Employers have a duty of care under the Health and Safety at Work (NI) Order 1978 to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of their employees. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (NI) 1992 also requires employers to assess the risks of violence to employees and make arrangements for their health and safety by effective planning, organisation and control.
- 8.4. The Council will make support available to employees involved in domestic violence and abuse through line managers, Human Resources, Occupational Health, the Council's confidential employee counselling service and the network of "trusted colleagues".
- 8.5. The Council has set in place a procedure for designating certain staff members to be "**trusted colleagues**". These employees will be available as the first point of contact for employees experiencing domestic violence and abuse. They will receive training in responding to disclosures of domestic violence and abuse, information about relevant agencies that offer support and information on current legislation, reports, publications and events to do with domestic violence and abuse. The trusted colleagues will be drawn from a range of areas/locations within the Council but will include staff from Human Resources and trade union representatives. The names and contact numbers for all trusted colleagues will be displayed on all location noticeboards.
- 8.6. The role of the "trusted colleague" is to:
- Be available and approachable to employees experiencing domestic violence and abuse;
  - Listen, reassure and support individuals;
  - Keep information confidential (subject to the requirements of child and adult protection);
  - Respond in a sensitive and non-judgmental manner;
  - Discuss the specific steps that can be taken to help the employee stay safe in the workplace;
  - Ensure the employee is aware of the options available to them;
  - Encourage the employee to seek the advice of other relevant agencies - see appendices for contact details of support services available.
- 8.7. The Council is aware that victims of domestic violence and abuse may have performance issues such as absenteeism or lower productivity. When addressing performance and safety issues the Council will make reasonable efforts to consider all aspects of the employee's situation and/or safety problems and aim to assist the employee in seeking professional help. The Council will address health and safety concerns in the workplace and will signpost to external agencies to carry on support beyond the remit of the workplace. The Council will commit to collaborative working with external agencies (if

desired by employee) to provide a joined-up approach to supporting the employee, inside and outside the workplace.

8.8. While this policy applies to all employees of the Council, it is line managers, in consultation with “trusted colleagues” and when necessary, Human Resources, who will play a key role in implementing it in practice.

8.9. The role of the line manager can be summarised as follows:

- Be aware that employees who are experiencing domestic violence and abuse may demonstrate poor punctuality, attendance, work performance and productivity and should take steps to try to establish this prior to instigating any formal council procedures. Details of possible signs that someone is experiencing domestic violence and abuse are contained in Appendix 1.
- Do not directly confront an employee. It is for the employee to raise the matter. If you have concerns or suspect signs of domestic violence and abuse please contact a Trusted Colleague, your departmental HR team or Corporate HR - Employee Relations unit.
- Where domestic violence and abuse is known, managers should contact Corporate HR (Employee Relations Unit) for advice before any discussion with the staff member takes place, if it is possible to do so.
- If approached managers need to be prepared to listen and should ensure they are approachable and available.
- Where it is alleged that a member of staff is perpetrating abuse during work time or using work resources, the manager will discuss this as a matter of urgency with Human Resources.
- Managers will review the security of personal information held on members of staff and ensure that it is retained in a lockable filing cabinet or cupboard and disposed of securely when it is no longer required.
- Managers will ensure that a risk assessment is carried out that will provide a plan to address any security concerns in the workplace.
- Managers will keep a confidential record of any discussions and of any action taken. This will be kept with the knowledge and consent of the staff member concerned, who will be able to access it.
- Managers will use discretion to facilitate time off for appointments, counselling, re-housing, court attendances etc.
- Managers will ensure rehabilitative return and support under the Council’s Attendance Policy where appropriate.
- Managers will consider redeployment if necessary in regard to location of work, in liaison with departmental management, business support and Corporate HR.
- Managers will consider changes to working hours, shift patterns or flexible working arrangements.

- Managers will offer support through Occupational Health or Employee Counselling or assist with referrals to specialist agencies for on-going help or support.
- Managers will take advice from Human Resources staff in regard to issues of employment.
- Managers will consider the provision of any relevant training that might provide additional support to employees, e.g. assertiveness training for confidence building.

## **9. TRAINING MANAGERS AND TRUSTED COLLEAGUES TO IDENTIFY AND RESPOND APPROPRIATELY**

9.1. The Council will develop a programme of training for line managers and trusted colleagues to raise awareness of domestic violence and abuse and to ensure a common understanding of this policy and guidance.

9.2. The training will include:

- Signs that an employee may be experiencing difficulties;
- How to provide initial support;
- Referrals to other agencies;
- Ways to help the person stay safe in the workplace;
- The importance of understanding that they are not counsellors (counselling is to be left to trained professionals and no one should attempt to act in place of a domestic violence and abuse expert or counsellor).

## **10. GENERAL EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES**

10.1. All employees of the Council have a responsibility to:

- Accept primary responsibility for their personal safety and that of their colleagues;
- Familiarise themselves with and follow this policy and bring to the attention of their managers any concerns which they have relating to personal safety;
- Participate in training that has been made available to them on domestic violence and abuse;
- Ensure that no personal information relating to colleagues is passed on to callers.

## **11. VISIBLE RESOURCES THAT PROVIDE SUPPORT**

11.1. The Council will provide contact details for “trusted colleagues” and a range of organisations which can offer support to employees living with domestic violence and abuse. These will be found in highly visible locations as well as in private locations, so that they can be picked up discreetly by employees. Safe Place cards will be left in discrete but accessible locations.



## **12. PERPETRATORS WHO ARE EMPLOYEES**

12.1. With regard to perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse, the Council will undertake to do the following:

- Reserve the right to invoke the disciplinary procedure against any employee who perpetrates violence, including domestic violence and abuse and/or who uses the Council's time, property or other resources to abuse a partner or family member or to aid another to do so. The Council will establish the facts of the case, in line with the requirements of the disciplinary procedure, before considering if disciplinary action is justified.
- Refer to the Council's Criminal Misconduct Guidelines. It may be the case that such an issue is dealt with in the criminal legal system either as an alternative to, or concurrent to, the disciplinary procedure.
- Take action, as appropriate, to minimise the potential for a perpetrator to use his/her position or resources to find out the whereabouts, or other details, of his/her partner or ex-partner.
- Consider requests for time off to attend appropriate interventions, when perpetrators are seeking help to address their abusive behaviour.

12.2. In cases where both the perpetrator of domestic violence and abuse and the victim are employed by the Council, action may need to be taken to ensure that both the victim and the perpetrator do not come into contact in the workplace.

## **13. COMMUNICATING THE POLICY**

13.1. The Council will raise awareness of domestic violence and abuse through a variety of methods, including:

- Preparation and distribution of information to publicise the Council's policy and to raise awareness of the issues of domestic violence and abuse.
- The provision of information about agencies that can offer advice, information and support.
- Whilst it is acknowledged that these steps will be effective in the short term in raising awareness, the Council is committed to continue to communicate and raise awareness of domestic violence and abuse in the longer term using methods deemed to be the most effective and appropriate.

## **14. REVIEW**

14.1. This policy will be reviewed regularly by the Council and, if necessary, revised in consultation with recognised Trade Unions in light of changing legislation and current good practice. Details of the next scheduled review are contained on the front cover of this policy.

ENDS

## **Appendix 1 - Identifying domestic violence and abuse**

Signs that an individual is experiencing domestic violence and abuse can include:

- Poor timekeeping without explanation
- High absenteeism rate without explanation
- Uncharacteristic anxiety, depression or problems with concentration
- Uncharacteristic deterioration in the quality of work performance
- The receipt of repeated upsetting calls/faxes/e-mails/text messages
- Individual being a victim of vandalism or threats
- Obsession with time
- Needing regular time off for appointments
- Inappropriate or excessive clothing
- Repeated injuries, or unexplained bruising or explanations that do not match the injuries displayed
- Increased hours being worked for no apparent reason
- Prevented from seeing children or fear of not seeing children
- Limited money / access to money
- Restricted work / social life

Please note that this is not an exhaustive checklist, some victims may display no signs of domestic violence or abuse. Individuals experiencing domestic violence and abuse suffer a broad range of physical and emotional consequences.

Additionally, it is essential to understand that any of the above may arise from a range of circumstances, of which domestic violence and abuse may or may not be one.

## **Appendix 2 - Who is affected by domestic violence and abuse?**

Whilst women experience and report higher incidences of violence and abusive behaviour within their family and relationships, (PSNI reporting shows an approximate 70% female: 30% male breakdown), other people can be affected and hurt by domestic violence and abuse too.

Anyone, irrespective of gender, gender identity, gender expression, race, sexual orientation, age and disability can be affected by domestic violence and abuse. It is important to consider this when articulating and promoting your support to victims. For example, those who are in a same sex relationship and/or those who are male and those who are transgender (particularly, but not exclusively, transgender women with children) may face multiple barriers to coming forward to report. It is important to be sensitive and supportive in different ways to help all victims feel comfortable speaking to their colleagues and managers about their relationship in the workplace.

Remember that those who are in a same-sex relationship may face a fear of discrimination or actual discrimination and exclusion on a daily basis because of their sexual orientation. They may be reluctant to come out to colleagues and if they do you should be sensitive about who is informed of the details of their relationship.

Often, an abusive same sex partner takes advantage of homophobia to manipulate a partner to keep the abuse a secret and/or threatens to 'out' them to family, friends and work colleagues. Same sex attracted victims may also fear that most support services are designed for heterosexual people. It is important that you have access to appropriate support services for lesbian, gay and bisexual people and can provide this information to all employees to communicate your openness and thoughtfulness in this regard.

For male victims whether heterosexual or same sex attracted, coming forward to talk about abuse in a relationship and ask for help and support is difficult to do. Men access support in very different ways to women and often can be further isolated in an abusive relationship due to the myths about maleness meaning strength and self-sufficiency etc. It is difficult in the workplace to acknowledge you are experiencing abuse. Many men worry that they will be mocked or treated with disbelief.

Transgender individuals, both male and female often face abuse, physically, emotionally and psychologically from family members, siblings and partners. Transgender women, and particularly those with children often face extreme harassment centering around access, education, caregiving and even physical abuse from their ex-partner's new partner. Many transgender women are often too frightened to seek support or intervention when they perceive access to their children is being used as a weapon to deny or halt their transition.

There are support services for heterosexual and same sex attracted men, and for trans people or those in the process of transitioning. It is important that you have access to appropriate support services and can provide this information to all employees to communicate your openness and thoughtfulness in this regard.

It is important that all staff who are trained to support victims of domestic violence and abuse in the workplace have received appropriate guidance and training in issues pertaining to the diversity of people that can be affected by domestic violence and abuse.

## Appendix 3 - Employee factsheet and internal contacts

### INTRODUCTION

As your employer, Belfast City Council values your health and safety. If you are an employee experiencing domestic violence and abuse, as an organisation we understand that your morale, health, well-being and self-confidence can be affected.

This fact sheet is intended to answer questions and concerns you may have about your employment if you are experiencing domestic violence and abuse.

### HOW CAN WE HELP IF YOU EXPERIENCE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE?

As your employer we can only assist you, if you disclose that you are subject to domestic violence and abuse.

### WHO TO ASK FOR HELP?

You can approach your Line Manager, Business Support Officer or Trade Union representative, a Trusted Colleague or another colleague with whom you feel able to discuss your circumstances.

Whoever you approach, your situation will be treated with the utmost confidentiality.

Whoever you approach, you must be prepared to discuss who else may need to be informed e.g. Head of Service, Occupational Health etc.

If you approach a colleague/s you must understand that they may need to involve a third party like HR because they may not have the knowledge or expertise or access to specialist resources to help you.

### WHAT ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY?

Whatever you disclose will be confidential. Any disclosure about you or your circumstances will only be made with your permission.

The Council will only involve other agencies or share information with your consent unless we are required to do so by law or the information is necessary for the protection of children or vulnerable adults. We will inform you if this is necessary.

### WILL I BE DISCIPLINED?

You will not be disciplined **because you have experienced** domestic violence and abuse.

However, if you are going through a disciplinary process and your personal circumstances have a bearing on why you are being disciplined it may be in your best interests to disclose your circumstances as soon as possible to ensure that they can be taken into account and the appropriate support provided.

### BELFAST CITY COUNCIL CONTACTS LIST

Corporate HR - HR Manager	Catherine Christy Ext. 3226																										
Corporate HR - Employee Relations -	<table border="1"> <tr> <td><b>Corporate</b></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Andrea Anderson</td> <td>Ext. 3737</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Helen Devlin</td> <td>Ext. 6462</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Karen Fennell-Jenkins</td> <td>Ext. 3274</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sharon Steele</td> <td>Ext. 3253</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Patrick Carville</td> <td>Ext. 3798</td> </tr> </table>	<b>Corporate</b>		Andrea Anderson	Ext. 3737	Helen Devlin	Ext. 6462	Karen Fennell-Jenkins	Ext. 3274	Sharon Steele	Ext. 3253	Patrick Carville	Ext. 3798														
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Departmental HR / Business Support Representatives	<table border="1"> <tr> <td><b>Place and Economy</b></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Alan Noble</td> <td>Ext. 3773</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Civic &amp; Legal Services</b></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Maureen McKearney</td> <td>Ext. 6014</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Finance &amp; Resources</b></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Irene Murray</td> <td>Ext. 6087</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Physical Programmes</b></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Eamonn Neeson</td> <td>Ext. 3264</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>C&amp;NS</b></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sonya McAllister</td> <td>Ext. 5310</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Claire Rodgers</td> <td>Ext. 6207</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Shirley Ferran</td> <td>Ext. 3523</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Julie McNally</td> <td>Ext. 3420</td> </tr> </table>	<b>Place and Economy</b>		Alan Noble	Ext. 3773	<b>Civic &amp; Legal Services</b>		Maureen McKearney	Ext. 6014	<b>Finance &amp; Resources</b>		Irene Murray	Ext. 6087	<b>Physical Programmes</b>		Eamonn Neeson	Ext. 3264	<b>C&amp;NS</b>		Sonya McAllister	Ext. 5310	Claire Rodgers	Ext. 6207	Shirley Ferran	Ext. 3523	Julie McNally	Ext. 3420
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Julie McNally	Ext. 3420																										
Employee Counselling	028 9051 7269 07921501299																										
List of Trusted Colleagues	See staff notice boards																										
Trade Union C-coordinators	<table border="1"> <tr> <td><b>TU Coordinators</b></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ciaran Morrison</td> <td>Ext. 2353</td> </tr> <tr> <td>David Cowieson</td> <td>Ext. 3569</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Francis Shannon</td> <td>Ext. 4792</td> </tr> </table>	<b>TU Coordinators</b>		Ciaran Morrison	Ext. 2353	David Cowieson	Ext. 3569	Francis Shannon	Ext. 4792																		
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The table below lists the various internal contacts. This table displays information as of August 2019. It will be reviewed every six months and updates made and included on the version available within the policy documents library on interlink.

#### Appendix 4 – Useful contact details- external

<b>SIPTU</b> - 028 90314000
<b>NIPSA</b> - 028 9066 1831
<b>Unite</b> - 028 2565 6216
<b>GMB</b> - 028 9039 3340
<b>Women’s Aid - Lisburn and Belfast</b> – 028 9066 6049 <b>Antrim, Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Larne &amp; Newtownabbey</b> 028 2563 2136
<b>Cookstown &amp; Dungannon Women’s Aid</b> - 028 8676 9300
<b>Men’s Advisory Project (MAP)</b> - 028 9024 1929
<b>Men to Men</b> - 028 9023 7799
<b>24-hour Domestic and Sexual Violence Helpline</b> - 0808 802 1414
<b>Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender Helplines</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gay Helpline - 028 9032 2023</li><li>• Lesbian Helpline (Thursday evenings) - 028 9023 8668</li><li>• Rainbow Project - 028 9031 9030</li></ul>
<b>Other Helplines</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Age NI - 0808 808 7575</li><li>• Childline – 0800 11 11</li><li>• NSPCC – 0808 800 5000</li><li>• Lifeline – 0808 808 8000</li><li>• Simon Community – 0800 171 222</li></ul>
<b>Police Service of Northern Ireland - Domestic Violence Officers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In an emergency dial 999 or 18000 for text phone users</li><li>• For non-urgent matters dial 101. Operators will pass your call to your local police station</li></ul>



**Other Useful Numbers**

- Rape Crisis & Sexual Abuse Centre 028 9032 9002
- Nexus 028 9032 6803

## Appendix 5- Managers' Factsheet

### INTRODUCTION

These guidance notes are intended to assist managers and employees when dealing with this very sensitive and personal issue.

Human Resource teams will be able to help and advise managers and employees if that is what the individual wants. It is also recognised that managers and employees may feel a sensitive issue such as domestic violence and abuse is best dealt with at a local level within existing Belfast City Council Policies and Procedures.

This is an information-sharing document and is produced in support of the Belfast City Council Policy on Domestic Violence and Abuse in the Workplace.

### WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE?

Domestic violence and abuse is defined as any “threatening, controlling, coercive behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, verbal, sexual, financial or emotional) inflicted on anyone (irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, or sexual orientation) by a current or former intimate partner or family member”. (Definition taken from the DOJ & DHSSPS Strategy)

Research shows that the majority of those who experience domestic violence and abuse are women, with the majority of perpetrators being men. However, it is important to note that domestic violence and abuse is not limited to this group and is an issue for all within our society.

We do not currently record incidents of domestic violence and abuse experienced by our own employees. However, BCC is committed to raising awareness about domestic violence and abuse and providing services to support those who experience it.

Managers should understand that domestic violence and abuse is an issue that can impact on the workplace. Domestic violence and abuse can affect the morale, health, wellbeing and self-confidence of an employee, which in turn can impact on their performance at work.

### WHAT PRACTICAL SUPPORT CAN MANAGERS GIVE?

- If approached managers need to be prepared to listen and should ensure they are approachable and available.
- Do not directly confront an employee. It is for the employee to raise the matter. If you have concerns or suspect signs of domestic violence and abuse please contact a Trusted Colleague, your departmental HR team or Corporate HR - Employee Relations unit.
- Managers will need to establish “ground rules” for example confidentiality, consent for who else is to be involved, e.g. Business Support Advisor, colleague etc.
- Managers will need to be able to explain to an employee how we as an employer can support them, including the possibility of the following:

#### Leave

The current special leave scheme provides unpaid time off for employees ‘to cater for special,

individual circumstances’.

For more advice and information please contact departmental Business Support Manager, the Employee Relations Team, Corporate Human Resources, TU representative.

Managers may receive requests for time off from employees who are experiencing domestic violence and abuse to arrange appointments during the normal working day. These requests should be treated sympathetically. These appointments may typically include:

- Appointments with support agencies
- Arranging re-housing
- Meeting with solicitors, police etc.
- Making alternative childcare arrangements, including schooling.
- Attending court in relation to seeking an injunction or order in cases of violence and abuse or harassment.

Management will agree with the individual (in conjunction with Corporate HR) how leave can be facilitated based on an individual's circumstances and service delivery. This may include special paid leave, unpaid leave, flexi time (including flexi time outside normal provision if required), or changes to start and finishing times of work or a combination of council leave provisions.

Additionally, Management will implement, as appropriate, workplace adjustments necessary to increase an employee’s safety at work e.g. in the event that a perpetrator attempts to make unwanted contact with an employee experiencing domestic violence and abuse whilst the employee is in their workplace, or in the event that the employee works in the community, and this is known to the perpetrator. Managers may consider a change in working pattern or hours if necessary or a change of duties or reallocation of duties.

### **Referral to Occupational Health**

The Occupational Health Team can assist with dealing with absences and medical advice relating to specific injuries and referrals can also be made to Employee Counselling. You can choose to refer an employee to an agency or counsellor without the support of Occupational Health. Departments will consider on recommendation from Occupational Health the provision of additional specialist counselling or support services.

Both male and female employees can also be referred to a Women’s Aid Advisor who can provide specialist advice and guidance. This is a free service.

### **Police Involvement**

Any consideration of involving the police must be discussed with the employee.

## **SAFETY AT WORK?**

Managers have a duty to ensure that all employees have a safe working environment. Ensuring an employee, who is experiencing domestic violence and abuse, is safe at work can be difficult and in some cases may involve obtaining the consent of the employee to inform colleagues to avoid disclosure of the employee’s whereabouts to alleged perpetrators, other family members or their representatives. However, the need for confidentiality is paramount and a manager

should not divulge information of a private nature without the express permission of the employee, unless required to do so by law.

Managers may also need to assess the risk to other employees from the perpetrator.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY?

Once an employee has confided to their manager that they are experiencing domestic violence and abuse, the manager should assure the employee that they will keep this information confidential and within the boundaries they have already agreed. An exception to this is where child protection issues could arise. In these circumstances the manager must advise the employee that they will be seeking further advice from an appropriate agency.

#### ATTENDANCE POLICY

An employee's circumstances or disclosure of being subject to domestic violence and abuse may come to the attention of a manager through the application of the absence procedure.

The attendance policy still needs to be followed and allows for the possibility of discretion being applied. However, information relating only to the specific illness or injury needs to be recorded. The issue of domestic violence and abuse should not be recorded locally and the issue should be dealt with separately if the employee wishes.

Depending on the circumstances and what course of action the employee wishes to take will depend on how much we as an employer need to support an employee.

#### WHAT IF AN EMPLOYEE OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL IS A PERPETRATOR OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE?

We all must be aware that domestic violence and abuse is a serious matter that can lead to criminal convictions.

Conduct of an employee outside of work can lead to disciplinary action. (Refer to Code of Conduct).

A manager will need to assess each case on its merits and consider the implications carefully. If you are made aware that an employee is a perpetrator of domestic violence and abuse contact your Departmental Business Support Manager or the Corporate HR Employee Relations team for advice and support.

#### DEALING WITH A VICTIM OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE AND POTENTIAL WORKPLACE ADJUSTMENTS.

The following are practical key points to bear in mind when dealing with possible domestic violence and abuse situations, to encourage disclosure and/or discussion of domestic violence and abuse:

- Create an environment where employees feel safe to talk about what they are experiencing. Be a good listener and believe what they are saying. Although total confidentiality might not be possible in all cases, try to respect the confidentiality of the individual concerned.
- Provide a sensitive non-judgemental response and reassure the employee that they are not to blame, there is no justification for this treatment of them and that there is help and support available, both through the organisation and links with specialist agencies.
- Be aware that an individual can be subject to domestic violence and abuse from more than one perpetrator within their particular personal circumstances.
- Be well informed about the support options that are available and discuss these with the employee, including how to contact local domestic violence and abuse support and information services and specialist confidential counselling services. If requested by the employee, assist them to make contact.
- Respect the choices and decisions the employee may make about their situation. Often it is difficult for them to leave for many reasons, for example, financial, losing their home, childcare responsibilities, fear of loss of contact with their children, false counter-allegations and threats of violence. Also, be aware that the decision to leave an abusive relationship can be a very dangerous time for the person experiencing the abuse.
- Be aware that a victim may make many attempts before they finally leave their violent partner.
- If you are a manager, seek to accommodate insofar as possible, requests for adjustments to working hours, workloads and time off (within the parameters of other current Council policies and procedures) to make arrangements, for example meetings with solicitors, making financial arrangements, making alternative arrangements for childcare, appointments with schools, social work and housing agencies, and attendance at court.
- People experiencing domestic violence and abuse are especially vulnerable once they attempt to leave abusive partners and may become vulnerable going to or coming from work or while they are at work as the perpetrator knows where they can be located. This can give rise to health and safety issues and an increased risk of workplace abuse. If you are a manager, consider carrying out a workplace risk assessment for both the victim and other employees.
- Keep in touch with the employee during any period of absence, maintaining confidentiality of their whereabouts at all times.
- If the employee's duties require work outside their place of work, consider how the risks can be minimised.
- Checking that staff have arrangements for safely getting to and from home.
- Diverting / screening telephone calls / obtaining new telephone number.

- Providing alternative email addresses.
- If consent is given, alerting reception and security staff if the perpetrator / alleged perpetrator is known to attend or come to the workplace.
- With consent, advising colleagues of the situation on a need-to-know basis and agreeing what the response should be if the perpetrator / alleged perpetrator contacts the office.
- Consider financial assistance by way of a directly paid advance in pay. Any such payment would be agreed by the relevant director and the employee would agree how and when any such payment would be paid back to the council.

Further advice should be sought from Departmental HR or the Corporate Human Resources Employee Relations team if you are considering any of the above.