

## **REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - CUSTOMERS, GOVERNANCE AND EMPLOYEES**

### **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CHARTER**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To seek the approval of Personnel Committee to sign the GMB Work to Stop Domestic Abuse Charter and to agree to the completion of a review of the Council's existing policy and associated guidance documents with a view to updating them as necessary to meet the stipulations of the charter.

#### **Information**

2. Domestic abuse can be a single incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in the majority of cases, by a partner or ex-partner. Domestic abuse can include, but is not limited to:
  - Psychological abuse - Intimidation, threats, belittling, gaslighting (persistently undermining or manipulating someone, so they doubt their own sanity)
  - Physical abuse - Any type of violence against someone such as pushing, hitting, punching, kicking, choking or using weapons
  - Sexual abuse - Any unwanted touching or groping, including pressuring or forcing someone to have sex when they don't want to (rape)
  - Verbal abuse - Belittling, insulting, or demeaning someone with words – alone or in front of others
  - Financial abuse - Taking control of someone's finances to deny them money and limit their independence
  - Emotional abuse - Being made to feel guilty, emotional blackmail (threats to kill oneself or lots of emotional outbursts)
  - Online abuse - Insulting or threatening someone via social media, messaging, or email
  - Controlling behaviour - Attempting to restrict who someone sees or talks to. Preventing them socialising with friends or family.

3. Anyone can experience domestic abuse regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status (class), sexuality or background - this is true for both the abuser and the abused. Some people who experienced other forms of discrimination and oppression and may face additional barriers to disclosing abuse and finding help, such as migrant women, LGBT+ and Black, Asian and ethnic minority people. Different kinds of abuse can happen in different contexts. The most prevalent type of domestic abuse occurs in couple relationships, but the definition of domestic abuse also covers abuse between family members, such as teenager to parent or carer.
4. It is timely to bring this report to November's Committee following on from Domestic Violence Awareness month in October. The charter calls on employers to support employees experiencing domestic abuse by ensuring that:
  - Employees will not be disadvantaged at work
  - Employees will be supported with access to services and information
  - Employers will train staff to be able to appropriately and confidently support staff.
5. For some colleagues experiencing domestic abuse, their workplace may feel like the only safe place for them, providing an important opportunity to get support away from their abuser. Sadly, some workers are targeted at their workplace, even after they have fled an abusive situation, as their physical workplace may be a known location to their abuser. In either case, an understanding and effective workplace policy to deal with the impact of domestic abuse is key and will build a more nurturing and safer working environment for all staff. This will encourage greater staff retention and importantly economic independence for those individuals living with or fleeing domestic abuse.
6. The statistics are shocking, in that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men in the UK have endured domestic abuse in their lifetime. Two women each week and one man each month are killed in England and Wales by a current or former partner, with an estimated 2.4 million people experiencing domestic abuse last year in England and Wales. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the problem with lockdown requirements such as working from home and limited opportunities to leave home creating additional tensions and barriers to survivors fleeing their abusive situation.
7. As an employer who cares about the impact of domestic abuse on our employees, we want to demonstrate our commitment to all our employees. The charter seeks a pledge to:
  - i. support employees who are experiencing domestic abuse to access support services and information confidentially.
  - ii. ensure that those experiencing domestic abuse will not be disadvantaged within the terms and conditions of their employment and will take all reasonable measures to facilitate any needs in the workplace.
  - iii. commit to working/participating with other organisations to facilitate best support for those experiencing domestic abuse.
  - iv. provide all employees with access to toolkits, information and policies on domestic abuse, in a format that is easily and discretely accessible within the workplace.
  - v. ensure that we have employees trained across our organisation to provide adequate signposting to support within the workplace for all employees. Employees trained should be representative of our organisation and can include line managers and Trade Union representatives.

## **Other Options Considered**

8. The Council already has a policy relating to supporting employees experiencing domestic abuse (Appendix 1). However, signing the charter provides an opportunity to publish a demonstrable commitment to supporting colleagues experiencing domestic abuse.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

9. As Members have previously recognised, our workforce is our most valuable asset. Supporting colleagues experiencing domestic violence or abuse demonstrates our wider consideration for our employees' health and wellbeing. Those who find themselves in this type of abusive situation can experience both physical, emotional and psychological harm. Having a clear policy and package of support will assist our employees to manage their personal situations and make informed decisions around the options open to them.

## **Statutory and Policy Implications**

10. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

## **Data Protection and Information Governance**

11. There are no data protection implications arising from this report as all information is in relation to trends rather than named individuals' data.

## **Financial Implications**

12. There are no direct financial implications arising from the development of the charter and we will build on existing policies and guidance. Any training costs will be met from existing budgets.

## **Human Resources Implications**

13. The Human Resources implications are implicit in the body of this report. The impact of domestic abuse on individuals and families is significant and one which is often hidden for a variety of reasons. A possible consequence of abuse is increased absence due to physical or psychological harm or because the person is unable to attend work. It is important to raise awareness of this difficult issue and by signing the charter we are signalling our support for colleagues involved in abusive situations and removing the stigma victims/survivors can often feel.

## **Public Sector Equality Duty Implications**

14. In seeking to maintain our position as an Employer of Choice, the ability to support our workforce, whatever they are experiencing in their personal lives, is essential to our ongoing success. Whilst there is a moral imperative to do so, there is also a clear business benefit in times where many organisations are facing significant recruitment difficulties, to have another support measure added to our overall employment package.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that members:

- 1) Agree to sign the Work to Stop Domestic Abuse Charter and to any required actions to meet the associated pledge.
- 2) Agree to undertake a review of the Council's existing policy, management guidance and training around supporting people experiencing domestic abuse to ensure its currency and fitness for purpose.

**Marjorie Toward**

**Service Director – Customers, Governance and Employees**

**Chief Executives Department**

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## **Constitutional Comments (EKH 22/10/2021)**

15. This report is appropriate to be considered by Personnel Committee and they have the power to make any resolution resultant upon the recommendation.

## **Financial Comments (RWK 25/10/2021)**

16. There are no specific financial implications arising directly from the report.

## **HR Comments (JP 26/10/2021)**

17. The report sets out a review of the support offered to the workforce in this subject area. HR implications are contained in the body of the report.

## **Background Papers and Published Documents**

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- None

## **Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

- All