

Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet 2nd April 2024

Employee and Councillor Domestic Abuse Policy

Accountable member:

Councillor Flo Clucas, Cabinet Member Communities and Safety

Accountable officer:

Tracy Brown, Safeguarding and Partnerships Manager

Ward(s) affected:

All

Key Decision: Yes

Executive summary:

The Council does not have a specific policy that covers employees and elected members who are affected by domestic abuse.

An employee domestic abuse policy has therefore been developed to ensure that the Council is following current best practice in this area. This will help the Council provide support for its employees and elected members and ensure a safe working environment for all.

Recommendations: That Cabinet:

- adopts the Employee and Councillor Domestic Abuse policy.**
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1. Implications

1.1 Financial, Property and Asset implications

The recommendations have no direct finance, property or asset implications. Training mentioned in point 3.5 will be provided free of charge by Gloucestershire Safeguarding Adults board.

Signed off by: Ela Jankowska – Finance Business Partner



1.2 Legal implications

There are a number of legislative requirements in the Council both as a local authority and employer to meet various safeguarding obligations. This policy and its implementation will assist the Council in approaching its safeguarding obligations towards its employee in relation to domestic violence.

Signed off by: One Legal – legalservices@onelegal.org.uk

1.3 Environmental and climate change implications

None arising directly as a result of this report.

Signed off by: Louise Forey, Programme and Engagement Officer, Climate team
Louise.forey@cheltenham.gov.uk

1.4 Corporate Plan Priorities

This report contributes to the following Corporate Plan Priorities:

- Being a more modern, efficient, and financially sustainable council

1.5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

The Council's Employee and Councillor Domestic Abuse Policy and training associated with it follows local good practice guidance. This training and guidance addresses issues including race, culture, disability, sexuality, gender, and age ensuring the Council applies the policy without prejudice or discrimination. By its nature the policy supports the Council in its public sector equalities duty by ensuring the Council addresses an issue that has a bigger impact on some groups in society than others and creates a safe working environment for all.

2 Background

2.1 Domestic abuse is an issue that is prevalent throughout our society with an estimated one in four women and one in six men victims of it in their lifetimes. It impacts both the physical and emotional safety of adults and children. According to the Charity Refuge on average two women a week are killed at the hands of an existing or previous partner as well as an estimated three women a week committing suicide due to domestic abuse.

2.2 In addition to the devastating human impact, it also has a significant economic impact with an estimated £1.3 billion being spent on dealing with it. It is acknowledged that workplaces have a significant role to play in tackling domestic abuse as they offer a place where people are outside of the home environment and have the opportunity to gain support and advice. And as with other risks to employee safety, employers have statutory duties to mitigate risks posed by domestic abuse and put controls in place so that employees can carry out their role safely.

2.3 Although domestic abuse is addressed in the Council's Safeguarding policy, this covers situations in which employees or elected members might receive disclosures or witness concerns within the community. The Council does not currently have a policy that specifically covers the issue of when employees or elected members are affected by domestic abuse as either victims or perpetrators.

2.4 It was therefore agreed when the Council's revised Safeguarding policy was adopted that a separate domestic abuse policy which supported employees and elected members to promote a workplace safe from domestic abuse was developed.

3 Policy Content

3.1 The policy sets out the definitions of domestic abuse and the principles within which the Council will operate. It goes on to detail how the Council will mitigate the impact of domestic abuse in the following key ways.

3.2 The policy sets out possible signs of domestic abuse and how to respond. It stresses that confidentiality is vital to ensure everyone's safety. It is also noted that apart from in a very small number of specific circumstances consent must be obtained from the victim to share information.

3.3 Support for staff or elected members who are victims is outlined including emotional support, referral to external agencies and reasonable adjustments. The importance and process of safety planning is detailed to ensure the victim and their colleagues are kept safe.

3.4 As well as victims of abuse it is likely that some employees will be perpetrators. The policy outlines the action the council will take in this situation as well as the support an employee could receive to hopefully stop their abusive behaviour such as referral to external agencies.

3.5 The policy requires specific domestic abuse training to be available to employees and elected members. Once the policy has been approved, a pathway of training for employees will be launched that includes the Council's requirement around both safeguarding and domestic abuse so that they complement each other. The training pathway will have different levels and types of training depending on the needs of the employee's and members' job role and position.

3.6 Due to the inter-related nature of domestic abuse and safeguarding, it is proposed that the senior officers, elected member advocates, designated officer and HR leads, who are nominated to support the safeguarding policy also support the domestic abuse policy. This is reflected in the responsibilities section which mirrors the responsibilities in the Council's Safeguarding policy. This will allow a joined-up approach to the issues to be taken and increase the knowledge and capacity of key employees within the organisation.

4 Reasons for recommendations

4.1 It is recommended that the policy is adopted at this time to ensure that the Council has a comprehensive response to domestic abuse and fulfils its statutory duties. It will also support the Council to create as safe a working environment for its employees and elected members as possible.

5 Alternative options considered

5.1 It was considered if it would be possible to incorporate the guidance and protocols within the Employee and Councillor Domestic Abuse Policy into the Council's Safeguarding policy. It was decided to keep them separate so to make the guidance and protocols in the policies easier to enact.

6 Consultation and feedback

6.1 Consultation on the policy has taken place with the Council's human resources team, other Gloucestershire district councils and the Leadership team and their feedback has been incorporated.

7 Key risks

7.1 Creating a safe working environment for employees is a statutory duty of Cheltenham Borough Council failure to have an employee and councillors domestic abuse policy could mean that the Council was not fulfilling its statutory duties. If the policy is not fully implemented across the Council it could also put employees and elected members at greater risk of harm.

Report author:

Tracy Brown Safeguarding and Partnerships Manager

Appendices:

- i. Risk Assessment
- ii. Employee and Councillor Domestic Abuse Policy

Background information:

N/A

Appendix 1: Risk Assessment

Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5)	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	Control / Action owner	Deadline for controls/ actions
	If the Council fails to engage fully with the domestic abuse agenda the council may not meet its statutory duties.	Tracey Birkinshaw	4	2	8	Reduce	Adoption and roll out of employee domestic abuse policy to complement existing provision in the safeguarding policy	Tracy Brown	April 2024
	If service areas fail to engage with the domestic abuse agenda fully there may be a failure to safeguard an employee or elected member while at work	Tracey Birkinshaw	4	2	8	Reduce	Roll out of training to all employees and elected members, deputy designated officers identified and trained. Communications plan	Tracy Brown	September 2024