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HUMAN RESOURCES

Guidance

Managing and supporting employees experiencing domestic abuse



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1. Introduction

Domestic violence affects thousands of people living in Royal Greenwich every year. It cuts across all social, geographic and cultural groups and impacts upon the emotional, physical and psychological well-being of both adults and children who are affected by it. It is a serious crime that shatters lives and can result in death.

A safer Greenwich is one where people do not live in terror within their own homes and where children can enjoy their childhood without being traumatised by the violence they witness. The Council takes a zero tolerance approach to domestic abuse.

- 1.1 Domestic abuse is an issue that can follow all staff to work and both managers and staff may witness staff under strain or difficulty as a result of domestic abuse.
- 1.2 The role of the manager is not to deal with the abuse itself or to provide direct advice, but is rather to make it clear that employees will be supported, to outline what help is available and signpost the employee to specialist support services.
- 1.3 To a large extent providing support and help involves good people management involving listening, empathising and showing concern so staff feel safe and supported at work.
- 1.4 The aim of the guidance is to ensure prompt quick and appropriate action is taken to support staff. A failure to do so could result in decreased productivity and absence while the abuse continues as well as neglecting a general duty of care to the employee. Failure to act promptly and appropriately could also leave the employee in danger.
- 1.5 Most of this guidance concerns employees who are victims of Domestic Abuse. Section 8 concerns dealing with employees who are perpetrating domestic violence.
- 1.6 Remember, the role of the manager is not to deal with the abuse itself or to provide direct advice but to identify the abuse and support the employee.

2. What is Domestic Abuse?

- 2.1 Domestic abuse is any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those who are or have been intimate partners or family members. The abuse can take many different forms, including physical, sexual, emotional, psychological verbal and financial abuse. Research shows that women are more likely to experience abuse and more likely to suffer more serious injury and ongoing assaults than men.-However, it should be acknowledged that men can experience domestic abuse from their female partner and that domestic abuse also occurs in same-sex relationships. All employees who experience abuse should be supported regardless of gender, sexuality or the type of abuse.
- 2.2 In its extreme form, domestic abuse can result in domestic violence for example being assaulted, false imprisonment, harassment and rape which are criminal offences. However psychological abuse such as coercive control can be equally damaging in a different way.

- 2.3 Victims of domestic abuse often feel ashamed or frightened about disclosing it even though the signs are evident to others. Much domestic abuse goes unreported to employers and the police.
- 2.4 In some cases the domestic abuse may have been occurring over a long period of time.

3. Supporting Employees Experiencing Domestic Violence- Why a workplace issue?

- 3.1 Being a good employer includes supporting staff through difficult periods in their lives. Domestic abuse can have a devastating impact on individuals and their families. Domestic abuse can cause staff to be perform badly, be distracted at work, be late, leave early or miss work. Unless a manager is made aware that domestic abuse is an issue, such changes in behaviour, would normally result in formal action being taken under Royal Greenwich procedures.
- 3.2 Managers may become aware that an employee is a victim of domestic violence when work performance, sickness absence or disciplinary difficulties come to light. These situations are likely to present conflicting priorities and difficult decisions. Whilst not ignoring drop in performance, sickness or conduct issues, domestic abuse is clearly a mitigating factor and has a detrimental effect on the well being of the employee and should be taken into account in any steps taken to deal with the presenting problematic issues in the workplace. This may mean making adjustments to working arrangements to enable the impact of the domestic violence and abuse on the employee's job to be minimised. Any informal or formal action which pays no regard to the victim's circumstances will stand little chance of success and simply add to the stress the employee is under.
- 3.3 Managers should be aware that often those experiencing abuse are targeted at work such as by telephone, email or on the premises.
- 3.4 Sometimes colleagues can be affected by being approached by the perpetrator of the abuse and questioned about the victim's whereabouts and contact details.
- 3.5 Royal Greenwich has a duty of care and health and safety laws stress employees have a right to work in a safe environment where risks to health and well-being are considered and dealt with efficiently.
- 3.6 Managers have a responsibility to provide staff with a safe and effective work environment. For some employees the workplace is a safe haven and the only place that offers a route to safety. For example, a regular salary represents economic independence and an opportunity to break away from an abusive relationship.

4. Procedure and Clear Steps for Managers

4.1 Recognise the problem

- Domestic abuse tends to be a hidden subject area and is not easily disclosed. Often a victim will experience many incidents of domestic abuse before seeking help
- Take notice if an employee appears to be withdrawn, distracted or upset for no good reason
- Listen to work colleagues suspicions about what may be going on
- Look for changes in behaviour, attendance or quality of work performance for unexplained reasons
- Take notice of any unexplained bruises or attempts to cover them up for example wearing long clothing on hot summer days or excessive use of make up
- Take notice of strained or difficult conversations on the telephone or mobile which are not related to work

4.2 Confirm

- Meet with the employee explaining the behaviour changes or suspected signs that have been seen and give an opportunity to talk over any problems in total confidence
- Acknowledge that is fairly common for outside issues to impact on work and that managers are aware of difficulties involving childcare, care commitments, addictions and domestic abuse etc... and ask if any of these are an issue for them?
- Probe if necessary domestic abuse or personal relationship issues for example 'is everything alright at home'.
- An employee may explain that the observed changes are for reasons other than domestic abuse. If the explanation seems implausible the manager should voice their concern about potential abuse. This should be done sensitively as this may make it difficult for the employee to confide.
- Sometimes employees do come forward voluntarily and ask for help from the manager, alternatively they may confide in a colleague who then has a duty to inform the line manager.
- If the employee discloses experiencing problems that may be domestic abuse, believe them and do not ask for proof. Make no judgement about them or the situation or try to give advice.
- Reassure the employee that you have an understanding of how domestic abuse affects people at work and say that the Council can provide support.
- Establish whether the employee has an existing network of support
- However a manager should not pressurise an employee to discuss personal information they do not wish to reveal.

Refer to Specialist Team

- First and most important thing is to ask the employee to contact the Royal Greenwich Domestic Violence and Abusive Services Helpline which can be contacted on 0208 317 8273. Advise the employee to also contact the Her Centre (see section 9 for contact details) and remind them of the Council's Employee Assistance Programme. It will be for

the specialist services, not the manager, to determine whether the domestic violence should be reported to the police.

- If the employee refuses help and their performance is not affected the manager will not be in a position to take action, however if the employee's performance is affected the normal procedure should be followed.

Provide support

Managers can offer support in a number of ways;

- agree with the employee what to tell colleagues and how they should respond if their ex/partner telephones or visits the workplace
- provide a new phone extension or calls on divert so they do not receive harassing calls
- ensure they do not work alone or in an isolated area and that arrangements for getting home and to work safely are in place
- keeping a record of any incidents of abuse in the workplace including persistent telephone calls, emails or visits to the workplace
- contacting health and safety team for advice on risk assessments or obtaining a safety alarm
- agree temporary voluntary changes to working times and patterns and possibly workplaces
- special leave for relevant appointments including support agencies, solicitors or court appointments
- Changes to specific duties, for example to avoid potential conflict with an abuser in a customer facing role
- relevant training courses such as on assertiveness or personal safety training
- Revising performance targets if appropriate
- If the reason for sickness absence from work is as a result of domestic abuse, bearing this in mind when implementing the Council's Absence Management procedures.

Managers need to work with the employee to adopt a positive, sympathetic approach to developing practical solutions.

5. Confidentiality

- 5.1 In most circumstances, the disclosure of domestic abuse will be kept between the manager and the employee unless it is agreed with the employee to notify other team members.
- 5.2.1 Managers should ensure information about a victim is not disclosed to the perpetrator and that all employees are aware of their general responsibilities in relation to confidentiality e.g. to not give employee information such as contact details, shift patterns or places of work away in casual conversation or over the phone to any members of the public.

- 5.3 A confidential note should be made and retained by the manager of discussions and action agreed with the employee.
- 5.4 If the employee has children who may have witnessed the domestic abuse, the manager must consider whether to make a referral to Children's Safeguarding & Social Care in the area where the employee lives. The manager should inform the employee that they need to make this referral explaining how children can be harmed through domestic abuse. The employee should be reassured that they will be offered support through this referral.

6. Employee is confronted/abused at work

- 6.1 In line with Royal Greenwich's existing procedures, any form of violent behaviour or abuse towards staff will not be tolerated and will be dealt with appropriately. This may include the involvement of the Council's own security team and possibly the police.
- 6.2 Managers are responsible for taking steps to keep employees safe at work. When domestic abuse is disclosed, managers should ensure measures are put in place to prevent abuse of the employee at work. This may involve a range of measures such as temporarily removing the employee from front line service if appropriate, encouraging the employee to vary routes to and from work, arranging for a colleague to accompany them to and from car parks etc. The manager should carry out a risk assessment and produce a risk reduction plan. Guidance on undertaking a risk assessment can be found on the HR Intranet site.
- 7.1 Full support should be given to any employee who experiences abuse at work such as a break away from their immediate work to recover, time to contact the employee assistance scheme, exploration of whether assistance can be provided if appropriate under the Council's financial hardship procedures, or other help they request.

8. Dealing with Employees who are Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse.

- 8.1 Employees should be aware that domestic abuse is a serious matter which the Council intends to treat with zero tolerance.
- 8.2 Any police action for domestic abuse offences outside of work could lead to dismissal. The Council's General Rules of Conduct and Breaches of Discipline guidance gives examples of offences, which will be regarded as gross misconduct. One of these examples is "a criminal offence committed outside the working environment that makes the employee unsuitable for their job role/purpose or for remaining in the Council's employ, e.g., domestic violence."
- 8.3 In line with the Council's Code of Conduct, staff charged or under investigation for domestic abuse should inform their manager.
- 8.4 If the alleged perpetrator works with vulnerable adults or with children there needs to be an immediate discussion with the Greenwich Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) who will evaluate the information and to decide whether a response is required.

- 8.5 If the alleged perpetrator is an RBG employee they will be able to access counselling services through the Employee Assistance Programme. However it should be noted however, this should not be seen as an alternative to any necessary disciplinary action or report to the police.
- 8.6 If a victim of domestic abuse and their alleged abuser are both employed by Royal Greenwich, any incidents at work will be investigated under the procedure for discipline.
- 8.7 Any reports or information that comes to light about an alleged abuser who is employed by Royal Greenwich will be investigated under the procedure for discipline.

9. Further information

- 9.1 Please see the list below for getting further information and making referrals. All details can be found on the internet.

9.2 Local Services

Royal Greenwich Domestic Violence and Abuse Services

Helpline: Tel 0208 317 8273.

Her Centre –

Island Business Centre, 18 Wellington St, London SE18 6PF
Tel: 020 3260 7715
info@hercentre.org

LADO

See the Council's telephone directory

Note when dealing with Children it is important to inform the service whether the child's family is resident in RBG.

Metro Centre

This is a Greenwich based service that runs a support group for survivors of same sex domestic violence Tel: 020 8305 50000

Domestic Violence Intervention Project for Perpetrators of DVA.

Royal Greenwich has commissioned the Domestic Violence Intervention Project (DVIP) to pilot a perpetrator programme. Service users attend the programme on a voluntary basis. Tel: 020 7633 9181

9.3 National Services

National Helpline: This is run by Women's Aid and Refuge
24-hour National Domestic Violence Free phone Helpline – 0808 2000 247

Women's Aid. This is the national domestic abuse charity that helps women and children every year. They work to end violence against women and children and support many domestic and sexual violence services across the country. See national helpline number above

Refuge. This is one of the largest single providers of specialist accommodation and services to women and children escaping domestic violence. See national helpline number above

Southall Black Sisters

This organisation provides advice and information on domestic abuse, racial harassment, welfare and immigration, primarily for Asian, African and African-Caribbean women. Helpline Number: 020 8571 0800

Broken Rainbow

Provides support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people experiencing abuse. Helpline Number: 0800 999 5428

Man Kind Initiative and Men's Advice Line

This is a national charity that provides support for male victims of domestic abuse and offers practical advice and information as well as concerned friends and families. National Helpline Tel: 01823 334249

Men's National Advice Line

Advice and support for men experiencing domestic violence and abuse. Freephone: 0808 801 0327