

Cheltenham Borough Council

Domestic Abuse Policy 2025-2028

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Responsible officer

- Tracy Brown
- Amanda Wray

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Consultees

Internal

- Human Resources
- Housing Services Neighbourhood and Communities Team
- Housing Services Property and Communities Team
- Informal Cabinet/Leadership Team

External

- Domestic Abuse (Housing) Programme Manager
- GSCP and GSAB District Safeguarding Network
- GDASS (training)
- GSAB (training)

Distribution

Text

Domestic Abuse and Stalking Support Services in Gloucestershire

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Introduction

Cheltenham Borough Council is committed to fostering safe, inclusive, and supportive communities for all residents. Recognising the impact domestic abuse can have on individuals and families, the Council has developed this policy to ensure a robust, compassionate, and confidential response to those affected.

Domestic abuse can take many forms including physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, financial, and coercive control and may be experienced by anyone, regardless of age, gender, sexuality, or background. The Council acknowledges that its employees and elected members play a critical role in identifying and supporting victims and in preventing further harm.

At the heart of this policy is a person-centred approach. We strive to treat every individual with dignity and respect, tailoring support to meet their unique needs and circumstances.

We stand firmly against all forms of abuse and recognise that the responsibility for domestic abuse lies with the perpetrators. We are dedicated to creating a Borough where everyone feels safe, supported, and empowered to seek help.

Aims and scope of the policy

The aim of the Domestic Abuse (DA) Policy is to ensure the safety of tenants, residents, staff and elected members who may be affected by domestic abuse.

The policy will ensure that:

- Our employees are confident to recognise and appropriately respond to domestic abuse by providing appropriate domestic abuse training for all employees and elected members
- We work together across council services and partner agencies to provide a co-ordinated community response to domestic abuse as it requires a multi-agency response to best support those affected
- We strive towards providing a trauma-informed response
- Empowering victims by building trust and working in collaboration to meet their needs
- We take a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse and will hold perpetrators of abuse to account while ensuring victim's safety
- We are honest and transparent with the guidance, help and options available to those affected by domestic abuse
- We will be aware of how a person's experience of domestic abuse may be impacted by their protected characteristics by reflecting the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy in the delivery of this DA policy

This policy is underpinned by key legislation that defines the responsibilities of district councils in responding to domestic abuse. The **Domestic Abuse Act 2021** establishes a statutory duty for local authorities to provide support for victims in safe accommodation. While county councils (tier one) lead on strategy and commissioning, district councils (tier two) are legally required to cooperate in assessing local need and delivering safe accommodation services. This includes working collaboratively through Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Boards and supporting the implementation of local strategies.

Under the **Housing Act 1996**, individuals who are homeless as a result of domestic abuse are automatically considered to be in priority need. District councils must ensure suitable interim accommodation is provided and follow statutory guidance on allocations, including recent regulations that prohibit local connection requirements for survivors. Additionally, the **Care Act 2014** places safeguarding duties on councils to protect adults with care and support needs who are at risk of abuse, requiring multi-agency cooperation and timely safeguarding enquiries. These obligations are reinforced by the **Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance (2022)**, which sets out best practice for housing, safeguarding, and partnership working.

Defining Domestic Abuse

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 defines abusive behaviour as any of the following:

Domestic abuse is any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading, or violent behaviour—including sexual violence—between people aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.

- Controlling Behaviour can be a range of acts designed to isolate a person and make them subordinate or dependent on the perpetrator.
- Coercive Control is a pattern of acts of assaults, threats, humiliation, and intimidation used to harm, punish, or frighten the victim.
- Physical Abuse is any act that results in a physical injury that was intended to be intentional or because of punishment.
- Emotional or Psychological Abuse is mistreatment of a person where the perpetrator intends to cause mental or emotional pain or injury.
- Sexual Abuse is any act of a sexual nature which is performed in a criminal manner.
- Financial/ Economic Abuse is any behaviour that has a substantial effect on using or maintaining another person's money or property.

.Domestic abuse is not limited to physical violence and can persist long after a relationship has ended. It is rooted in power and control and can have devastating effects on victims, children, and communities.

Children and Domestic Abuse

The Domestic Abuse Act of 2021 recognises children that have witnessed domestic abuse as victims of domestic abuse in their own right – they can suffer from both physical and emotional harm and are entitled to comprehensive consistent multi-agency approach to keeping them safe from harm.

Although domestic abuse is legally defined as between people 16 and over, it is recognised that abuse can take place in teenage intimate relationships. This should be reported through the safeguarding policy however with due regard to the risk associated with domestic abuse.

[Information on reporting a domestic abuse safeguarding concern can be found here \(link to be added once policy is uploaded to intranet\).](#)

Partnership Working

The Council recognises that tackling domestic abuse requires collective action. No single agency can address every need, which is why collaboration is key to delivering effective support for victims and perpetrators.

The Council delivers its partnership commitments through Safer Gloucestershire, the Cheltenham Community Safety Partnership, the Violence against Women and Girls group and associated subgroups.

Domestic Homicide Related Death Reviews

Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews (DARDRs) were introduced under Section 9 of the **Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004**. DARDRs (formerly known as Domestic Homicide Reviews) are statutory processes carried out when a person dies as a result of domestic abuse, whether through homicide or by suicide.

In Cheltenham reviews are led by Cheltenham Community Safety Partnership, which is facilitated by the Council.

Council officers taking part in a DARDRs have responsibilities to share relevant information, contribute to multi-agency learning, and implement any recommendations that arise from the review to improve safeguarding and service responses. The overarching aim is to identify lessons from each case, ensure accountability, and prevent future deaths through better coordination and policy changes.

Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Strategy 2025-2028

The Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Strategy 2025–2028 sets out a countywide vision to ensure that everyone can live free from abuse and harm. It builds on previous plans and aligns with statutory duties under the **Domestic Abuse Act 2021** and the **Victims and Prisoners Act 2024**. The strategy emphasises prevention, early intervention, and coordinated multi-agency responses and recognises domestic abuse as a gendered crime that disproportionately affects women and girls, while acknowledging its impact on all genders.

The approach includes raising awareness, improving access to safe accommodation and support services, and strengthening safeguarding for victims and their children. The strategy has four Strategic Priorities:

Prevention and Early Intervention – raising awareness, education, and community engagement to stop abuse before it starts.

Protection and Support for Victims – ensuring timely access to safe accommodation, advocacy, and trauma-informed services.

Tackling Perpetrators – focusing on accountability and behaviour change programs to reduce reoffending.

Partnership and System Leadership – strengthening multi-agency collaboration, data sharing, and governance to deliver a whole-system response.

The DA Council's policy aligns with the County strategy and a local delivery plan is being developed.

Roles and Responsibilities

All employees and elected members must ensure they are aware of the Council's domestic abuse and related safeguarding procedures particularly those employees and members who have a specific responsibility for safeguarding and domestic abuse. All employees and elected members will receive safeguarding and domestic abuse training and information at induction and as an on-going training requirement.

Designated Senior Leaders

Cheltenham Borough Council has two Senior Leaders (one officer and one cabinet member) responsible for safeguarding and domestic abuse. They have overall responsibility for ensuring that the Council fulfils its safeguarding and domestic abuse responsibilities:

Senior Officer Lead – Claire Hughes, Director of Governance, Housing and Communities

Cabinet Member Lead – Councillor Victoria Atherstone, Cabinet member for Safety and Communities

Designated Safeguarding and Domestic Abuse Officer

The role of the Designated Safeguarding and Domestic Abuse Officer is to support employees and elected members and provide guidance and advice to aid implementation of this policy and the related safeguarding policy including to make a referral or safety plan. They will also support the Safeguarding and Domestic Abuse Advocates and Leadership team to fulfil their roles. The Council has three officers with these responsibilities:

Designated Safeguarding and Domestic Abuse Officer (non-housing) – Tracy Brown, Safeguarding and Partnerships Manager

Designated Safeguarding and Domestic Abuse Officer (housing) – Amanda Wray
Safeguarding, Diversity and Equality Manager

Designated Safeguarding and Domestic Abuse Officer (HR) – Shona Corbett, HR
Manager

Safeguarding and Domestic Abuse Advocates

Elected member Safeguarding and Domestic Abuse Advocates are responsible for championing the importance of safeguarding, tackling domestic abuse and promoting the welfare of children, young people, vulnerable adults and victims of domestic abuse. They are nominated by full council and are normally cross-party.

Safeguarding and Domestic Abuse Advocates – Cllrs Jackie Chelin, Tabi Joy, Helen Pemberton and Victoria Atherstone.

Leadership Team

Cheltenham Borough Council's Leadership Team will ensure that:

1. The Council meets its legal obligations.
2. Where applicable, domestic abuse and its prevention are considered in strategies, plans and services.
3. National best practices in domestic abuse are embedded and maintained across all services to ensure continuous improvement and compliance with national and local policies.
4. Matters relating to domestic abuse are expedited in a timely manner and treated seriously.
5. Support employees and elected members on all aspects of domestic abuse and ensure procedures are adhered to.
6. Appropriate training is facilitated on an on-going basis, in particular for frontline employees.

Service Managers

Cheltenham Borough Council's service managers will ensure that:

1. The domestic abuse policy is adhered to across the organisation.
2. They and their employees complete and implement the appropriate domestic abuse training and that this is reinforced through team meetings and 121s etc.
3. Employees handling domestic abuse issues are fully supported.
4. They take responsibility for the quality of the response to domestic abuse in their service area.
5. Report any concerns as per the policy.

Human Resources

Human Resources will ensure that:

1. The relevant policies are in place.
2. Managers are supported in the use of these policies directly and indirectly associated with domestic abuse.
3. Provide employees involved in domestic abuse support as outlined in the policy including workplace safety planning.
4. Provide support with pre-employment checks as appropriate.
5. All employees are issued with domestic abuse information and training at induction and support on-going domestic abuse training for all employees.

6. When the domestic abuse policy is updated, ensure this is communicated to all employees.

Employees and Elected Members

Cheltenham Borough Council's employees and elected members will:

1. Treat all domestic abuse matters seriously.
2. Report any concerns as per the policy.
3. Be aware of and adhere to the domestic abuse policy and related policies.
4. Complete domestic abuse training relevant to their role..

Procedures and practices

Council's approach to victims of domestic abuse

Every disclosure of abuse should be treated on a case-by-case basis and our approach to a disclosure must be victim-led. If a member of staff or elected member receives a disclosure of abuse they should follow the below principles:

Disclosure

It is understandably difficult for a victim to disclose domestic abuse. When you receive a disclosure of domestic abuse from a victim, always try to:

- Be sensitive and non-judgmental
- Find a private space and allow time
- Discuss safety
- Signpost to specialist support services

However, it is important that you:

- Do not seek proof of the abuse
- Do not contact the abuser
- Do not adopt the role of support worker yourself
- Do not compel the person to accept specialist support

Safety

It is vital to consider the safety of the person who has disclosed domestic abuse information. Staff and elected members should take any actions necessary to ensure the person's immediate safety if at immediate risk. GDASS (Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Service) is the local support service for domestic abuse and can offer guidance on safety planning in the longer term.

Staff and elected members should always consider their own safety as well as that of other people associated with the Council or the public. Any concerns about safety can be raised with the designated safeguarding officer or the HR safeguarding lead.

Risk

Domestic abuse results in the death of around two women per week and 30 men per year. It is therefore vital in case of domestic abuse to establish the risk posed so that necessary action can be taken.

Staff and elected members should complete a [DASH form](#) to help them clarify the risk. This should wherever possible be completed with the person making the disclosure. This can help support safety planning and determine what the next steps are. As depending on the risk, it may be necessary to involve other agencies.

Support with the DASH form can be given by the designated safeguarding officers or via the GDASS helpline.

Consent and Confidentiality

All disclosures of domestic abuse will be handled with the utmost discretion, and information will only be shared with relevant professionals when necessary to protect individuals from harm or to comply with safeguarding obligations.

Any disclosure must be treated with strict confidentiality and only shared with consent of the individual. The only exceptions to this are:

- In the case of high-risk domestic abuse
- If there is a risk to children
- If there is a risk to a vulnerable adult
- If a crime has been committed

If employees or elected members are uncertain about whether a disclosure can be shared without consent, they should discuss their concerns with either the Council's designated officers or seek specialist advice from One Legal.

Safeguarding referral

If the disclosure involves a child, young person or vulnerable adult where there is also a safeguarding concern, it is important for employees and elected members to follow the appropriate procedures in the safeguarding policy to report a safeguarding concern.

[Link to procedure from Safeguarding policy to be added when uploaded to the intranet](#)

Support for Cheltenham Borough Council tenants

The Council will treat all reports of domestic abuse from tenants within the Council's housing stock as a high priority. Trained employees will follow the correct protocols and refer to the appropriate agencies who can provide specialist advice and support.

The Council's Housing Services

The Council's Housing Services team will aim to ensure:

1. Tenants are able to report domestic abuse in various ways that best suit their needs. This could be via telephone, email or in person and where possible ensure a member of staff on request of the same gender. This could be via the Council's domestic abuse inbox, safeguarding inbox or customer services inbox. If tenants contact customer services, the concerns will be dealt with confidentiality and passed onto the relevant domestic abuse lead.
2. Safety is prioritised when communicating with tenants. This could include the type of communication channel used, the safety of a physical location, safe dates/times of communication, agreed 'safe words' to use in communications, and any other reasonable adjustment tailored to specific need and circumstances.
3. Confidential advice is provided or signposted to specialist services such as Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Service (GDASS), ensuring timely and appropriate referrals. In discussion with the tenant, Housing Services employees may also complete referrals where appropriate for on-going support, this could include referrals for mental health or substance misuse to ensure wraparound support is offered.

Once a tenant has disclosed domestic abuse the Council will, agree the frequency and safety of communications with the tenant to remain in regular contact. Alternative contact arrangements will be provided in case of absences, for reassurance of continued support.

Relevant advice and help, including information about victims' rights and options to remain in their home where it is safe, and their wish to do so. This could include discussions and signposting regarding protection orders (such as Non-Molestation Orders or occupation orders), including additional security measures in the home if appropriate and suitable, as well as on-going support from specialist organisations.

Housing options will be offered in high-risk cases where victims are in immediate fear of their households' safety. This could include a homeless application, temporary accommodation, refuge, or a managed move if there is no prospect of a safe return. The Council supports the county wide Places of Safety scheme. The scheme enables tenants experiencing domestic violence to move to a different area in the county with expert support in place.

If a tenant is in temporary accommodation the Council will provide information and reassurance on any safety measures, of that accommodation.

The Council will action a multi-agency risk assessment (MARAC) and provide intelligence to inform the overall assessment of risk and work with partners to develop action plans to manage those risks, to ensure tenant and wider community safety. On-going management of MARAC related cases is carried out by the Council's Tenancy Services Team.

Homelessness

The Cheltenham Borough Council Housing and Homelessness Strategy (2023–2028) addresses domestic abuse as a key factor contributing to homelessness and housing vulnerability. It recognises that victims of domestic abuse often face urgent housing needs and prioritises early intervention to prevent homelessness in these cases. The strategy commits to working closely with partners, including safeguarding teams and specialist domestic abuse services, to ensure that survivors have access to safe and secure accommodation and tailored support. This includes emergency housing options and pathways into longer-term solutions that promote stability and recovery.

The strategy aligns with the **Homelessness Reduction Act** duties, ensuring that anyone threatened with homelessness due to domestic abuse receives structured advice and assistance. The Council aims to make rough sleeping rare and non-recurring, with specific measures for vulnerable groups such as those fleeing abuse. By embedding domestic abuse considerations into its housing policies, Cheltenham seeks to create safer communities and reduce the risk of repeat homelessness among survivors.

Council staff who are victims or perpetrators of domestic abuse

Where any matter covered by this policy relates to an employee of the Council, the issue will be managed in accordance with the Council's internal HR policies, procedures, and LGA guidance.

[link to intranet Domestic Abuse Guidance For Employees and Managers \(to be added once uploaded\)](#)

The Council's approach to perpetrators

The Council will support police action where appropriate and share information regarding perpetrators to prevent domestic abuse reoccurring and to prevent wider community harm.

Tenants who are perpetrators of domestic abuse

When taking any action against a perpetrator, the Council will prioritise the safety and wishes of victims and ensure housing needs are fully considered. The Council will hold perpetrators to account for their behaviour, this may include the right to take enforcement action against tenants, using the powers available under the Housing Act, up to and including recovering possession of a property, and may remove perpetrators from both joint and sole tenancies. Link to policy to be added once uploaded.

Where it is safe and appropriate to do so without increasing risk to the victim. The Council will consider referring perpetrators to specialist support for positive engagement as long-term domestic abuse prevention requires behavioural change from those who cause harm. This can be discussed and actioned for perpetrators who recognise their behaviour and would like support.

Stalking and harassment

Stalking or harassment happen when someone repeatedly behaves in a way that makes a person feel scared, threatened or distressed. Stalking is a form of harassment where the stalker carries out behaviours which are fixated, obsessive, unwanted and repeated. The types of behaviours which may make up stalking can include:

- Following someone
- Contacting someone or trying to contact someone in any way
- Publishing material about someone or pretending to be someone online or elsewhere
- Monitoring someone's internet use, emails or other electronic communications
- Loitering near places someone goes (whether public or private spaces)
- Interfering with someone's property
- Watching or spying on someone

Stalking or harassment can happen online such as through social media, email, chat rooms and other online platforms. This is called "cyberstalking".

If an employee or elected member receives a disclosure of stalking and/or harassment they should seek advice from specialist local services or contact the appropriate designated domestic abuse officer for support.

Domestic Abuse Training

All Council employees and elected members will receive domestic abuse awareness training at point of induction and on-going. This training will be updated every 3 years to ensure best practise is followed.

Where relevant to their role employees and elected members will also receive specialist domestic abuse training. This will include DARE (domestic abuse routine enquiry) to support officers to work with perpetrators of domestic abuse, domestic abuse and risk training, and enhanced domestic abuse training level 2 via GDASS.

Training needs of Council employees and elected members will be reviewed regularly by service managers to ensure staff are able to confidently support disclosure, identify risk and keep themselves and the community safe.

Support for front-line employees

Domestic abuse is a complex, sensitive and high-risk matter, dealing with disclosures or allegations. Front-line employees can access support themselves when supporting victims or perpetrators as well as those experiencing domestic abuse as either a victim, perpetrator or their wider family. Employees can access support via the employee assistance program.

Information and Advice

The Council will ensure clear, accessible information and advice is provided in a range of formats for those impacted by domestic abuse such in leaflets, posters, internal newsletter website, social media, awareness talks and the tenancy handbook.

Monitoring and Review of the Domestic Abuse Policy

The Domestic Abuse Policy will be monitored and reviewed to ensure it remains effective.

Monitoring and review will include:

- Direct learning from tenant lived experiences
- Support and supervision of employees and elected members
- Ensuring that lessons learnt included those from DARDR's are reflected in future policy and best practice reviews
- Changes in national legislation

Organization	Phone	Email	Website	Details
Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Service (GDASS)	01452 726570	support@gdass.org.uk	www.gdass.org.uk	Local service offering advice, safety planning, refuge access, and advocacy.
National Domestic Abuse Helpline (Run by Refuge)	0808 2000 247	helpline@refuge.org.uk	www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk	24-hour free helpline for anyone experiencing domestic abuse.
GALOP (For LGBT+ People)	0800 999 5428	help@galop.org.uk	www.galop.org.uk	Specialist support for LGBTQ+ victims of domestic abuse.
Rape Crisis (England and Wales)	0808 802 9999	info@rapecrisis.org.uk	www.rapecrisis.org.uk	Support for anyone affected by sexual violence.
Mankind Initiative (For Male Victims)	01823 334244	info@mankind.org.uk	www.mankind.org.uk	Confidential helpline for male victims of domestic abuse.
Respect (Perpetrator Support & Advice)	0808 802 4040	info@respectphonenumber.org.uk	www.respectphonenumber.org.uk	Advice for perpetrators seeking help to change behaviour.
Love Respect		support@loverespect.co.uk	www.loverespect.co.uk	Aimed at 16–25-year-olds, providing education on healthy relationships.
Women’s Aid	0808 2000 247	info@womensaid.org.uk	www.womensaid.org.uk	National charity supporting women and children affected by domestic abuse.
GreenSquareAccord	0300 111 7000	info@greensquareaccord.co.uk	www.greensquareaccord.co.uk	Expanding provision of safe places and housing support for victims.
FearFree – Stalking and Harassment Service	08088 020300	isac@fearfree.org.uk	www.fearfree.org.uk	Provides an Independent Stalking Advocacy Caseworker (ISAC) for Gloucestershire. Offers risk assessment, safety planning, and liaison with police and courts.

STREET (Young People's Domestic Abuse Service)	0808 168 9111	STREETreferrals@victimsupport.org.uk	www.victimsupport.org.uk	For young people aged 13–19 experiencing teenage relationship abuse or affected by domestic abuse in the home.
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