

## REPORT OF PERSONNEL MANAGER

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### **SUBJECT: NEW WORKPLACE POLICY (DOMESTIC ABUSE)**

#### Purpose of Report

Members are asked to approve the new *Workplace Policy: Violence Against Women and Domestic Abuse*, as recommended by Employee Forum.

#### Introduction/Background

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) research 'How Fair is Wales' assessed the greatest inequalities in Wales, and one of the 7 significant challenges emerging from the evidence was the need to reduce the incidence of domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Therefore, the Welsh Government's 10,000 Safer Lives project sets eleven minimum standards for public services in Wales, one of which is the need for a 'violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence' workplace policy.

#### Comparisons

The Welsh Government encourages Welsh public bodies to adopt workplace policies, to support the work that public agencies do within our communities. Many of these bodies have done so.

The policy offered for consideration has been informed by the guidance from EHRC.

#### Considerations

This workplace policy aims to

- Raise awareness of the issues;
- Provide a supportive environment for employees who may be experiencing violence to raise issues;
- Give managers and colleagues a basis from which to take supportive action;
- Ensure that the responsibility for violence is assigned to the perpetrator and that it won't be tolerated; and
- Give examples of the types of workplace support that can be available.

These are important aims that are best supported by a policy framework and an organisational commitment as proposed.

Whilst for some people who are experiencing domestic violence, the workplace can be a safe haven and provide a route to safety, it is reported that 75% of women who experience domestic abuse are targeted at work.

Employee Forum considered this policy at its meeting in February and recommend it to Personnel Committee for approval. Suggestions arising at Employee Forum have been incorporated in the current draft.

#### Financial considerations

There are no costs additional to budgets currently in place for staff management and health promotion.

#### Risk considerations

There is a political or public perception risk of being out of step with other public bodies if the Authority does not adopt this policy. There is a potential that such a framework and policy may prevent or reduce harm to an employee.

#### Compliance

The proposed policy contributes towards the Welsh Government's vision for fairness in Wales and supports the Authority's standing as a public body in Wales.

#### Human Rights/Equality issues

The policy takes account of gender differences in the impact of, and patterns of behaviour involved in, domestic violence. It includes reference to the differential impact among people in other groups with protected characteristics.

#### Biodiversity implications/Sustainability appraisal

The proposed policy contributes towards a safe and fair society.

#### Welsh Language statement

N/A

#### Recommendation

Members are asked to approve the new *Workplace Policy: Violence Against Women and Domestic Abuse*.

#### Background Documents

EHRC guidance available on their website

*(For further information, please contact June Skilton, Personnel Manager 01646 624835)*

*Author: June Skilton*

*Consultees: Leadership team, Staff reps group, Employee Forum*

**PEMBROKESHIRE COAST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**  
**Workplace Policy: Violence Against Women<sup>1</sup>**  
**and Domestic Abuse**



## **Introduction**

Being a good employer includes supporting staff through new or difficult periods in their lives. Domestic Abuse, violence against women and sexual violence can all have a devastating impact.

This policy takes account of the Equality and Human Rights Commission's (EHRC) guidance.

## **Background**

The EHRC research 'How Fair is Wales' assessed the greatest inequalities in Wales, and one of the 7 significant challenges emerging from the evidence was the need to reduce the incidence of domestic abuse and sexual violence. Women experience a disproportionate level of violence and in order to reduce the overall incidence the primary focus needs to be on women's experiences.

Every year across the UK, at least 3 million women experience violence (the term violence against women includes domestic abuse, rape and sexual violence and many other forms of violence that predominately affect women); 2 women each week are murdered by their partners/ex partners and a further 10 women each week commit suicide as a means of escaping an abusive relationship. 1 in 4 women experience domestic abuse at some point in their lifetime.

The scale and impact of violence against women warrants focussed action and the support of all organisations can make a difference. Domestic Abuse is the most prevalent and whilst for some the workplace can be a safe haven and provide a route to safety, 75% of women who experience domestic abuse are targeted at work (perpetrators may use workplace resources, such as phones and email, to threaten, harass or abuse their current or former partner).

Colleagues may also be affected. They may be followed from work, or subject to questioning about the victims contact details or locations. They may be aware of the abuse and violence but not know how to help.

The Welsh Government's 10,000 Safer Lives project sets eleven minimum standards for public services in Wales, one of which is the need for a 'violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence' workplace policy.

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<sup>1</sup> The umbrella term of violence against women is used, due to the disproportionate effect on women. Nevertheless, our commitment is towards women and men who experience violence and the guidance should be read accordingly.

## Statement

This Authority does not tolerate abuse and violence towards its employees within or outside the workplace. This workplace guidance demonstrates a commitment to tackle domestic abuse and violence against women by:

1. Raising awareness
2. Providing a supportive environment for employees who may be experiencing violence to raise issues
3. Giving managers and colleagues a basis from which to take supportive action
4. Ensuring that the responsibility for violence is assigned to the perpetrator and that it won't be tolerated
5. Giving examples of the types of workplace support that can be available.

### **If you are experiencing domestic abuse and/ or violence, please consider:**

- talking to your line manager (or anyone else at work) about your situation and how we might help you, we can agree what to tell colleagues
- accessing the support and guidance available from the All Wales Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Helpline and/or the Optum helpline provided by the Authority
- making sure your emergency contacts and next of kin details are up to date, should we be unable to contact you for any reason.

### **All of us can help by:**

- reading and taking note of this guidance
- being willing to act appropriately
- maintaining confidentiality<sup>2</sup>

### **Managers in particular can help by:**

- being aware of physical, behavioural changes and/or performance changes that may be the result of domestic abuse and/or violence<sup>3</sup>
- discussing issues confidentially with the employee
- liaising with the Personnel Manager to develop and arrange any support measures that have been agreed with the employee;
- working with the relevant property manager and the Personnel Manager to develop a personalised workplace safety plan to minimise risk to the employee and colleagues, where appropriate.

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<sup>2</sup> Maintaining confidentiality is not about keeping secrets, it is about limiting discussion and information to those involved in managing and supporting a case. Disclosure to those who need to be involved in a case will be discussed and agreed with the employee prior to information being shared, except in the circumstances where people are at immediate risk. Information will only be shared on a need to know basis in order to achieve the best outcome for the employee.

<sup>3</sup> There is no simple way to know whether or not an employee is experiencing domestic abuse and /or violence but there are signs that you can look out for. They may be small at first but over time they may become more obvious. See appendix.

- understanding that it is not your role to deal with the abuse itself

A key element is managers and colleagues having the confidence to ask difficult questions, to provide the right environment for a conversation (when the employee is ready). Shying away from the subject can perpetuate fear of stigma and increase feelings of anxiety. Often employees will not feel confident in speaking up, so a manager or colleague making the first move to begin a conversation can be key.

### **Key Principles**

Avoid victim blaming and try to stay non-judgemental and supportive, respecting the employee's boundaries and privacy.

Provide a sensitive and non-judgemental approach

Ensure that confidentiality is respected as far as possible

Recognise that the employee may need some time to decide what to do and may try many different options during this process, let them make their own decisions.

Look for or refer on about measures to prioritise safety in the workplace

Be aware of what support is available and explore these options with the employee.

Acknowledge that it takes strength to trust someone enough to talk about the abuse and violence.

### **There are lots of ways we can offer practical support at work:**

- ✓ Diverting phone calls and email messages
- ✓ Alerting reception and security staff if the abuser is known to come to the workplace (possibly providing a copy of any existing orders against the abuser and a photograph).
- ✓ Checking that staff have arrangements for getting safely to and from home
- ✓ Reviewing/updating personnel records eg addresses, next of kin
- ✓ Changing working arrangements if reasonable: eg flexible working/satellite working, temporary changes to working times, patterns, workplace, changes to duties if possible (eg phone calls), secure car parking
- ✓ Moving the employee out of public view i.e. ensuring that they are not visible from reception points or ground floor windows
- ✓ Ensuring that the employee does not work alone or in an isolated area
- ✓ Agreeing with the employee what to tell colleagues and how they should respond if the violent partner/ex-partner telephones or visits the workplace
- ✓ Keeping a record of any incidents of abuse on the workplace, including persistent telephone calls, emails or visits to the employee by their partner/ex-partner.

## Appendix

### Contacts:

#### **All Wales Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Helpline**

Tel: 0808 80 10 800

[www.allwaleshelpline.org.uk](http://www.allwaleshelpline.org.uk)

The Wales domestic abuse helpline offers free confidential information and support to women and men experiencing domestic abuse. It is also an information service for people who are concerned about someone they know, and for agencies that need information on the support available in Wales for adults and children.

#### **Dyn Project**

[www.dynwales.org](http://www.dynwales.org)

The Dyn Project works across Wales to support men who experience domestic abuse.

#### **Men's Advice Line**

[www.mensadviceline.org.uk](http://www.mensadviceline.org.uk)

The Men's Advice Line offers practical advice, information and support to male victims of domestic abuse as well as concerned friends and families.

#### **West Wales Women's Aid**

[www.westwaleswa.org](http://www.westwaleswa.org)

Tel: 01970 625585 (24 hour helpline) or 01239 615385

There are other organisations in addition to those above who can offer support.

### Definitions:

The Home Office defines domestic violence and abuse as:

any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.  
(For example, this can include abuse and violence perpetrated by sons, daughters, grand-parents or any other person who has a close or blood relationship with the victim).

The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.

## **Diversity:**

People may have different needs and experiences, for example:

- Older women are less likely to report their experiences of domestic abuse
- Disabled women are more likely to experience domestic abuse and sexual violence than non-disabled women.
- Ethnic minority women face additional barriers to accessing support
- Lesbian, gay and bisexual women and men can be vulnerable to abusers who undermine their sexuality and threaten to 'out' them to colleagues, employers and family members.
- Transgender women and men may have fewer services available to them.
- Men experiencing domestic abuse and sexual violence may find it more difficult to disclose abuse and may find more barriers to accessing support.

## **Possible Signs that someone may be experiencing violence:**

- apparent uncharacteristic or reduced self confidence and self esteem
- apparent uncharacteristic or reduced concentration, anxiety or low mood
- apparent social withdrawal or change of routine
- obsession with time or avoiding lunch breaks or socialising outside work
- unwillingness or refusal to do business trips
- needing regular time off for appointments
- frequent or sudden medical problems
- sleeping or eating disorder
- reluctance to turn off mobile whilst at work
- repeated injuries, ill health or unexplained bruising or bruising with dubious explanations
- inappropriate or excessive clothing
- changes in hairstyle
- changes in the quality of work performance for no apparent reason
- the receipt of apparently upsetting phone calls/texts/emails/faxes
- being secretive about home life
- presenteeism – a preference to be at work and work long hours and a reluctance to take holidays
- early or late arrivals or departures without a clear explanation
- high absence rate

## **Welsh Police Forces**

The Authority understands that the Welsh Police Forces operate a positive action policy in relation to domestic abuse and violence. This means they investigate any incident and will take action against the perpetrator if there is sufficient evidence and work closely with other agencies to secure safety and provide practical help.