

Domestic Abuse Policy for Service Users



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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Oxford City Council (Council) understands that 1 in 4 women will be affected by domestic abuse at one point in their lives. Men may also be victims; however, women are disproportionately affected.
- 1.2 The Council recognises that domestic abuse occurs in every social class and across all ages, regardless of gender, sexuality, disability, race, or religion.
- 1.3 Socio-economic factors are also highly relevant to domestic abuse. Research consistently shows that factors such as financial stress, poverty, and low educational attainment can significantly increase the risk of domestic violence.

2. Policy Statement

- 2.1 The Council considers domestic abuse as unacceptable whenever and however it occurs.
- 2.2 The Council is committed to a survivor-led approach. This means the survivor's views and experiences will inform the service they receive, and they will be able to exercise choice and control.

The Council will adopt this approach by:

- Communicating with, or about survivors using a non-judgemental and believing approach.
- Giving clear and accurate advice to survivors about their options and signposting them to appropriate support services to help them work through these decisions.
- Information will only be shared where it is lawful, necessary and appropriate to do so in accordance with the Council's Data Protection Policy.
- Consent to share information is not always required if the level of risk to the service user is high, but in every circumstance the survivor will be informed of what is being shared, with whom and why. Where appropriate, necessary, and safe to do so, consent will be sought.
- Accurate records will be kept of all information sharing activities in a secure place.

- 2.3 The Council commits to working closely with agencies who specialise in supporting survivors and their children. Relevant staff will consult with

partners when safety planning and will participate in the MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference), MATAC (Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination) and Drive Programme processes, as well as local and regional Domestic Abuse forums.

- 2.4 The Council will be mindful that service users may have experienced domestic abuse in their childhood or past. Staff will listen, believe, and support service users to access support when required.
- 2.5 The Council will be mindful that service users may be or may have been reported abusers of domestic abuse. The Council believe it is their role to hold reported abusers to account for their behaviour and understand it is the Council's responsibility to sign-post reported abusers to specialist agencies who can provide them with appropriate support.
- 2.6 The Council commits to providing or making available training for staff on how to collaborate effectively with survivors and reported abusers of domestic abuse.
- 2.7 The Council will consider all disclosures of domestic abuse as a safeguarding concern and will refer to the organisational Safeguarding Policy to ensure disclosures are made at the right time, with the relevant agencies and recorded appropriately.

3. Diversity Implications

- 3.1 The Council recognise that domestic abuse can occur to anybody regardless of their demographic make-up. However, the research shows that most abuse is perpetrated by men against women. Women are more likely than men to suffer repeat incidents of domestic abuse, and serious physical or mental injury or death.
- 3.2 Children under 18 years are recognised directly and indirectly as prevalent victims of domestic abuse which has a significant impact on experiences across their life span.
- 3.3 People with disabilities can face disproportionately high-risk levels of domestic abuse. In some cases, the primary perpetrator of domestic abuse may be a carer.
- 3.4 Minority groups are also more likely to be affected by domestic abuse. This

may include black minority ethnic, lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or transgender and those with vulnerable immigration status who may face further barriers to disclosure and reporting.

Some of these barriers might include:

- Increased stigma or isolation.
- Language barrier.
- Lack of familiarity/understanding around the statutory support systems.
- Previous experiences of discrimination.

4. Policy Objectives

- 4.1 Improve the quality of the Council's workforce by providing training, and a raised understanding of the dynamics and impact of domestic abuse.
- 4.2 Maintain a pool of domestic abuse specialists who can provide guidance, listening support and risk identification, if necessary, to staff who have received a disclosure of domestic abuse from a service user.
- 4.3 Early identification of domestic abuse to ensure survivors receive a trauma-informed, client-led response.
- 4.4 Provide sanctuary for any survivor and their children fleeing domestic abuse through well-trained staff and the Sanctuary Scheme.
- 4.5 Employees will know how to sign-post reported abusers for support to change their behaviours.

5. Legal Obligations and/or responsibility

5.1 The Council recognise its legal responsibilities in line with:

- Serious Crime Act 2015.
- Human Rights Act 2000.
- Crime and Disorder Act 1998.
- Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004.
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997.
- Modern Slavery Act 2015.
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
- Equality Act 2010
- Part VI and Part VII Housing Act 1996

- Homeless Reduction Act 2017
- Social Housing Regulation Act 2021

6. Definition

6.1 The Council has adopted the statutory definition of Domestic Abuse, from the Domestic Abuse Act, 2021 which identifies domestic abuse as:

“Domestic abuse is any single incident, course of conduct or pattern of abusive behaviour between individuals aged 16 or over who are personally connected to each other as a result of being, or having been, intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. Children who see, hear or experience the effects of the abuse and are related to either of the parties are also considered victims of domestic abuse.”

6.2 Behaviour is abusive if it consists of any of the following:

- Physical or sexual abuse.
- Violent or threatening behaviour.
- Controlling or coercive behaviour.
- Economic abuse; or
- Psychological, emotional, or other abuse.

This includes incidences where the abusive party directs their behaviour at another person (e.g. a child).

6.3 **Economic** abuse means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on someone’s ability to acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or obtain goods or services.

6.4 **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.

6.5 **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.

6.6 This definition incorporates harmful traditional practices including, but not limited to, so called 'honour' based violence, 'honour' killings, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

6.7 The Council recognise 'honour'-based abuse as 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.

6.8 **Personally connected means two people who:**

- Are, or have been, married to each other.
- Are, or have been, civil partners of each other.
- Have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been ended).
- Have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been ended).
- Are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other.
- Have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child.
- Are relatives.

6.9 **Children as victims of domestic abuse:**

- Sees or hears, or experiences the effect of, the abuse and is related to either person.
- The person is a parent of, or has parental responsibility for, the child.
- The child and person are related.
- Child means person under the age of 18 years.
- Psychological.
- Physical.
- Sexual.

- Financial.
- Emotional.

7. Policy Scope

7.1 This policy applies to survivors and/or reported abusers of domestic abuse, as well as their families. This policy must be applied in conjunction with the following Council documents:

- Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy.
- Lone Worker Procedure/Health & Safety Policy.
- Modern Slavery Statement.
- Employee Domestic Abuse Policy.

and;

- Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy.
- Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategy.
- Out of Hours Standby Procedures.
- Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Pathway.
- Oxfordshire Young People's Domestic Abuse Pathway.

8. Roles and Responsibilities

The Council's Chief Executive:

- Has overall responsibility for the implementation and application of this Policy.
- Is responsible for ensuring that all Council Members and staff are made aware of their obligations, and that they carry them out in a safe and proper manners as detailed in the Policy or other related documents.

Members of the Council's senior leadership team have a responsibility to ensure that the Policy is understood and implemented.

Managers in the Council:

- Are required to ensure that the Policy is understood and implemented by their staff.

- Are required to have an awareness of domestic abuse and trauma informed approaches.
- Are responsible for the well-being of their staff.
- Can mitigate vicarious trauma by providing regular case supervision, signposting to additional support and de-briefing when required with their frontline staff to mitigate against vicarious trauma.
- Line Managers who have a Domestic Abuse Champion within their team should give them the flexibility and time to conduct their role effectively.

The Council's Domestic Abuse Lead is responsible for providing advice and guidance on the policy and related procedures to managers and employees.

Domestic Abuse Champions

- Are frontline staff who have an enhanced and specialist knowledge of domestic abuse.
- Are responsible for ensuring survivor's voices are considered on a regular basis and that this feedback shapes service initiatives and improvements.
- Are responsible for providing vital advice to staff, stakeholders and members of the public who may approach with concerns about domestic abuse. Their contact details can be found on the staff intranet.
- Should ensure they are up to date with new legislation with regards to domestic abuse and have regular refresher training.

All employees and workers are responsible for understanding and adhering to this policy.

9. Confidentiality

In accordance with the Council's Data Protection Policy, any disclosure of domestic abuse will be treated as sensitive personal information and therefore in the strictest of confidence, unless the Council have a duty to disclose information to:

- Protect the person experiencing abuse

- Prevent harm to someone else, or
- Prevent or detect a crime.

10. Related documents

This policy must be applied in conjunction with the following documents:

- Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy
- Lone Worker Procedure/Health and Safety Policy.
- Modern Slavery Statement.
- Domestic Abuse Policy for Employees.
- Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy.
- Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategy.
- Out of Hours Standby Procedures.
- Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Pathway.
- Oxfordshire Young People's Domestic Abuse Pathway.
- Data Protection Policy

11. Policy Owner

11.1 The Council's Domestic Abuse Lead.

12 Monitoring and Review

12.1 The policy will be reviewed every 2 years by the Domestic Abuse Lead.
And if there are any changes in legislation/law.

12.2

13 Version Control

13.1 **Review Period:** Every two years.

Version	Status	Date	Author	Comments	Next Review
1	Draft	26.11.2024	Liz Jones		
2	Draft	26.11.2024	Liz Jones	Shared with Policy Group	
3	Draft	28.01.2025	Liz Jones	Policy feedback Group	
4	Draft	02.01.2025	Liz jones	Shared with Unison for feedback	
5	Draft	30.01.2025	Liz Jones	Shared with Ali Daly (Legal)	
7	Draft	31.01.2025	Liz Jones	Shared with Richard Adams Head of Community Safety	

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