

<b>CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL</b>	<b>Cabinet</b> <b>21 April 2021</b>
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<b>Report title</b>	HR Policy – Domestic Abuse Policy	
<b>Decision designation</b>	AMBER	
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Councillor Paula Brookfield Governance	
<b>Key decision</b>	No	
<b>In forward plan</b>	Yes	
<b>Wards affected</b>	Not applicable	
<b>Accountable Director</b>	David Pattison, Director of Governance	
<b>Originating service</b>	Human Resources	
<b>Accountable employee</b>	Sukhvinder Mattu	Service Lead – HR Policy & Strategy
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<b>Report to be/has been considered by</b>	Governance Leadership Team	21 January 2021
	Strategic Executive Board	28 January 2021

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**Recommendation for decision:**

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the Domestic Abuse policy for use by managers and employees of the Council.

## 1.0 Purpose

1.1 To inform Cabinet of changes to the current Domestic Violence policy.

## 2.0 Background

- 2.1 The existing Domestic Violence Policy was due for review as part of the rolling HR policy review process.
- 2.2 The Covid-19 pandemic forced household isolation and increased homeworking for those that were able. These instructions heightened anxiety for employees who were experiencing or felt at risk of domestic abuse.
- 2.3 Between March and June 2020 (the first lockdown), police recorded 259,324 domestic abuse offences, 7% up on the same period in 2019 according to the [Office of National Statistics](#). However, the ONS suggest domestic abuse reports have been increasing each year and it is therefore difficult to ascertain the exact impact Covid-19 had.
- 2.4 In addition, it is important to note that domestic abuse is an underreported crime, so although reports have been rising, it doesn't necessarily mean that the prevalence is increasing. The increase could instead be attributed to more incidents of formal reports being made.
- 2.5 In Wolverhampton, reports of Domestic Abuse have increased significantly - When you compare quarter 1, quarter 2 and quarter 3 of this year (2020-2021) to the previous period last year, recorded incidents have increased by 39%.
- 2.6 'One in four women and one in six men suffer from domestic abuse in their lifetime and domestic abuse costs businesses £1.9 billion every year due to decreased productivity, time off work, lost wages and sick pay' (2018 - [gov.uk website](#)). Not only does the Council have an obligation to support the mental health and well-being of employees, but also a responsibility to maintain productivity and attendance at work.
- 2.7 Engagement has taken place with several stakeholders to review the policy, including managers, employees, trade unions, the equality team and staff equality forums, The Haven, Public Health and employees who have specialisms in this field have also been consulted.

## 3.0 Progress

- 3.1 The following are the main changes:
- Renamed to domestic abuse rather than domestic violence as it encapsulates more examples of a perpetrators behaviour to gain control over the victim.
  - Definition of domestic abuse reviewed – up to date and in line with 'newer' examples of abuse, such as online abuse and to ensure that it is in line with the new statutory definition set out in the domestic abuse bill.

- Provides examples of domestic abuse that may not be obvious, this includes financial abuse, online abuse, gaslighting, forced marriage, honour-based violence etc. Some of these examples may be more prevalent in certain cultures and therefore not widely known with the aim of raising awareness to provide support to the Council's diverse workforce.
- Supported by practical manager's guidance including details of signs to look out for to identify potential cases of domestic abuse, how to respond to victims requesting help and where to signpost them to for further support.
- Includes up to date information on the silent solution, Clare's Law and Action Needed Immediately (Ani) scheme. It also includes information for employees who may be deaf or can't talk on how they can seek help in emergencies.
- Includes a breakdown of specialist support organisations specific to employees under protected characteristics.

3.2 Training provision – training will be delivered to managers, both face to face and through e-learning to help raise awareness of domestic abuse, the signs to look out for and how to respond to disclosures.

#### **4.0 Evaluation of alternative options**

4.1 An option would be to make no changes to the policy. This would result in the information being provided to managers and employees being out-dated and not valid. Cases of domestic abuse in employees can be potentially missed and managers will not have enough information to be able to respond to disclosures effectively.

#### **5.0 Reasons for decision**

5.1 Having a workplace policy on domestic abuse sends a clear message that it is not tolerated inside or outside the workplace, and that the Council wants to help and support.

5.2 Implementing an effective workplace policy could improve employee wellbeing and may help to retain skills and experienced staff and enhance our reputation as a responsible employer.

#### **6.0 Financial implications**

6.1 There are no financial implications arising from the recommendation in this report. The intention behind the revised Domestic Abuse policy is to give both employees and managers access to clear up to date information regarding the support available within and outside of the Council.

[GE/26032021/P]

#### **7.0 Legal implications**

7.1 There are no legal implications. The Council has a legal responsibility to ensure the health and safety and welfare of its employees. The policy is being introduced to demonstrate the

Council is committed to support its employees and to ensure managers have the right information to respond to disclosures.

[TC/28032021/K]

## **8.0 Equalities implications**

8.1 An equality impact assessment has been conducted in association with the equality team and the policy has been amended as a result. Feedback from employee equality forums was also sought and changes made.

## **9.0 All other Implications**

9.1 There are no other implications.

## **10.0 Schedule of background papers**

10.1 None

## **11.0 Appendices**

11.1 Appendix 1: Proposed domestic abuse policy