



Domestic Abuse Policy

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1. Introduction

Rossendale Borough Council is committed to a multi-agency approach to respond effectively to the issue of domestic abuse. The policy reflects the Council's commitment, as an employer and service provider, to working to meet the needs of men, women and children living with, and escaping from abuse and the Lancashire Domestic Violence Strategy 2007 – 2012.

2. Definition of Domestic Abuse

In 2005 the Government agreed a 'core' definition of domestic abuse as follows:

“Any incidents 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.”

3. Statement of Intent

Rossendale Borough Council is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for the entire community to live, visit and work in and has adopted a policy of zero tolerance in relation to domestic abuse. The Council will raise awareness of domestic abuse and develop a culture where domestic abuse is recognised as unacceptable.

4. Aims of the Policy:

- To demonstrate the Council's commitment to and support for anyone experiencing domestic abuse, whether they approach the Council as a service user or employee;
- To increase awareness of domestic abuse, what forms it can take and its likely effects on Rossendale's community;
- To contribute to the health and well-being of all sections of the community in order that everyone can enjoy fulfilling lives in and around Rossendale;
- To provide advice about appropriate action to take should anyone be experiencing domestic abuse, whether they approach the Council as a service user or employee;

To be clear and consistent in that advice;

- i) to publicise support for anyone experiencing domestic abuse;
- ii) to ensure that Council employees understand the important role they can play in tackling domestic abuse;
- iii) to set out what the Council may do if an employee is found to be a perpetrator of domestic abuse.

5. Confidentiality

An individual's right to confidentiality is of paramount importance to the Council. Maintaining confidentiality is crucial to the safety of a person experiencing domestic abuse. Information will only be shared with other agencies when consent from the service user has been obtained unless required by law, or it is necessary for the protection of children. As far as reasonably practicable confidentiality would be maintained for employees experiencing and receiving support for domestic abuse.

6. Children and Young People

The Council recognises the need to consider whether children and young people who are living in a domestic abuse environment, are at risk of harm and may need protection and/or support.

The possibility of child abuse must be explored in incidents of domestic abuse (although domestic abuse and child abuse do not always exist together).

Factors, which should be considered, are:

- i) risk of physical injury
- ii) risk of emotional abuse
- iii) risk of neglect
- iv) risk of sexual abuse

In line with the Council's Child Protection Policy, any cases of suspected child abuse should be reported to the Child Protection Officer (Head of People and Policy) who will liaise with Lancashire County Council, Children's Integrated Services.

7. Service Users experiencing domestic abuse

The Council recognises that men, women and children experiencing domestic abuse will often access its services when in a crisis situation. It is therefore imperative that the services we offer are well co-ordinated and that the members of staff who deal with these situations are well informed and trained to respond appropriately.

We also recognise that the Council is not always the most appropriate source of support and that our role includes awareness of, and signposting individuals and families to, other relevant local agencies. The Council is an active partner in the Rossendale Domestic Abuse Partnership (RDAP). In the event of a family in crisis contacting the Council, the Council would in most cases sign post to the STAR Centre (Services Targeted Around Abuse in Rossendale) to which the Council contributes financial support.

In general when an approach for assistance is made to the Council, we will:

- respond appropriately taking into account individual needs and circumstances, cultural diversity, disability, etc.
- provide appropriate private interview arrangements.
- provide a member of staff of the same sex, if appropriate or requested
- provide an interpreter if necessary or requested
- listen to the service user in a safe, confidential environment, giving them time to explain their situation

We will not:

- expect individuals to prove their experience of domestic abuse
- contact the alleged perpetrator nor insist that legal action be taken against the alleged perpetrator
- pass on messages from perpetrator to victim or vice versa
- act as a go-between

In order to achieve the above aims we will ensure that our contractors and staff likely to come into contact with service users experiencing domestic abuse are offered the appropriate training and support.

8. Employees experiencing domestic abuse

Clear and effective responses are important to help minimise the impact of domestic abuse on council employees.

The Council believes that all employees have the right to raise the issue of domestic abuse with their employer in the knowledge that the issue will be treated with sympathy and confidentiality and that an effective support system will be available to them.

Employees experiencing domestic abuse will be expected to take a responsible attitude towards ensuring their own health and safety and that of their colleagues when the abuse impacts upon the workplace.

9. Manager's Role

A manager may become aware or suspect that an employee is experiencing domestic abuse although the employee might not feel able to raise the issue with anyone.

Managers should be alert to signals such as frequent absence from work, poor performance or a partner frequently making contact.

In these cases offering appropriate support may mean that the employee is able to deal with her situation more effectively. The issues surrounding domestic abuse can be complex and sensitive. Advice should be sought from the People & Policy Team.

Managers must have a sensitive approach and ensure that employees are offered support if the issue of domestic abuse has been disclosed to them. Managers are advised:

- To ensure privacy and confidentiality as far as possible;
- To ensure a non-judgemental approach, taking the employee seriously and above all, listening and believing what they tell you;
- That an employee may wish to involve a third party i.e. a friend, rather than their line manager;
- That additional issues such as age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race and disability may also face the employee and managers should be aware of this;
- To support the employee in whatever they decide to do by exploring the support and options available to them.
- Managers must maintain a secure environment for all employees. In cases of domestic abuse the Council's risk assessment procedure should be followed. To ensure a secure environment it may be necessary to consider, with the employee concerned, the possibility of informing colleagues of any potential risk.
- Colleagues should always be reminded of the confidentiality of the issue and information should only be disclosed with the express permission of the employee concerned.

Additional courses of action could include:

- a) improving security e.g. changing codes on keypads;
- b) reminding reception and switchboard staff in particular, but all employees in general, that personal details of employees are not to be divulged;
- c) considering offering a temporary or permanent alternative workplace;
- d) changing work times and patterns, along with office layout to ensure the employee is not visible through the windows or front reception points;
- e) offering changes in specific duties e.g. removal from reception duties, or redeployment to another post if changes cannot be easily made;
- f) providing those responsible for security with a photograph and other relevant information about the abuser;
- g) agreeing what to tell colleagues and advising them what response they should give if the abuser telephones or calls at the work place;
- h) reviewing systems for recording whereabouts of employees during the working day and minimising the risks to lone workers or outside visits/meetings;
- i) recording all incidents of violence or threatening behaviour via the Council's Incident Reporting Procedure. Incidents can include persistent phone calls, emails or visits by the alleged perpetrator. Details of witnesses to

- incidents should also be recorded. If legal proceedings follow, the records could be used as evidence.
- j) considering offering paid or unpaid leave for employees experiencing domestic abuse in accordance with the Council's Special Leave Policy;
 - k) changing payment arrangements;
 - l) providing advice on useful contacts; referral, with employee's consent, to appropriate counselling services.

Attendance at court will be necessary if criminal charges are brought. Leave will be granted in accordance with the Council's Special Leave Policy. The Manager should follow normal Council procedures for recording any absences or Special Leave.

Employees experiencing domestic abuse will be asked whether they agree to their report being recorded for monitoring purposes. All reports will remain anonymous.

Managers will reassure employees of confidentiality as far as is practicable. However, employees should also be made aware that there could be circumstances e.g child protection issues, that warrant sharing the information. In cases such as this, the employee should be informed that Lancashire County Council or the Police will be made aware of the situation.

10. The Council's Approach to Employees who are alleged or Actual Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse

Employees should be aware that domestic abuse is a serious matter that can lead to criminal convictions.

11. Conduct At Work

Perpetrators of domestic abuse might use workplace resources such as telephone, fax or email to threaten, harass or abuse their current or former partners, and may involve other colleagues who may or may not be aware of their motives in assisting them.

Such abuse requires an effective employer response because it could be damaging and potentially dangerous for those being abused, as well as possibly bringing the Council into disrepute if the abuse is allowed to continue.

Similarly, proven harassment and intimidation of Council employees by their partner or ex-partner who also works for the Council will be viewed seriously and may lead to disciplinary action being taken. This can be deemed as Gross Misconduct and lead to dismissal.

12. Conduct outside of work

Conduct outside of work (whether or not it leads to police action/a criminal conviction) can also lead to disciplinary action against an employee because of its employment implications and because it undermines the confidence the Council (as an employer) has in the employee. This can be deemed as Gross Misconduct and lead to dismissal.

Taking Action

Prior to commencement of any disciplinary action please seek advice from the People and Policy Team.

13. Information, support and training for employees

The Council recognises that all employees need to be made aware of domestic abuse issues and the impact on their work place. To support the implementation of this policy the People and Policy Team Development will:

- iv) Publicise the Policy through the Team Brief;
- v) Place the full Domestic Abuse Policy on the Council's Intranet.
- vi) Arrange for relevant employees to receive specific training to ensure they have the necessary skills to support someone experiencing domestic abuse;
- vii) Assist employees experiencing domestic abuse and those supporting them e.g. managers/colleagues to be signposted to appropriate counselling services where necessary. This may include a referral, with the employee's consent, via the Council's Occupational Health Unit. In certain circumstances perpetrators of domestic abuse will also be offered access to counselling or another appropriate service.

14. Useful contacts

The STAR (Services Targeted Around Abuse in Rossendale) Centre

East Lancashire Women's Refuge: Tel 07866 510728 www.elwra.org.uk
Refuge Office: 01282414130
PO Box 9
Burnley
Lancashire

Trish Ellins, Community Safety Officer: Tel 01706 252542

Rossendale Borough Council

Liz Murphy, Head of People and Policy
Development: Tel 01706 252452
Rossendale Borough Council

15. Related Policies

Health and Well Being