



Domestic Abuse Policy

2021 - 2024

Version Control	Version Final
Status of Policy	
Sponsor	Glen Channer Safeguarding Manager
Author/Reviewer	
Approved	
Review Date	June 2022 or as required due to guidance or Legislation changes

Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Definition.....	4
3. The Facts.....	4
4. The Effects the COVID Pandemic	5
5. Partnership Working	6
6. Corporate Policies that Support the Aims of this Policy	7
6.1. Safer Watford.....	7
6.2. Watford's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-25.....	8
7. Relevant Legislation	8
8. Service Delivery.....	9
8.1. The Role of the Safeguarding Manager	9
8.2. Case Management.....	9
8.3. Service standards	10
8.4. Case management.....	10
9. Watford Borough Council as an Employer.....	11
9.1. Managing the impact.....	11
9.2. Training.....	11
9.3. Service standards	12
9.4. Perpetrators	12
9.5. Employee case management.....	12
10. Equality.....	13
11. Record keeping, monitoring.....	13
12. Review.....	13

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Total Number of Offences (excluding fraud) flagged as domestic abuse-related, by month January 2018 to June 2020, England and Wales (Excluding GMP) .	5
Figure 2 Watford Community Safety Partnership	8

Appendices

Appendix 1 Further Guidance and Resources	14
Appendix 2: Domestic Abuse Reporting.....	15

Tables

Table 1 Provisional number of domestic homicides in England and Wales, by quarter, January 2016 to June 2020.....	5
---	---

1. Introduction

In the year ending March 2019, an estimated 2.4 million adults aged 16 to 74 years experienced domestic abuse (1.6 million women and 786,000 men).

The Council has a long-standing corporate commitment to treat all known and suspected cases of domestic abuse seriously. The Council recognises that where it occurs domestic abuse is both harmful and damaging to the individuals involved and the wider community. As a key local partner to many service providers the Council recognises that it has an integral role to play in supporting work to reduce the incidence of domestic abuse and provide support to victims, as both an employer and a direct provider of services.

Services are available through the Health Hub which gives access to the Domestic Abuse worker where victims can get both practical and emotional support they need.

It is recognised that domestic abuse is not restricted to a specific age group, race, religion or socio-economic standing, but cuts across all sections of society and its effects can be debilitating on both the individual concerned and society as a whole.

The Council believes that:

- Domestic abuse is unacceptable and should not be tolerated;
- Those who abuse should be held accountable for their behaviour;
- Domestic abuse affects not only children and families but also the whole community; and
- The safety and empowerment of those experiencing domestic abuse should always be the priority in any response.

In achieving the aims of this policy the Council will:

- Adopt a strong partnership approach with agencies working within this field;
- Support both local and national agencies and the police to co-ordinate responses at strategic and operational levels;
- Make available to both service users and employees relevant information from appropriate agencies;
- Ensure a sensitive, consistent, confidential and prompt response in service delivery;
- Ensure that staff are trained to the appropriate level, and that this training is refreshed every 3 years or when legislation changes.
- Ensure Council Officers receive support and training to enable them to take appropriate action, including referral and signposting;
- Ensure all employees understand the important role they can play in addressing the effects of domestic abuse and develop a consistent approach across the Council;
- Provide a range of services to assist people to live in safety and security;
- Ensure that services are accessible to all and that any barriers to access, such as language and disability, are addressed;

- Offer support and understanding in the workplace to those experiencing domestic abuse, prioritising confidentiality and workplace safety;
- Support the police and other local partners to challenge perpetrators and make use of legal remedies where appropriate; and
- Be clear to employees and Members that any conviction of a domestic abuse-related crime could bring the Council into disrepute, and that such a conviction may trigger disciplinary or other conduct procedures.

2. Definition

For the purpose of this policy the following cross-government definition is used:

NOTE

Domestic violence and abuse is 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.

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 assaults, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten their victim.

This definition includes so called honour based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group (Home Office 2009). It also takes into account elder abuse, male victims and same sex relationships.

3. The Facts

- Provisional figures show that from the period January 2018 to June 2020 there were a total of 538 domestic homicide deaths in England and Wales. This equates to 8 per month.

Table 1 Provisional number of domestic homicides in England and Wales, by quarter, January 2016 to June 2020¹

Period	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Quarter 1 (January to March)	37	29	37	29	34
Quarter 2 (April to June)	28	25	30	26	30
Quarter 3 (July to September)	29	26	37	30	:
Quarter 4 (October to December)	31	23	33	24	:

- In the year ending March 2019, an estimated 2.4 million adults aged 16 to 74 years experienced domestic abuse (1.6 million women and 786,000 men).
- The police recorded 746,219 domestic abuse-related crimes in the year ending March 2019, an increase of 24% from the previous year.
- According to Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) data for the year ending March 2018, only 18% of women who had experienced partner abuse in the last 12 months reported the abuse to the police
- Women are much more likely than men to be the victims of high risk or severe domestic abuse: 95% of those going to Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) or accessing an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) service are women
- 130,000 children live in homes where there is high-risk domestic abuse
- 62% of children living with domestic abuse are directly harmed by the perpetrator of the abuse, in addition to the harm caused by witnessing the abuse of others
- On average high-risk victims live with domestic abuse for 2.3 years before getting help
- 85% of victims sought help five times on average from professionals in the year before they got effective help to stop the abuse

4. The Effects the COVID Pandemic

It is difficult to estimate the effect that the lockdown has had on domestic abuse. Figure 1 shows that nationally cases dipped during the lockdown and picked up again once the restrictions relaxed and the bars and clubs opened.

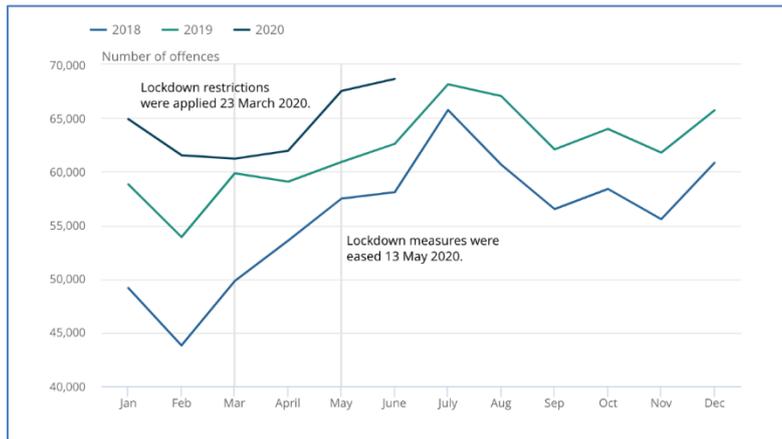
Figure 1: Total Number of Offences (excluding fraud) flagged as domestic abuse-related, by month January 2018 to June 2020, England and Wales (Excluding GMP)²

¹

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/domesticabuseduringthecoronaviruscovid19pandemicappendixtables>

²

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseduringthecoronaviruscovid19pandemicenglandandwales/november2020#police-recorded-crime>



The town centre supports Watford's local economy, providing around 90,000 residents in Watford and 500,000 residents living within 20 minutes of Watford with a thriving sub-regional centre which meets their needs in terms of retail, business, social, leisure and cultural activities.

There are possible lessons that can be learned from the effect of the lockdown had on all crimes in particular domestic abuse, this information can be used so that working with our partners a rise to previous levels can be avoided when the restrictions are relaxed.

5. Partnership Working

Through its established inter-agency partnerships, the Council will contribute to wide and far reaching strategies to tackle domestic abuse. The Council adopts a strong partnership approach to domestic abuse, working with the following local agencies including:

- Community Safety Partnership
- The Police
- 'True Love' – a preventative programme to target teen abuse
- Sunflower Project
- MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences)
- Domestic Violence Forum
- Domestic Violence support providers
- Local refuge
- Safer Places
- Safe Lives
- Herts Young Homeless
- Perpetrator support
- Homicide reviews
- Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Board
- Hertfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board
- Hertfordshire Domestic Abuse partnership Board
- Clinical Commissioning Groups
- Public Health.
- I am Cherished Programme

- Watford Women's Centre
- White Ribbon

The Council is committed to playing an active role and ensuring that it is represented at multi-agency forums and meetings led by its partners.

The Council will work towards a proactive multi-agency approach with all relevant statutory and voluntary agencies working together to facilitate effective case management.

The Council will ensure that a multi-agency approach is taken by making use of referrals and signposting to local agencies, charities and other service providers within the partnership. The Council will however only involve other agencies where it has received consent from the person to do so, unless required to do so by law.

Where children are affected particular care will be taken to ensure that their interests are taken into account and that where appropriate the police and support agencies are involved, provided that parental rights and wishes are followed, unless the Council is required by law to share information.

6. Corporate Policies that Support the Aims of this Policy

Through its policies and procedures the Council is able to demonstrate that it is committed to:

- Preventing domestic abuse from happening in the first place by challenging the attitudes and behaviours which foster it, and intervening early to prevent it from continuing, recurring or escalating.
- Reducing the risk to victims ensuring that perpetrators are held to account and supporting them to change their behaviour.
- Working in partnership to provide adequate levels of support where abuse occurs

6.1. Safer Watford

Safer Watford is the town's Community Safety Partnership, which brings together Watford Borough Council, Herts Constabulary, Herts Fire & Rescue, Herts County Council and other key local organisations. The Community Safety partnership includes initiatives related to domestic abuse.

Figure 2 Watford Community Safety Partnership



6.2. Watford's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-25

This strategy details how the Council will tackling the causes of homelessness and rough sleeping and improve the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act

The Action Plan states that together with internal and external stakeholders, including other local authorities, the Council will identify and develop timely responses to housing situations that may lead to homelessness, including cuckooing, gangs, domestic violence, and modern slavery including challenging and tackling illegal evictions.

7. Relevant Legislation

Watford Borough Council recognises that it operates within a legislative framework, including:

- Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007
- Children Act 1989 and 2004
- The Family Law Act 1996
- Housing Act 1996
- Protection of Harassment Act 1997
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Crime and Victims Act 2004
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Housing Act 1985 and 1996
- The Homelessness Act 2002
- Civil partnership Act 2004
- The Localism Act 2011
- The Crime and Disorder Act 1998
- Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004
- Protection of Freedoms Act 2012
- Anti-Social Behaviour and Policing Act 2014
- Serious Crime Act 2015

8. Service Delivery

8.1. The Role of the Safeguarding Manager

The Council has a Safeguarding Manager who is supported by Designated Safeguarding Officers.

This Manager provides:

- An overview of service provision;
- Advice and training; and
- Up-to-date knowledge of good practice and legislation.

Relevant service areas have the responsibility for their own case management and will have staff trained in this regard.

The Safeguarding Manager will work with Designated Safeguarding Officers for each departmental service area and quarterly meetings will be used to share learning from recent cases, MARAC, and homicide reviews. This is in line with the Council's structure for safeguarding.

The Safeguarding Manager will also be able to provide support to Human Resources where an employee may be experiencing domestic abuse, particularly where the employee may be at threat within the work place.

8.2. Case Management

A person or household experiencing domestic abuse will have their case dealt with by the team appropriate given their housing situation:

- In the case that a person or household is homeless they will be dealt with in the first instance by the Housing Solutions Team.
- In the case that a person or household is a current licensee in council owned property, they will be dealt with in the first instance by the Housing Association managing the accommodation on the Council's behalf;
- In the case that a person or household is a current tenant in social housing, they will be dealt with in the first instance by their landlord; and
- In the case that a person or household is a private tenant or homeowner they will be dealt with in the first instance by the Community Protection team who will refer them to Housing Solutions Team to have their housing situation appropriately assessed.

The Council will provide suitable accommodation where the Council accepts that it is unreasonable for a person or household to return to their home in line with the requirements of the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homeless Reduction Act 2017. Each case will be assessed on its own merits and will be viewed against statutory legislation.

Where action is to be taken against the perpetrator, the Council will signpost or refer residents affected by domestic abuse to agencies able to support them in making use of legal remedies available, including non-molestation orders, occupation orders, and property transfer orders.

The Council will facilitate and provide information on a range of housing options and services that provide support and counselling to residents affected by domestic abuse.

The Council will look to further develop partnerships with support providers to co-ordinate services to residents affected by domestic abuse.

Where a Housing Association tenant is experiencing domestic abuse the Council will work with and support communication with other partnership agencies to assist in securing out-of-area arrangements for accommodation in cases where there would be a continuing risk to the household by remaining in the Borough. This decision would be subject to a MARAC decision.

8.3. Service standards

If someone is experiencing domestic abuse they can expect the following:

- To have their situation dealt with sympathetically and in a non-judgemental manner;
- To be spoken to immediately or within 24 hours if more appropriate and to be fully involved in all decisions;
- To be offered the choice of speaking with a same-sex officer;
- To have arrangements made to have an interpreter available if English is not their first language;
- To be provided with details of other agencies that may be able to offer support and counselling;
- To have a referral made with their consent to a specialist service provider;
- To have the level of risk assessed to inform interventions and support available.
- To experience high levels of confidentiality. Any information given to staff will remain confidential and will only be given to other agencies with the consent of the person unless there is a statutory duty to do so (e.g. under section 47 of the Children's Act 1989);
- To be contacted safely and securely, contact should consider appropriate methods and using measures such as a code word if necessary.
- To not have staff contact the person responsible for the abuse unless express permission is given to staff to do so. The sole exception is where there is a clear reason to believe that there is an attempt to defraud the Council. Any decision to contact the person responsible will be approved by a Senior Officer;
- To be assisted in identifying emergency temporary accommodation as a result of experiencing domestic abuse;
 - o have arrangements made to ensure that the service is accessible and that appropriate advice and support is provided where there are barriers to communication or mobility, a learning disability, or if the abuser is relied on for care;
- To have safeguards put in place to maintain their safety, especially in relation to the Council making contact with them by phone, letters or visits; and
- To talk to staff who are culturally aware and who have received relevant training.

8.4. Case management

All cases involving domestic abuse will be kept open with regular reviews, until the person considers that their situation has been resolved satisfactorily in accordance with this policy.

- All cases should be risk assessed by a trained member of staff using the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment and Honour-based violence risk identification, assessment and management model (DASH) risk assessment tool.
- All cases will be referred to and reviewed regularly by the relevant manager
- All cases assessed as high risk will be referred to MARAC
- Where a person is not in receipt of support services or declines support and WBC are still involved in the case it should be remembered that any risk assessment is dynamic and that changes in circumstances such as pregnancy should lead to the case being re-assessed as the risk may have altered.
- Where a person is dissatisfied with the investigation or a decision, they may pursue an appeal through the Council's complaints procedure.
- Information on available support networks should be given to all victims of Domestic Abuse to include specific cultural organisations.
- Case records should be maintained at all stages of the process

An easy to follow guide can be found at Appendix 1

9. Watford Borough Council as an Employer

9.1. Managing the impact

The Council is committed to the welfare of staff and where risks are identified precautions will be made to ensure protection for staff from situations that could make them potentially vulnerable.

The impact of domestic abuse experienced in the home has both direct and indirect impacts in the workplace, which include:

- Decreased productivity;
- Absenteeism;
- Errors; and
- Increased employee turnover.

The Council will provide all staff, in particular managers and HR staff with awareness of the main issues involved in domestic abuse, to recognise potential victims and perpetrators, and to provide a supportive structure in which to deal effectively with cases.

Those with line management responsibility should take a proactive stance in increasing awareness.

All employees and their family members may access independent free advice and support through the Council's Employee Assistance Programme.

9.2. Training

All new staff will need to sign a statement to say that they have read and understood the Domestic Abuse Policy

All staff will undertake training in safeguarding and domestic abuse awareness as part of the Council's mandatory training programme. This is to be managed through the Council's online HR Employee Information System and line managers are expected to make sure employees attend where required.

Where appropriate the Council will consider policy and mandatory training requirements when procuring contracts for services that could bring contracted staff into contact with the public.

For front line teams coming into contact with cases of domestic abuse on a more regular basis specialist training will be appropriate. Line managers are expected to make sure employees attend where required in line with County guidelines.

9.3. Service standards

Employees who have identified that they are experiencing domestic abuse will be treated without judgement, both personally and professionally, and provided with a sympathetic, supportive response.

Where risks in the work environment are identified managers and HR will support employees to put in place safety precautions to prevent exposure through work to situations that could make any employee vulnerable.

The Council will support employees in making positive changes and in providing a safe and positive working environment.

In considering formal action relating to issues of performance or attendance managers should take the impact of domestic abuse into account as far as is reasonable.

Discussions between a manager and an employee who is experiencing domestic abuse will be treated in confidence. In some circumstances this confidence may need to be broken in order to protect children or vulnerable adults or criminal offences revealed.

Managers will ensure that reasonable additional measures are taken to protect personal information regarding those who are known to be experiencing, or who have experienced, domestic abuse.

9.4. Perpetrators

An employee who is cautioned or convicted of a criminal offence may be subject to disciplinary procedures. The Council reserves the right to use disciplinary procedures should an employee's activities outside of work have an impact on their ability to perform the role for which they are employed, or be considered to bring the Council into disrepute.

9.5. Employee case management

Where an employee is dissatisfied with any actions or decisions made in relation to their situation, they may pursue this informally with their line manager or HR, or formally by

making use of review procedures outlined in the relevant HR policy/procedure, or if appropriate through the Council's grievance procedure.

10. Equality

We will ensure that this policy is applied fairly and consistently to all our customers. We will not directly or indirectly discriminate against any person or group of people because of their race, religion, age, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, disability or any other grounds set out in our Equality and Diversity policy.

When applying this policy we will act sensitively towards the diverse needs of individuals and communities.

When applying this policy we will take the necessary positive action to reduce discrimination and harassment in local communities.

11. Record keeping, monitoring

The Council's teams will keep confidential records in an electronic file with restricted access. The data will be stored and removed in accordance with the Councils Data Protection Policy and in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and The General Data Protection Regulations 2016.

12. Review

The policy will be reviewed three yearly or in response to changes in relevant legislation or guidance.

Appendix 1 Further Guidance and Resources

Further guidance is available from:-

Glenn Channer - Safeguarding Manager
01923 278421

Liam Fitzgerald - Community Safety Manager
01923 278406

Justine Hoy - Line Manager
01923 278449

Designated Safeguarding Persons for Children and Young Persons only

Designated Safeguarding Persons for Child, Young Persons and Adults

Other useful resources and contacts

Hertfordshire Sunflower Service
www.hertssunflower.org

Safer Places – Domestic Abuse Services
www.saferplaces.co.uk

I am cherished
www.iamcherished.co.uk

Hertfordshire IDVA Services
<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/media-library/documents/herts-sunflower/hertfordshire-idva-flyer.pdf>

Watford Women's Centre
<https://wwcplus.org.uk>

Hertfordshire County Council website
<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk>

Appendix 2: Domestic Abuse Reporting

