



Cherwell
DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

Domestic Abuse Policy

DOCUMENT CONTROL

Organisation(s)	Cherwell District Council (CDC)
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DOCUMENT APPROVALS

This document requires the following committee approvals:

Committee	Date of meeting pending approval
CDC Personnel Committee	03 December 2025

DOCUMENT DISTRIBUTION

This document will be distributed to all employees of Cherwell District Council.

DATE FOR REVIEW

No later than 03 December 2028 but sooner if impacted by legislative changes.

REVISION HISTORY

Version	Revision date	Summary of revision
1.0	09 July 2024	Introduction of policy
2.0	03 Dec 2025	Best practice updates following feedback from the Lived Experience Group.

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Domestic abuse can happen to anyone, regardless of age, background, gender, religion, sexuality, or ethnicity.
- 1.2 Employers have a duty of care and a legal responsibility to ensure that all employees have a safe working environment. Cherwell District Council is committed to fostering a workplace culture that proactively supports and responds to disclosures of domestic abuse.
- 1.2 This policy aims to raise awareness of domestic abuse and ensure that all employees know where to seek help and support if they, or a colleague, are affected.
- 1.3 Victims of domestic abuse may not always realise that they are experiencing domestic abuse. This policy aims to ensure that all employees can understand and spot the signs of abuse, in order to move to a culture where employees feel comfortable talking about domestic abuse.
- 1.4 This policy seeks to benefit the welfare of individual employees and challenge abusive behaviours. It is the Council's expectation that managers will show empathy, flexibility and understanding with victims and survivors of domestic abuse.
- 1.5 The Council sees that part of their role is to provide training to employees about domestic abuse to enable them to recognise the signs and be aware of support pathways for those experiencing domestic abuse.
- 1.6 This policy also covers the approach to be taken where there are concerns that an employee may be the perpetrator of the abuse. The Council is clear that domestic abuse is unacceptable.

2 Purpose and scope

- 2.1 The purpose of this policy is to:
 - support employees experiencing domestic abuse
 - aid managers seeking to help team members experiencing domestic abuse
 - assist colleagues of those experiencing domestic abuse
 - outline the approach to be taken where there are concerns that an employee may be a perpetrator of domestic abuse
 - move the Council to a culture of domestic abuse being seen as everyone's responsibility
 - enable employees to remain productive and at work.
- 2.2 This policy applies to all employees. The Council will also offer support to agency, contract workers and volunteers wherever possible.

3 What is domestic abuse?

- 3.1 **Domestic abuse** is defined as, *"Any single incident or pattern of conduct where someone's behaviour towards another is abusive, and where the people involved are*

age 16 or over and are, or have been, personally connected to each other, regardless of gender or sexuality.” (Domestic Abuse Act 2021)

Domestic abuse can encompass:

- Controlling or coercive behaviour
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Violent or threatening behaviour
- Economic abuse
- Psychological or emotional abuse

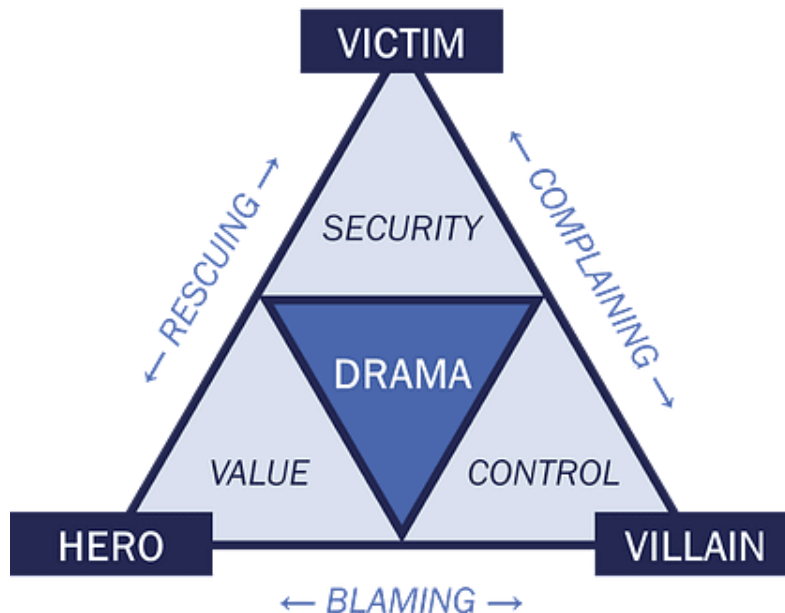
- 3.2 This definition includes stalking and so called ‘honour’ based violence, female genital mutilation and forced marriage otherwise known as Harmful Practices.
- 3.3 **Controlling behaviour** is defined as a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.
- 3.4 **Coercive behaviour** is defined as an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, frighten or control their victim. It is also about the emotional control and manipulation of another person which may sometimes be referred to as ‘gaslighting’. Sometimes victim-survivors may not recognise this as abuse as it is less physical and more psychological.
- 3.5 **Physical abuse** is when an abuser's actions physically harm someone, or physically threaten them to make someone feel scared, helpless, and to gain power. Abusers use **sexual violence** for the same reason they use physical violence: to gain control.
- 3.6 Often, when people hear the term ‘domestic abuse’ they picture acts of physical violence, but there are also more subtle forms of behaviour. Since 2015, the offence of coercive and controlling behaviour within a relationship has been illegal in England and Wales. While this abuse takes many forms, it typically involves manipulation, humiliation, intimidation, denigration to family and friends, and isolation to control and instil fear in people who are harmed, leaving lasting effects.
- 3.7 **Violent or threatening behaviour** is any kind of behaviour that hurts, or threatens to hurt, one person or more, or behaviour that damages property.
- 3.8 **Economic abuse** is when the abuser controls someone’s access to money, resources and economic stability and restricts their ability to act freely and independently.
- 3.9 **Psychological or emotional abuse** is the regular and deliberate use of a range of words and non-physical actions used to manipulate, hurt, weaken or frighten a person.
- 3.10 **Stalking and Harassment** can be defined as persistent and unwanted attention that makes someone feel pestered and harassed. It includes behaviour that happens two or more times, directed at or towards the individual by another person, which causes

them to feel alarmed or distressed or to fear that violence might be used against them. This can include in person events, as well as through digital methods.

- 3.11 **So called “Honour” Based Abuse** is an incident or crime involving violence, threats of violence, intimidation, coercion, or abuse (including psychological, physical, sexual, financial, or emotional abuse), which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of an individual, family and or community for alleged or perceived breaches of the family and / or community’s code of behaviour. It can be distinguished from other forms of abuse as it is often committed with some degree of approval and / or collusion from family and/or community members.
- 3.12 **Female Genital Mutilation** refers to procedures that intentionally alter and cause injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. It is classed as child abuse and leads to severe short and long term physical and psychological consequences and is illegal within the UK, as is taking or being involved in a child being taken abroad to undergo this practice.
- 3.13 All employees staff have a responsibility to remain vigilant and to act promptly if they have any concerns about the safety or wellbeing of a young person. All safeguarding concerns must be reported in line with our Safeguarding procedures.
- 3.14 **Harmful practices** are a collective term for several different forms of abuse which all share a similar characteristic, that they are seen as acceptable practices within sections of society. Harmful practices can cover, amongst other forms of abuse, child marriage, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, breast flattening/ironing, hate crimes, child abuse linked to faith or belief and so called “honour-based” abuse.
- 3.15 Ultimately, domestic abuse is the abuse of power and control over one person by another.
- 3.16 Domestic abuse can result in lasting trauma for victim-survivors and their extended families. The impact of domestic abuse can range from loss of self-esteem to loss of life.
- 3.17 Domestic abuse can particularly impact children and young people who may witness the abuse, or who may not see the abuse but may be aware of it or hear it occurring. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 makes clear that children, irrespective of whether they are injured or see the offending, are deemed to be victims of domestic abuse if they live in an abusive household.
- 3.18 It is important to recognise that both females and males can be subjected to domestic abuse from and by a current/ex-partner, their children (aged 16+) or a member of their family or people that they live with. Perpetrators can be either male or female. However, we know that women disproportionately experience domestic abuse and men disproportionately perpetrate it.
- 3.19 Domestic abuse is often more common in groups such as the LGBTQIA+ community, those who are not white, disabled communities, the elderly and other groups who may be marginalised.
- 3.20 Most abusive relationships display a distinct pattern; however not all experiences of domestic abuse are the same. The Drama Triangle is a psychological and relational

model, developed by Dr. Stephen Karpman, that illustrates the shifting roles often present in dysfunctional or abusive relationships. It identifies three key roles:

- **Persecutor** – The person who uses blame, criticism, or control to dominate or diminish others.
- **Victim** – The individual who feels oppressed, helpless, or powerless, often internalising the abuse.
- **Rescuer** – The person who intervenes or takes responsibility for others, sometimes enabling the cycle by preventing accountability or change.



- 3.21 In the context of domestic abuse, individuals may shift between these roles, creating a cycle of emotional manipulation, dependency, and confusion. For example, an abuser may alternate between persecuting and rescuing the victim, reinforcing control and emotional entrapment. The victim may also adopt the rescuer role in an attempt to appease or protect the abuser, further complicating the dynamic.
- 3.22 Understanding the Drama Triangle can help professionals and victims recognise patterns of coercive control and emotional abuse, and support efforts to break the cycle through healthy boundaries, empowerment, and appropriate intervention.

4 Identifying domestic abuse

- 4.1 There are ways in which a manager or colleague may become aware that an individual is being subject to domestic abuse. These may include:
- an employee may disclose domestic abuse to a colleague, directly to their manager or tell them something which makes them concerned for their safety.
 - there may be obvious effects of physical abuse, or injuries that don't match the explanation given (it is important not to make assumptions).

- the situation may become known during discussions regarding a workplace concern such as sickness absence, timekeeping, drop in performance or a change in behaviour.
- there might be increased contact from a partner, ex-partner or family member to the employee during working hours.

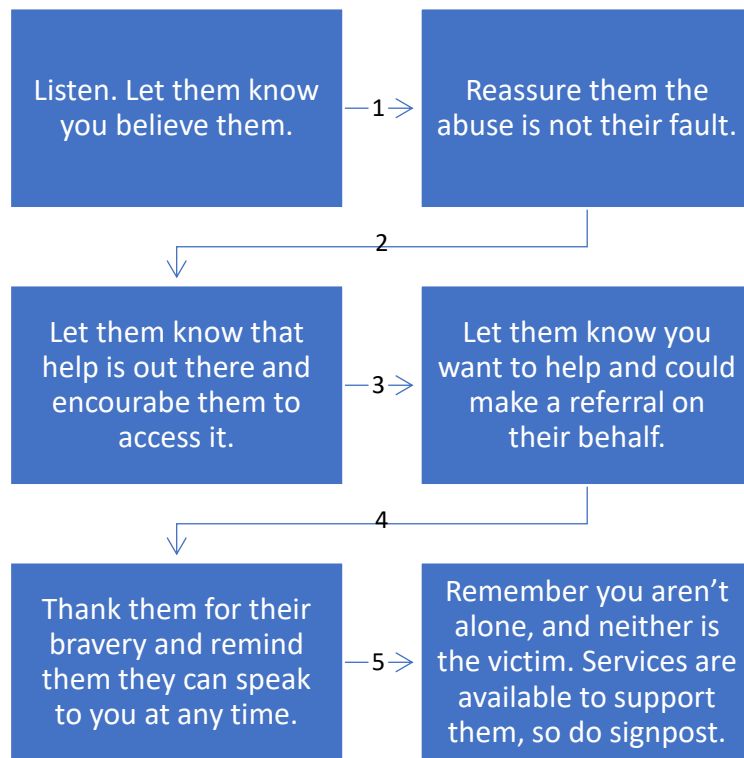
4.2 Possible signs of domestic abuse include:

- a change in appearance, behaviour or demeanour
- changes in quality of work for no explained reason
- receiving repeated social media contact, calls, texts, emails, or visits to the workplace
- physical indications, such as unexplained bruises or injuries, or wearing clothes that cover their body
- avoiding lunch breaks or socialising outside of work
- loss of self-esteem or confidence, or becoming withdrawn
- increased absenteeism or increased presenteeism
- unhealthy coping mechanisms such as alcohol or substance misuse
- financial hardship / not having control over their money
- reluctance for video calls or partner is always in the background
- being concerned about leaving children or pets at home without them
- seeming nervous of their partner's reaction to things they've done.

4.3 This is not an exhaustive list, and it is important to understand that any of the above may arise from a range of circumstances of which domestic abuse may be one.

5 **Line managers' role**

- 5.1 Managers have a crucial role to play in enabling employees experiencing domestic abuse to seek help and to work in a safe environment.
- 5.2 If a line manager suspects that an employee is experiencing domestic abuse, they should facilitate a conversation to discuss this and identify / implement appropriate support. Often employees will not feel confident in speaking up, so making the first move to begin a conversation can be key.
- 5.3 Always have the conversation face to face. Make sure you are in a safe quiet space, won't be interrupted or overheard and have enough time to chat. Approach the subject with patience, kindness and concern. A good starting point might be to mention things you have noticed in their behaviour, or that of the potential abuser.
- 5.4 In supporting the employee, the line manager should:



5.5 It should be recognised that the employee may need some time to decide what to do. Try not to influence them, allow them to be in control of their own decisions.

5.6 All line managers have a responsibility to:

- be aware of this policy and be able to apply it when they suspect or have identified an employee who may be suffering from domestic abuse.
- understand it can be difficult to make a disclosure and make it clear that the employee will be supported.
- prioritise safety over work efficiency.
- Offer solutions to work related problems in a supportive, sensitive and non-judgemental way.
- help the employee to identify the best source of external support (internal colleagues that can provide guidance on this are listed at section 7.1).
- report anything that raises concern via a [See it – Report it \(SIRI\) form](#).

6 Confidentiality and right to privacy

6.1 The Council encourages employees at risk from domestic abuse to disclose this so that they can receive support.

6.2 The Council respects an employee's right to privacy should they make a disclosure and recognises the importance of maintaining confidentiality to protect the safety of an employee and any associated children or adults who may be experiencing domestic abuse. However, in certain circumstances including those of child protection or the protection of adults at risk from abuse, relevant safeguarding authorities may

need to be informed. Complete confidentiality therefore cannot be guaranteed in these situations.

- 6.3 If it is necessary to disclose certain information the manager will discuss with the employee, the reasons why. Information will only be disclosed on a need-to-know basis and will be proportionate. Any decision to disclose without consent (if an employee is at serious risk of injury or death, or a child or other adult is at risk of significant harm) should be documented.
- 6.4 Employees can be assured that the information they provide will not be shared with colleagues without their agreement. In some cases, it may be advisable to share some information with colleagues, for example, it may be helpful for colleagues to know how to respond in cases where the alleged perpetrator of the abuse tries to contact the employee at work.
- 6.5 All records concerning domestic abuse will be kept strictly confidential and in line with the [Council's Privacy Notice](#).
- 6.6 All incidents of violence or threatening behaviour, or breaches of security in the workplace must be retained for evidence purposes. These should be recorded via a [See it – Report it \(SIRI\) form](#) which will be reviewed and retained by the Deputy Designated Safeguarding Officer. The record must be clear, accurate and include the date, time, location and witnesses.

7 Internal support

7.1 Support is available to employees involved in domestic abuse through:

- line managers
- [the Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead](#)
- [the Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator](#)
- [human resources](#)
- [domestic abuse champions](#)
- [trade union representatives](#)

7.2 The Employee Assistance Programme is also available.

Heath Assured is a confidential counselling and information service available 24/7 to assist employees and their immediate family members with personal or work-related problems including life support, legal information, bereavement support and medical information.

✓ Telephone line, **0800 030 5182**, open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year

7.3 Through the Wisdom smartphone app, employees can access a range of features, all aimed at improving health and wellbeing.

✓ [Wisdom](#) smartphone app, access using code **MHA222473**

8 External support

8.1 The Council provides a comprehensive directory of domestic abuse support services on its website, including both local and national resources. We encourage any

employee affected by domestic abuse to access this information, which offers guidance, support, and pathways to safety. You are not alone, and help is available. <https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/directory/157/domestic-abuse-directory-of-services>

- 8.2 If you believe someone is in immediate danger, you should call the **police on 999**.

9 Attendance

- 9.1 Where domestic abuse has been reported managers, with guidance from Human Resources, should be flexible with unplanned absences and timekeeping.
- 9.2 Managers may offer employees experiencing domestic abuse flexibility to attend relevant appointments, including those with support agencies, solicitors and court.

10 Perpetrators of domestic abuse

- 10.1 Any allegation of involvement in domestic abuse should be reported promptly via a [See it – Report it \(SIRI\)](#) form where an assessment will be made on the most appropriate course of action. This may include referral to the police and/or the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer).
- 10.2 Should an employee approach the Council about their abusive behaviour; information will be provided about the services and support available to them.
- 10.3 Employees are expected at all times to present high standards of personal integrity and conduct that will not reflect adversely on the Council and its reputation. In line with the Council's disciplinary policy and procedure it would therefore be considered gross misconduct if an employee were to be convicted of the physical violence, threat or assault of another person.
- 10.4 The Council is committed to ensuring that:
- all allegations and convictions of domestic abuse are dealt with fairly and proactively.
 - confidentiality is maintained and information restricted only to those who have a need to know.
 - all efforts are made to put support in place as quickly as possible.