

Sefton Council



DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

STATEMENT OF GOOD PRACTICE

(Guidance, advice and support)



DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

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DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE STATEMENT

1. Sefton Borough Council believes that everyone has a right to a life that is free from violence and abuse of any form. Domestic and sexual violence is totally unacceptable and the Council is committed to creating a working environment that promotes that view and helps and supports individuals who are experiencing it. Individuals that perpetrate domestic and sexual violence either within or outside the workplace will be dealt with as appropriate to the circumstances. Actions taken if appropriate in each individual case may include:

- help to access information, support and counselling
- relocation
- disciplinary action
- dismissal

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- Demonstrate the Council's commitment to challenge and address the issue of domestic and sexual violence.
- Raise awareness of the extent and nature of domestic and sexual violence and the damage it causes to individuals, the organisation and society as a whole.
- Inform, help and support individuals who are victims of domestic and sexual violence and their colleagues who may be affected by association.
- Inform, guide and support managers when domestic and sexual violence is suspected, identified or reported.
- Inform, guide and support managers in taking appropriate action in relation to individuals who are perpetrators of domestic and sexual violence.

SCOPE

2. The actions and support mechanisms contained within this document apply to all employees of the Council, and may, where appropriate, apply where the Council uses individuals for its services.
3. The guidance is to be applied ensuring equality of access, irrespective of age, culture, gender, disability, race, colour, ethnic or national origin, religion, belief, sex or sexuality.

COMMUNICATION AND AWARENESS RAISING

4. This document will be distributed throughout the Council to raise awareness via all available communication routes. This will include senior managers, the Intranet, trade union representatives, employee counselling providers, and occupational health staff.
5. Organisations working in partnership with the Council, to whom individuals may go for advice or support, will also be informed of the guidance for staff, e.g. Sefton Equalities Partnership, Community Empowerment Network Members.

DEFINITION OF DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

6. Domestic and sexual violence knows no boundaries with regards to age, gender, race, religion/faith, class, sexual orientation, ability, wealth, geography or demographic. Whilst it particularly affects women, men can also experience domestic and sexual violence.
7. As an issue, violence and abuse very much factor, and are reflected, in the wider prevalence of crime and disorder in Sefton. However domestic and sexual violence are also much more than just crimes, they damage the lives of those people who are abused and their children as well as 'harm' the local economy and the social fabric of our communities.
8. Domestic and sexual violence is reflective of a broad spectrum of issues, not all of which are reflective of the local picture, but which can include:
 - Domestic violence;
 - Sexual violence and rape;
 - Harassment and stalking;
 - Forced marriage;
 - Female genital mutilation
 - Trafficking, including prostitution
 - Honour killings
9. Statistically one in two women will experience domestic violence, sexual violence, or stalking at some point in their lives.
10. The behaviour of perpetrators of domestic and sexual Violence may include, but are not exclusive, to:
 - **Physical violence:** slapping, punching, beating, kicking, strangulation, wounds from weapons, which often lead to permanent injury and sometimes death.
 - **Sexual violence:** Rape, sexual degradation, sexual assault, and may often be in combination with physical violence.
 - **Psychological and emotional abuse:** constant criticism, bullying, using intimidation and coercion for a range of purposes, stalking and harassment,

threats to kill, threats to harm children or family members, destroying possessions, being kept isolated from family or friends, being locked in, not allowing any access to food, medication, money, sleep, freedom.

- **Financial abuse:** being denied access to money or not knowing about the family income, being made to ask for an allowance, taking the person's income, being prevented from getting or keeping a job.
11. Sefton Council acknowledges that in the main domestic and sexual violence occurs as a result of unequal levels of power that exist between men and women, and the misuse of power and control mechanisms that may occur in intimate, familial and close relationships. Other forms of gender based and sexual violence may occur as a one off incident perpetrated by a stranger or acquaintance but the vast majority of violence and abuse occurs in the context of intimate, familial and close relationships.
 12. In the majority of reported cases women are the victims however, men may also find themselves victims of violence and abuse in their lives and relationships.
 13. Domestic and sexual violence can include violence inflicted on, or witnessed by, children. The wide adverse effects of living with domestic and sexual violence for children must be recognised as a safeguarding issue, and the appropriate safeguarding policies must be followed.
 14. Domestic and sexual violence can also manifest itself through the actions of immediate and extended family members through the perpetuation of unlawful activities, such as forced marriage, prostitution, so called 'honour crimes' and female genital mutilation. Extended family members may condone or even share in the pattern of violence and abuse.

These guidelines will be used to support any employee, or any other individual as appropriate, experiencing any of the forms of abuse identified above.

COUNCIL POLICIES

15. Guidance, advice and support mechanisms contained in Council Policies that may be relevant to Domestic and Sexual Violence are:
 - Dignity at Work Policy
 - Sickness Absence Management
 - Flexible Working Arrangements
 - Special Leave Policy
 - Assaults on Employees
 - Disciplinary Procedure
 - Stress Policy
 - Corporate Health, Safety and Well-being Policy
 - Safeguarding Policies
 - Alcohol Policy and Procedure

- Lone Working Standard
- Risk Assessment Standard

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

STRATEGIC/SERVICE DIRECTORS

16. Overall responsibility for ensuring that the guidelines are available to all staff within their Directorate / Service Areas.

LINE MANAGERS

- Ensure that the guidelines and supporting information are accessible for all staff
- Be aware of appropriate services, (as identified in appendix 1) and the policies and sources of guidance and support that are available.
- Where domestic and sexual violence is suspected, identified or reported, respond appropriately and effectively.
- Where domestic and sexual violence is suspected, identified or reported, and there are children in the home, respond appropriately and effectively.
- Ensure confidentiality in discussing support and maintaining records.
- Encourage and support individuals to take action and seek help, continuing to support them if they are unable to do so.
- Take appropriate steps to maximise the health and safety of individuals.
- Take appropriate action with individuals that are perpetrators of domestic and sexual violence.

ALL INDIVIDUALS

- Seek guidance from their manager, personnel department or trade union representative if they have any questions about the contents of this document.
- Aim to be supportive and non-judgemental towards colleagues, being a “good listener” whenever possible.
- Maintain confidentiality – do not discuss or disclose information about colleagues.
- Discuss in confidence with your Manager any concerns that you may have about any colleague who may be experiencing, or has disclosed they are experiencing, any of the above forms of violence and abuse.

You may have become aware of this through a personal and/or professional relationship.

- Discuss with your Manager any concerns you may have about any colleague who may be experiencing domestic or sexual violence where there are children in the home.
- Report to your Manager any incidents/actions by an employee who is a perpetrator that you become aware of at work. Where possible inform the victim that you are doing this.

TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIVES

- Be familiar with the guidance.
- Be available for individuals experiencing domestic and sexual violence.
- Keep any information confidential within the boundaries outlined in this document
- Be aware of appropriate services, policies and sources of guidance and support that are available.

IMPACT ON THE WORKPLACE AND ORGANISATION

17. Personal problems cannot always be separated from work, and domestic and sexual violence can result in an individual being affected to the extent that their attendance, timekeeping and performance can deteriorate, potentially affecting their job security. Added to this people experiencing domestic and sexual violence may be particularly vulnerable at work as the perpetrator knows where they will be and may even be a work colleague. In addition work colleagues, and service users, may also find themselves at risk from the perpetrator directly if the individual is targeted through the workplace.
18. This vulnerability will increase if they try to end the relationship or change the circumstances that underpin the abuse; it is known that these changes often escalate domestic and sexual violence and increase the risk of serious harm.
19. This may inevitably result in negative affects on work colleagues and Managers, and clearly it is an issue that cannot be ignored.

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM

20. It can be difficult for anyone who is experiencing domestic and sexual violence to tell people at work about their situation, or to approach their

manager with their problems. It is possible that a manager will become aware of a situation through day to day supervision, performance review or managing an absence, e.g. via a Back to Work Meeting. As with other welfare issues, identifying that an individual has a problem at an early stage can lead to the appropriate help being offered enabling them to deal with their situation more effectively.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF INDIVIDUALS WHO MAY BE VICTIMS OF ABUSE

21. Signs and symptoms of domestic and sexual violence which managers and/or colleagues observe may include:

- Poor attendance, frequently late without explanation, or with explanations that seem implausible.
- Uncharacteristic depression, anxiety, seeming upset, fearful, distraction or problems with concentration.
- Indicators that the person is drinking more than usual.
- Changes in the quality of work performance for no apparent reason.
- The receipt of repeated upsetting calls/faxes/e-mails, or the individual being a victim of vandalism or threats;
- Overtly demonstrative behaviour from the partners, i.e. constantly sending flowers or presents to the workplace.
- Obsession with time.
- Problems with finances.
- Describing controlling behaviours in their relationship.
- Needing regular time off for appointments.
- Inappropriate or excessive clothing.
- Repeated injuries, or unexplained bruising or explanations that do not fit the injuries displayed
- Increased hours being worked for no apparent reason.
- Not being able to attend work related social functions.

22. It is important to note that this is not a checklist. Some victims may display no signs of violence or abuse; others may display one or more signs of abuse. There are as many different reactions to abuse as to those who experience it, and managers need to be alert to these as individuals experiencing domestic

and sexual violence suffer a broad range of physical and emotional consequences, some of which, for example depression, may be long term and continue after the relationship/situation has ended.

SUPPORT

23. The Council recognises that individuals may not wish or feel able to disclose that they are experiencing domestic and sexual violence. Those who do seek support may not feel able to approach their line manager, but would prefer to talk to a work colleague, Occupational Health Nurse or Doctor, Health and Safety Adviser, Employee Counsellor, Personnel Officer or Trade Union representative, or specialist support provider.
24. Anyone approached for support should use this guidance as a resource and recognise the limits of their knowledge, and ability to provide support.

SUPPORT WITHIN THE COUNCIL

25. This will be provided in the main through a range of existing Policies, which should be implemented appropriately to address the particular circumstances.
26. In some cases existing arrangements may need to be enhanced, and guidance should be sought on the individual circumstances. This guidance may be provided from a range of sources including Personnel Department, the Council's Vulnerable Victim Manager, and specialist support agencies. This does not exclude seeking guidance where necessary from any other source already listed.
27. Managers will need to bear in mind the impact of any arrangements on other work colleagues, productivity and service delivery, however, the health, safety and wellbeing of the individual concerned will be paramount.
28. As stated above, individuals that experience domestic and sexual violence may not want to tell anyone. They have the right to privacy and generic preventative measures should protect them while at work. However, it may be difficult for the Council to provide the appropriate level of health and safety protection and job-related support if they are not informed.
29. In serious cases, for example, where the perpetrator has specifically threatened the individual's life, the Police have been involved, or there are injunctions against the perpetrator, then the manager should be informed. This is important to enable managers to work with the individual to try and increase their safety, and the safety of work colleagues and service users. The Council aims to create an atmosphere of trust and confidentiality that allows individuals to report cases and, recognises that the violent and abusive perpetrator is the hazard and not the individual being abused, who should not be treated as responsible for the actions of the perpetrator.
30. Those experiencing domestic and sexual violence may know their abusers better than anyone else, and their line manager/Health & Safety Adviser

should therefore involve them in the risk assessment and the production of a safety plan. However the safety plan can be completed within the confines of confidentiality and without necessarily knowing who the individual is or without direct contact with them, should this be preferred.

31. However, if other individual's and/or customers are at risk, the Council must also balance this with its responsibility to respond quickly to the safety related needs of others.

32. Individual plans may vary but consideration should be given to:

- Advising that emergency numbers are kept readily accessible should emergency protection be needed, and providing a mobile phone, which connects directly to the Police in cases of emergency.
- Making sure that the individual is made aware of, and supported to access, relevant support services in Sefton, or within the area in which they live.
- Identifying a contact for the individual to reach when needed and also identify an emergency contact person should the Council, e.g. the line manager, be unable to contact the individual.
- Increasing safety measures such as changing keypad numbers, reminding individuals dealing with the public not to divulge personal information concerning colleagues, such as addresses or working hours.
- Check the security of personal information held, such as temporary or new addresses, bank or healthcare details.
- Screening mail or telephone calls at work if there is a threat of abusive phone calls or mailings.
- Keeping records of any incidents of violence at the workplace, including persistent phone calls, e-mails, visits, abusive language or threats by the perpetrator. These should include witness details so that the records can be used if they want to press charges or apply for an injunction. The employer can also apply for an injunction if the behaviour or actions of a perpetrator impinges on the health and safety and well being of staff.
- Offering temporary or permanent changes to the workplace and / or the work schedule. Moving the desk so it is not visible from the reception or windows, move from work with the public to back-room work, or redeployment if necessary.
- Changes in shift times to avoid late nights or early mornings, allowing colleagues to accompany the worker on certain journeys.
- Reviewing and if necessary reassigning parking arrangements. Where possible, providing a security escort for entry to and exit from the building.

- With the individual's consent, advise colleagues of the situation on a need to know basis and agreeing what the response should be if the abuser contacts the office. With permission, provide a copy of any existing protection orders and/or a photograph of the abuser to the line manager, reception area, security staff and childcare providers.
 - Setting up procedures for alerting security and/or the Police, and providing clear instructions about what to do if an abuser gains unauthorised access to the workplace, and if they refuse to leave and/or violate an existing order of protection.
 - Identifying any additional measures needed to ensure the safety of colleagues.
33. Any plan put in place must be reviewed on a regular basis and careful note taken of any incidents that have arisen. Ideally, security will be a high priority and special arrangements should be confidential as far as possible and implemented in a low-key manner.
34. A perpetrator of domestic and sexual violence/abuse may feel threatened by interventions they become aware of, and perceive them to be an attempt to erode any power they have over the victim, or support the victim to end the relationship. It is important to be aware that obvious interventions may unintentionally bring about an increase in the violence or abuse.

HIGH RISK OF SERIOUS HARM

35. If a Manager is concerned that any individual is at high risk of serious physical harm, he/she should seek their consent to refer them to the Vulnerable Victims Advocacy Team (see Appendix 1 for contact details). The Vulnerable Victims Advocacy Team will, with the individual's consent, undertake a needs and risk assessment and decide whether to refer the individual to other Agencies and if appropriate to the MARAC (Multi – Agency Risk Assessment Conference) in the area in which they live for action /support. Consent to refer a case to a MARAC should always be sought, but is not always necessary should the risk identified be deemed to meet a certain criteria.
36. If the individual is in immediate danger they should be advised to contact the Police on 999. If the individual refuses, advice should be sought from the Personnel Department.

SPECIAL LEAVE

37. In cases of domestic crises, Sefton's Special Leave Policy has provision to allow unpaid leave at the discretion of the line manager if the circumstances require it. When an individual has disclosed that they are experiencing

domestic and sexual violence, the manager should consider favourably requests for reasonable time off. Reasons for requests may include:

- Appointments for example specialist support agencies or counselling;
 - Arranging re-housing
 - Meetings with solicitors/attendance at court; and
 - Making alternative childcare arrangements, including meetings with schools, social workers.
38. Special leave with pay will apply when attending hearings as a witness in either the criminal courts, if they have been called under a witness order or summons, or within the civil or family courts where this relates to domestic and/or sexual violence, including seeking and injunction or harassment order.
39. Managers should record absences or applications for special leave in accordance with normal Council procedures. Where a special leave request is made, form SL1 should be forwarded to the Service Director for authorisation, giving the reason as 'domestic crisis.' Additional information given to Line Managers or Service Directors on a need to know basis should be under separate cover and be marked and treated strictly confidential.
40. There may be situations when an individual may be unable to attend work for a longer period of time, for example, if they are in temporary refuge accommodation outside the area. This is likely to be a stressful and worrying time and the individual may have children with them. Job security may well be of concern and consideration of the available policies should be made to accommodate such an absence, including unpaid Special Leave.

FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

41. Flexible working patterns may be considered as a temporary or permanent arrangement to assist an individual in these circumstances.
42. The suitability of an arrangement will be dependent on the individual circumstances and subject to normal considerations such as impact on service delivery; however, every effort will be made to accommodate requests in cases of domestic and sexual violence. The safety and wellbeing of the individual concerned will be an important consideration at all times.

ALTERNATIVE EMPLOYMENT/RELOCATION

43. In cases when the perpetrator of domestic and sexual violence is a work colleague, or targeting the individual at work, then serious consideration will be given to relocating, or finding alternative employment for the victim. Actions taken will be dependant on the wishes of the victim, but consideration at all times should focus on the level of risk posed by the perpetrator/s.
44. There is potential for action to be taken with the perpetrator (paragraphs 47 to 50) and the availability of alternative employment, or disciplinary action (where appropriate), need to be considered.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

45. Individuals experiencing may face considerable financial hardship. Partners may be denying them access to their finances, they may have concerns about leaving a violent relationship and finding alternative accommodation, and they may also have debts linked to abuse or be taking costly protective measures through civil or family court processes. Temporary changes to the method of salary payment could be considered in such cases if relevant. The individual may find information about the Sefton Credit Union and Financial Advice/Debt Counselling/Welfare Benefits useful (Appendix 1). Referral to an advisor may be made with their consent.

PREGNANCY

46. Domestic and sexual violence is known to start or worsen during pregnancy and women who are preparing to take maternity leave will be provided with information about domestic and sexual violence and sources of advice and support via the Maternity Booklet, available on the Intranet or from Corporate Personnel.

PERPETRATORS OF DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

47. Sefton Council recognises that individuals who are perpetrators of domestic and sexual violence may wish to voluntarily seek help and support, and the information in Appendix 1 should be used to provide information on the organisations and contacts that provide this.

48. The fact that the individual has sought help via the Council will not preclude action being taken under a relevant Council Policy (e.g. Disciplinary Policy) if appropriate to the circumstances.

49. Acts of domestic and sexual violence committed by any individual, within or outside the workplace, against any other person, will, in common with any other act which adversely affects the relationship between the Council and that person, be investigated under the Disciplinary Procedure and appropriate action taken. Any such investigation will be prompted by the Council becoming aware of such an act, via any reputable, verifiable source, or by knowledge of a conviction of a criminal offence; granting of any protection order, restraining order, injunction or any other proof.

50. Other acts of potential misconduct related to domestic and sexual violence may also be investigated under an appropriate procedure. Examples of this would include misuse of Council facilities and Council resources to locate, harass, threaten or abuse any individual including the victim, their children, and anybody else significant to them.

CONFIDENTIALITY

51. If an individual discloses that they are experiencing domestic or sexual violence, this information should, as far as possible, be kept confidential.
52. If a Manager is aware that an individual has disclosed information to work colleagues, the colleague must be reminded that this information must be kept confidential, and the potential consequences of breaching confidentiality should be impressed upon them.
53. Breaching confidentiality could have serious effects for the individual experiencing domestic and/or sexual violence, potentially increasing their vulnerability and reducing their safety; it could exacerbate the domestic and sexual violence and impact on their family, working arrangements and social activities. Statistics indicate that the risk of more serious assaults, permanent injury and murder takes place when a woman decides to leave home or try and escape from an abusive situation, or immediately thereafter.
54. Notwithstanding the importance of confidentiality there will be exceptions, including:
- A genuine belief that the individual is at serious risk of harm/death
 - When information given suggests a young person or child, or vulnerable adult, is at risk from physical, emotional, sexual abuse or neglect i.e. a safeguarding issue.
55. In such circumstances the individual should be encouraged to seek appropriate help, and if they are unwilling to do so, they must be advised that guidance will need to be obtained on the issue, which may entail divulging information to a third party.
56. Immediate contact should then be made with the appropriate agency from those identified in Appendix 1 or relevant others dependent on where the individual lives and/or the circumstances causing considerable concern.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

1. In an emergency always call **999** (Police, Ambulance and Fire Services)
2. www.saynotofear.co.uk – Safer and Stronger Communities Partnership Domestic and Sexual Violence website offering support and advice, including a directory of services.
3. **Vulnerable Victims Advocacy Team** 0151 934 5142/5143 - Provide a holistic support service to any victim of domestic and sexual violence and hate crime whose case is reported to the Police and is high/very high risk, including people whose case is likely to go to court, Multi Agency Risk assessment Conference (MARAC), or require Sanctuary to stay in their home or be safer when they need to relocate.
4. **Sefton Council's Homeless Team** 0151 934 3541, e-mail homeless.team@sefton.gov.uk - Support with homelessness, and a source of referral to other support agencies. Open for personal visits Monday to Thursday 10.00am until 4pm and Friday 10am until 3pm. Contact can also be made by phone between Monday and Thursday 9.00 and 5.30pm and Friday 9.00am and 4.00pm.
5. **National Domestic and Sexual Violence Helpline** 0808 2000 247 - Free national helpline, that provides support to women experiencing domestic and sexual violence, including access to refuge. Open 24 hours. The phone call will not show up on landline bills.
6. **Worst Kept Secret:** 0800 028 3398 - Anybody who is subjected to domestic and sexual violence, or any family or friends, who are worried about an individual, can call the free phone confidential helpline. The phone call will not show up on landline bills.
7. **Broken Rainbow** 0845 604460 - Support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people experiencing domestic and sexual violence. Open Mondays to Fridays 9am–1pm and 2pm–5pm and staffed by LGBT people.
8. **Merseyside Safe Place: Sexual Assault Referral Centre:** 0151 295 3550 - Provides crisis intervention, including forensic examination to victims of rape and serious sexual assault.
9. **Rape And Sexual Assault Service for Merseyside** 0151 666 1392 - rasamerseyside@btconnect.com or www.rasamerseyside.org
10. **Sefton Women's and Children's Aid (SWACA)** Bootle Office: 0151 922 8606, Southport Office: 01704 500647 - Provides free and confidential support services for all women and children experiencing domestic and sexual violence. The agency is open Mon-Fri 9.30am - 5.00pm
11. **Venus Women's Resource Centre** 0151 474 4744 - Provides a wide range of services to women including floating support, counselling, drop-ins, and support for

teenage parents and young women's group. Open Monday – Thursdays 10am-5pm, Fridays 10am-4pm.

12. Voice For Change 0151–920-2211 - Provide free and confidential support services to women and men experiencing domestic and sexual violence. Open 10am to 5pm Monday to Friday.

13. Male Domestic and Sexual Violence helpline: 01744 621119 - This service can offer 1:1 counselling to male victims of domestic and sexual violence; please call for information more information and to make an appointment

14. The Hideout is an on-line resource that provides support to children and young people living with domestic and sexual violence <http://www.thehideout.org.uk/>

15. Sefton Credit Union - A 'not for profit' organisation that enables people in the community to save or borrow money at low rates. For further information contact 01704 432725 or 0151 934 4563 or see the website www.seftoncreditunion.org

16. Sefton Council's Welfare Benefits Team: Provide a comprehensive welfare rights advice service. Individuals can carry out benefit checks and calculate benefit entitlement following actual or potential changes in circumstances. The team will assist with completing benefit claim forms, conducting back to work calculations and representing people at appeal tribunals against Dept of Works and Pension decisions. Please contact the confidential telephone advice line on 0151 934 3660 Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday between 10am -12.30pm. Alternatively email WelfareRights.Advice@hsc.sefton.gov.uk