

Medway Council

Domestic Abuse Policy

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Domestic abuse is defined by the Home Office as “any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of sex or sexuality. This can encompass but is not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse.”
- 1.2 Domestic abuse is totally unacceptable and every employee who identifies that they are experiencing domestic abuse or a manager who is supporting an employee experiencing domestic abuse during employment at Medway Council, will be appropriately supported. This policy sets out expectations of support without fear of stigma or victimisation.
- 1.3 The Council will take seriously cases where its employees are perpetrators of domestic abuse regardless of whether the victim works at Medway Council. The Council will investigate such cases as misconduct or gross misconduct in accordance with its Disciplinary Procedure. The Council will encourage and support those causing harm to make positive behavioural changes. For further guidance specific to perpetrators who work at the Council go to Section 12.
- 1.4 The Council has developed this policy to support employees' health, wellbeing and safety while in employment and underlines our duty of care to staff. It covers the internal and external support available to employees experiencing domestic abuse, including Care First, sickness and special leave provisions, and signposting to external sources of advice and support.
- 1.5 Domestic abuse impacts every aspect of a victim's life, including their time at work. We aim to foster an environment of support, which enables a victim to work to the best of their capacity. Time may be needed away from work to receive support from specialist support services, liaising with police, receiving medical support or accessing safe accommodation, which may reduce capacity at work.
- 1.6 Individuals may need to leave employment due to safety reasons, such as relocation away from a perpetrator. The Council understands and supports employees to put their safety first. A discussion should take place between employee and line manager if an employee needs to leave employment due to domestic abuse.
- 1.7 The facts:
 - The police receive a domestic abuse-related call every 30 seconds.
 - The Crime Survey for England and Wales estimated that 1.6 million women and 712,000 men aged 16 years and over experienced domestic abuse in year ending March 2024. This equates to approximately 7 in 100 women and 3 in 100 men.
 - Eight women a month are killed by a current or former partner in England and Wales.¹

¹ MARAC quarterly data set 2023 <https://safelives.org.uk/research-policy/practitioner-datasets/marac-data/>

- Between March 2021 and March 2023 in England and Wales a total of 353 people were killed, their deaths were directly linked to domestic abuse. 231 of these victims were female and 122 were male.
- Between March 2021 and March 2023 in Kent a total of 6 people were killed, 5 were female and 1 were male.
- 1 in 2 transgender people, 1 in 4 lesbians, 1 in 3 bisexual people and 1 in 4 gay men experience domestic abuse in their lifetime on average.²
- In 2018, research showed that 11% of LGBT+ people had faced domestic abuse from a partner in the previous year. This increased to 17% of black, Asian and minority ethnic LGBT+ people.
- 1 in 5 children have lived with an adult perpetrating domestic abuse.³
- It is estimated that less than 24% of domestic abuse crime is reported to the police.

2.0 Scope

2.1 This policy applies to all employees of the Council, elected officials, contractors, service users, and anyone engaged with Medway Council with the exception of schools-based staff. This is because schools do not have to adopt the Council's policies.

3.0 Equality Statement

3.1 The Council is committed to ensuring that no service user, employee, job applicant, those with care experience, partner, contractor, supplier or member of the public will be unlawfully discriminated, harassed or victimised on the grounds of race; ethnicity; nationality; ethnic or national origin; colour; disability; gender reassignment or presentation; marital or civil partnership status; maternity or pregnancy; family and caring responsibilities; sex; sexual orientation; age; HIV status; religion or belief; political beliefs; social class; trade union activity; carer or cared-for status; or irrelevant spent convictions.

4.0 Core Values and Council Objectives

4.1 This policy supports the Council's Our Values and Behaviours. The Council believes that a consistent approach to employee management and wellbeing is fundamental to the delivery of quality services and one of the aims of the policy is to support this belief.

4.2 All employees are expected to conduct themselves according to the Council's Our Values and Behaviours to support employees who are or have experienced domestic abuse and to hold those who use abusive behaviours to account and encourage positive change.

² Reducing the Risk <https://reducingtherisk.org.uk/lgbtq/>

³ Refuge statistics <https://refuge.org.uk/what-is-domestic-abuse/the-facts/#:~:text=Fact:%2020%25%20of%20children%20in,%C2%A323%20billion%20a%20year>

facts/#:~:text=Fact:%2020%25%20of%20children%20in,%C2%A323%20billion%20a%20year

5.0 Policy Statement

5.1 The purpose of this policy is to:

- Support employees experiencing domestic abuse;
- Aid managers seeking to support team members experiencing domestic abuse;
- Assist colleagues of those experiencing domestic abuse; and
- Reinforce organisational corporate social responsibility objectives by demonstrating that the employer values, and will support, staff during difficult periods.

6.0 Definition

6.1 Home Office Definition of Domestic Abuse and Victims – 2021

6.1.1 Behaviour of a person (A) towards another person (B) is domestic abuse if –

- a) A and B are both aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and
- b) the behaviour is abusive.

6.1.2 Behaviour is abusive if it consists of any of the following –

- a) physical or sexual abuse;
- b) violent or threatening behaviour;
- c) controlling or coercive behaviour, see section 6.2.3 for definition;
- d) economic abuse, see section 6.2.4 for definition;
- e) psychological, emotional or other abuse.

6.1.3 Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is a continuing act or a pattern of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten their victim.

6.1.4 Economic abuse means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B's ability to –

- a) acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or
- b) obtain goods or services.

6.1.5 Two people are personally connected to each other if any of the following applies –

- a) they are, or have been, married to each other;
- b) they are, or have been, civil partners of each other;
- c) they have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);
- d) they have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);
- e) they are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other;
- f) they each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child (see 6.2.6);

g) They are relatives.

6.2 Children

6.2.1 For the purposes of subsection 6.2.5f a person has a parental relationship in relation to a child if—

- a) the person is a parent of the child, or
- b) the person has parental responsibility for the child.

6.2.2 In this section—

- “child” means a person under the age of 18 years;
- “civil partnership agreement” has the meaning given by section 73 of the Civil Partnership Act 2004;
- “parental responsibility” has the same meaning as in the Children Act 1989 (see section 3 of that Act);
- “relative” has the meaning given by section 63(1) of the Family Law Act 1996

6.2.3 Children are victims of domestic abuse where the behaviour of person A towards person B is domestic abuse and the child/children:

- a) sees or hears, or experiences the effect of the abuse, and
- b) is related to A or B.

6.2.4 A child is related to a person if-

- a) the person is a parent of, or has parental responsibility for, the child, or
- b) the child and the person are relatives.

7.0 Signs of Domestic Abuse

7.1 It is important to be aware of the signs so that you may approach the subject with the person sensitively if you have concerns either as a colleague or as a line manager.

7.2 It can be hard to identify if someone is experiencing domestic abuse, however, there are often several signs. If you witness several warning signs in a colleague, you can reasonably suspect domestic abuse. These may include:

- Frequent injuries, with the excuse of ‘accidents’
- Frequent and sudden absences from work
- Frequent, harassing phone calls from a family member or family members
- Fear of the family member(s), references to the family member(s)’ anger
- Personality changes (e.g. an outgoing person becomes withdrawn)
- Excessive fear of conflict
- Reluctance to finish work, starting work earlier
- Not wanting to go home or leave the building
- Passive behaviour, lack of assertiveness
- Isolation from friends and family
- Insufficient resources to live (money, credit cards, car)
- Depression, crying, low self-esteem, lack of confidence
- Hypervigilance of surroundings

7.3 Domestic abuse occurs in all sections of society irrespective of background or protected characteristics. Domestic abuse is a crime affecting more women than men; however, men can also experience abuse, and abuse can occur between family members and in same-sex relationships.

8.0 Internal Support

8.1 We are committed to protecting the safety and wellbeing of all employees. We aim to ensure that any employee who experiences domestic abuse receives appropriate support and assistance.

8.2 Medway Council employees will receive appropriate training on domestic abuse, covering risk assessments and signposting information to professional support for victims. Additionally, trained internal Domestic Abuse Champions are available for victims who are seeking support – see Appendix 2.

8.3 The Council will:

- Raise workplace awareness of domestic abuse issues and promote domestic abuse support services through campaigns and internal communications such as MEDSPACE.
- Provide independent counselling for employees and managers who are supporting employees experiencing domestic abuse via Care First. The availability will be publicised regularly through noticeboards, the intranet and ongoing health and wellbeing initiatives.
- Offer access to counselling and other support as appropriate to employees perpetrating domestic abuse who seek help from the Council.
- Encourage and support people who use harmful behaviour to access behaviour change programmes.
- Provide training for managers to understand domestic abuse and how to support staff, especially around honour-based violence.
- Support employees experiencing domestic abuse to assess safety when working and implement adaptations to reduce risk to the employee. These adaptations could include adjustments to work time, changing where the employee works from, frequent check-ins with their line manager or accessing a different entrance to the building.

8.4 Some employees may find it difficult to raise these types of issues with their immediate line manager. If this is the case, the employee can raise the issues with any other manager, HR Services or their trade union representative. Employees can also contact a Domestic Abuse Champion (Appendix 2).

9.0 External Support

9.1 Details of organisations providing external support are attached at Appendix 1.

10.0 Line Manager's Responsibilities

- 10.1 Line managers have a crucial role to play in enabling employees experiencing domestic abuse to seek help. Care First, the Council's external Counselling Service provides management support to any manager requiring advice and assistance in handling sensitive issues including domestic abuse (Telephone **0800 174319**). HR Services can also provide advice and guidance.
- 10.2 A checklist of issues to discuss is attached as Appendix 4. This provides a framework for discussion, ensures consistency in advice and support offered and can be reviewed as situations develop and change. It can also give the employee the confidence that they are being treated seriously and sincerely.
- 10.3 Line managers should:
- Foster an open management culture that enables team members to disclose sensitive issues.
 - Be sympathetic and non-judgemental.
 - Provide support in the first instance, including specific advice on the options available using the Domestic Abuse Discussion Checklist (Appendix 4). However, managers must recognise the limitations of their role since they are not professional counsellors or experts.
 - Protect confidentiality in all instances except where doing so would leave children at risk of harm or place a vulnerable adult at risk of harm or danger.
 - Ensure that the safety of all employees in the team is protected.
 - Meet the needs of the employee through flexible working and time away from work to maintain a productive work environment that does not place further stressors on the employee.
- 10.4 If the line manager or anyone else supporting the employee suspects any children or vulnerable adults may also be at risk of abuse, they must request a consultation with the Duty Manager of the relevant Area Team. For families living in the Medway Council area, the contact number is 01634 334466 from where they will be redirected to the Duty Manager. For families living outside of the Medway Council area, they must contact the relevant local authority for advice.

11.0 Attendance

- 11.1 The Council recognises that those experiencing domestic abuse may need to be absent from work at times and will assist them by using its special leave or short notice leave provisions.
- 11.2 Individual absences can be discussed and agreed between the employee and the line manager, with HR support where appropriate.
- 11.3 Flexible working, change of workplace and changes to hours of work will be considered wherever possible.

12.0 Security and Safety

- 12.1 As far as possible, the Council will protect the safety and security of all employees at work, including those affected by domestic abuse and their colleagues.
- 12.2 The Council considers safeguarding to be of the highest priority. Should any child or adult be suspected to be at risk of harm, employees are required to report this immediately. If a child is at risk the Local Authority Designated Officer must be notified via the process at section 10.4 above. For further advice and to make a referral in Medway please contact: 01634 334466. See also Appendix 3.

13.0 Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse

- 13.1 The Council will treat any criminal convictions related to domestic abuse as misconduct or gross misconduct and employees will therefore be subject to the Council's disciplinary procedure, which could result in the termination of their employment with the Council.
- 13.2 In the event that an employee is imprisoned because of a conviction related to domestic abuse, depending on the circumstances, the Council will consider treating such absence as a breach of the employment contract which is likely to result in the termination of the employee's employment with the Council.
- 13.3 Perpetrators of abuse may come to recognise their behaviour is harmful and wish to seek help. In such cases, the Council will signpost them to organisations that can offer this support. Information given will be treated in confidence unless it affects children or vulnerable adults and will be dealt with as referred to in paragraph 12.2.
- 13.4 Where the individual experiencing domestic abuse and the perpetrator both work at the Council, our priority is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the employee who is experiencing domestic abuse. We will take steps to ensure that the person causing harm does not have access to the victim at work, physically or through shared work activities.
- If allegations are made against an employee, both parties will be interviewed to understand the situation and agree what safeguarding measures are needed to be put in place.
 - Where the perpetrator can use their workplace resources to cause harm, changing their duties, responsibilities and access to internal systems should be considered.
 - Where both parties would like to receive support jointly, where appropriate, support to access this should be given.
- 13.5 If an employee is found to be assisting a person causing harm in perpetrating domestic abuse or making a malicious allegation that another employee is perpetrating domestic abuse, they will be subject to a disciplinary investigation and, where appropriate, disciplinary action in line with the Disciplinary Procedure.

14.0 Data Protection and Privacy

14.1 Medway Council will manage records efficiently and systematically, consistent with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA18) and the Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on Records Management, supporting the business objectives of the Council and meeting legislative, regulatory, funding and ethical requirements.

15.0 Legal Framework

15.1 As an employer, under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 we have a duty of care to protect the physical and mental health, and wellbeing of our employees in the workplace. Additionally, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 furthers our responsibility to provide support to employees who are experiencing domestic abuse. The Council will support employees experiencing domestic abuse even when it is not directly linked to the workplace.

15.2 [Domestic Abuse statutory guidance](#)

Version history

Published Domestic Abuse Workplace Policy v2 May 2026 (replacing v1 November 2018)

Appendix 1: Organisations Providing Support

Appendix 2: Internal Support Contacts

Appendix 3: Safeguarding Children and Adults

Appendix 4: Domestic Abuse Discussion Checklist