



St Albans City and District Council Domestic Abuse Policy

**Hertfordshire Domestic Abuse Line
08 088 088 088**

Policy:	Domestic Abuse Policy
Scope:	This policy outlines St Albans City and District Council's zero tolerance approach to tackling domestic abuse, supporting victims and survivors of domestic abuse, and working to prevent further incidents. The policy applies to the Council's work with members of the public and staff.
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Connected Policies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disciplinary Policy • Bullying and Harassment Policy

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1.0 Introduction

The terms ‘we’, ‘us’ and ‘our’, refer to St Albans City and District Council (SADC).

St Albans City and District Council has zero tolerance for violence and abuse. This policy will outline how we will tackle domestic abuse, support victims and survivors of domestic abuse, and work to prevent further incidents.

This policy applies to our work with members of the public and all SADC staff.

The Council lead for domestic abuse is in contact with survivors and those with lived experience. This has informed the processes and content of this Policy.

Domestic abuse has a devastating impact on victims and survivors, their families, and the wider community. It can happen to anyone, in any type of relationship, including ex-partners, family members or those who have or had parental responsibility for a child.

We know domestic abuse is rarely confined to a single incident, may not involve physical abuse, and typically forms a pattern of coercive or controlling behaviour. This policy links into our wider work to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls, known as VAWG.

We understand the serious and enduring impact which can be caused by domestic abuse.

2.0 Definitions

2.1 St Albans City and District Council will use all the supportive, preventative and legal powers available to assist survivors who have reported abuse, in line with their wishes and needs.

2.2 The Statutory definition of **domestic violence** is contained in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 as follows:

(2) Behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is “domestic abuse” if —

(a) A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and

(b) the behaviour is abusive.

(3) Behaviour is “abusive” if it consists of any of the following —

(a) physical or sexual abuse;

(b) violent or threatening behaviour; (c) controlling or coercive behaviour;

(d) economic abuse (see subsection (4));

(e) psychological, emotional or other abuse;

and it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

(4) “Economic abuse” means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B's ability to —

(a) acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or

(b) obtain goods or services.

2.3 Coercive control

Coercive control is defined as “Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or 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. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

2.4 Controlling behaviour

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”.

2.5 Domestic abuse also includes female genital mutilation (FGM), cutting and forced marriage - the victims of which are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

3.0 Policy Details

3.1 This policy recognises that domestic abuse is disproportionately experienced by women and girls and disproportionately perpetrated by men and boys. However, anyone can be subjected to domestic abuse, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, disability, or background. Equally, anyone can be a perpetrator of domestic abuse.

3.2 The aims of this policy are to:

- Ensure all members of the public who mention they have experienced domestic abuse, receive advice and assistance according to their individual needs, wishes and in line with good practice.
- Ensure all employees who mention they have experienced domestic abuse receive advice and assistance according to their individual needs, wishes and in line with good practice.
- Ensure that employees know that support is available and that managers are aware of how they can support the health, safety and wellbeing of team members who are impacted by domestic abuse.
- Signpost members of the public and employees subjected to domestic abuse to appropriate services.
- Provide the framework to enable employees subjected to domestic abuse opportunity to continue working, and to do so safely whilst remaining productive and efficient.
- Reinforce SADC's zero tolerance attitude towards domestic abuse.
- Signpost perpetrators, who voluntarily wish to seek advice and support to address their behaviour, to specialist services.

3.3 It is important to be aware that:

- People with disabilities are more likely to experience domestic abuse than non-disabled people.
- The carers of people with disabilities, illnesses and mental health needs may also be more likely to experience abuse.
- LGBTQ+ people might not be open about their sexuality at work, meaning to disclose abuse may involve coming out.
- Men find it more difficult to disclose abuse and often find more barriers to accessing support, however, men are slightly more likely than women to talk to a colleague about what is happening to them.
- People who regularly work from home can more easily feel isolated.
- People at work may feel that disclosing abuse to their employers will harm their professional reputation or livelihood.
- Make no assumptions about older employees - abuse does not discriminate and can happen to people of any age.
- Some women from some ethnic minority communities may be made responsible for their family's 'honour'. When abuse is disclosed, it can increase risk of harm and brings with it wider impact and far-reaching consequences as people may feel their 'honour' has been compromised.

3.4 If a person does come forward and express that they are being subjected to domestic abuse, it is important that they are believed and listened to without judgement.

3.5 For further information on identification of and responding to perpetrators, see the Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse section below.

4.0 Providing support – taking action

- 4.1 A “blanket” policy will not be applied to the support offered and decisions taken.
- 4.2 At all times, we will ensure that the wishes of the person making the report, including their individual risks and personal circumstances are at the centre of our response. This is also known as a Whole Housing approach.
- 4.2.1 This also applies to the approach taken to perpetrators to ensure our actions do not increase risk.

4.3 The Council is committed to a Whole Housing Approach.

- 4.4 A report of domestic abuse could be made in person at the Civic Centre, via the telephone, by e-mail, or to an Officer visiting someone in their own home. It is crucial at this stage that a sympathetic and professional approach is taken to encourage the person reporting to feel confident in disclosing the details, as this may be the first time that they have reported the issues.
- 4.5 A DASH risk assessment will be offered for every person who mentions or indicates that they may have experienced domestic abuse. This risk assessment uses standard and recognised questions to arrive at a risk level. This risk level determines how the case will be managed by the Council and other agencies. It is also possible to use professional judgement to override the score in favour of a higher risk.
- 4.6 When completing a risk assessment, or during an interview, the reporting person should always be advised that a referral will be made, regardless of consent, to Children Services or Adult Care Services if it is felt that a child, or an adult at risk, is at risk of or suffering from abuse.
- 4.7 Community Protection staff will attend MARAC meetings and will feed back to relevant staff with actions and decisions.
- 4.8 For a joint tenancy, it is important that Officers provide advice on the full range of available legal options and implications, if approached by one or both tenants. This ensures that all available routes can be considered as soon as possible, which then reduces the risks involved.

5.0 Clare’s Law (DVDS)

- 5.1 Members of the public and employees should be made aware of Clare’s Law, also known as the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS). This police-run scheme allows the police to disclose information to a victim or potential victim of domestic abuse, to see if their current or ex-partner has a previous history of violence and abusive offending.
- 5.2 To request information under Clare’s Law, see:

<https://www.herts.police.uk/rqo/request/ri/request-information/cl/triage/v2/request-information-under-clares-law/>

6.0 Phoenix Programme

The Phoenix Scheme is in partnership with the housing repairs contractor, Morgan Sindall. The Council offers assistance and training for survivors to help them restore their confidence and develop their skills to enter or re-enter the workplace.

This scheme provides specific training, assistance with job applications, CV building, mentoring, work experience, help managing personal finances and interview skills.

7.0 Training

7.1 All relevant frontline staff will attend regular training and briefings on domestic abuse. This will cover local provisions, with training provided by, for example, a local Refuge J9 Champion, along with more specialist input from agencies such as Jewish Women's Aid.

7.2 The Council Lead Officer for Domestic Abuse is trained as a MARAC Chair and regularly Chairs MARAC meetings. They are also the Chair of the County Practice and Partnership Group, which brings together over 30 agencies working to tackle domestic abuse.

7.3 As a result of this work, the Lead Officer can share ongoing details of good practice and feedback from the meetings, to enable staff to provide the best and most appropriate response for survivors.

8.0 Violence Against Women and Girls

The Council is committed to eliminating Violence Against Women and Girls and our work on Domestic Abuse is one element of this. We assist the police with our CCTV service during specific night-time patrols, known as Operation Vigilant. This Operation targets those offenders who harass and abuse women and girls. We also provide access to the Hollie Guard extra app, which is a safety device available on all mobile phones. At the strategic level, we also participate in the County Violence and Women and Girls partnership group and attend the police scrutiny panel that assesses these particular offences, to see if cases are being dealt with correctly. We also participate in wider awareness raising events with local community groups including sixteen days of activism and Orange the World.

9.0 White Ribbon

The Council is an accredited member of the White Ribbon programme. This is a national charity that specifically engages men and boys to challenge behaviour towards women and girls. We have a multi-agency steering group which plans a number of actions. This has included working with St Albans FC, amending taxi licensing Policy to ensure card payments are accepted to increase night time safety, and providing specific training.

10.0 Support for Staff

10.1 It is SADC's intention to deal constructively, compassionately, and sympathetically with cases of domestic abuse.

10.2 SADC has zero tolerance for domestic abuse and will support all those who are subjected to and/or witness domestic abuse. We will also hold SADC employees perpetrating domestic abuse to account.

10.3 What should a Line Manager do?

10.3.1 Changes in an employee's behaviour may arise as a result of a range of different circumstances. It is important that a manager does not make assumptions but remains open and approachable to encourage members of staff to come forward should they wish to discuss a sensitive matter with them.

10.3.2 As a manager, you may be the first to become aware when a member of staff is subjected to domestic abuse – or perpetrating domestic abuse - through your general monitoring of attendance and performance within your teams.

10.3.4 Ensure that you conduct regular one to one supervision meetings with all members of your team and use these meetings to create a positive environment that allows employees to approach you with matters that may concern them.

10.3.5 Be alert to the signs and take responsibility to enquire sensitively should you have any concerns or identify performance issues, increased absenteeism or presentism, or changes in behaviour.

10.3.6 For members of staff who work from home and are being subjected to domestic abuse, we must first acknowledge that this could be more than a shift to virtual platforms.

10.3.7 The hybrid way we work can remove the workplace as a safe space. As a manager, you should consider what steps you will take to keep in touch with an employee subjected to domestic abuse remotely.

10.3.8 If you are made aware of a member of staff being subjected to domestic abuse it is important to remember the following:

- It is the exertion of power and control by the perpetrator that is the cause of domestic abuse.
- It is the perpetrator that is responsible, and accountable, for the abuse.
- Seek to identify a nearby room or area as a 'safe space' for disclosure and access to further information and support.
- Be sensitive and empathetic.
- Give space and time to your employee.
- Listen to your employee.
- Remain non-judgemental.
- Know how to support your employee and how to signpost to other specialist services and support.
- Support your employee in making their choices and decisions.
- Consider consulting with or signposting your employee to a workplace Domestic Abuse Champion.
- Consider reasonable time off for related appointments (such as legal, housing, financial and health).
- Advise your employee of the confidential professional advice and support provided through SADC's employee assistance programme.
- Treat unplanned absences or temporary poor timekeeping sympathetically.
- Consider and discuss with your employee what arrangements could be made at work which may support your employee and help keep them safe, for example:
 - Flexible working arrangements: such as changes in working patterns in instances where the perpetrator is also within the workplace, knows the address of the workplace as well as the time the employee arrives or leaves work, or changes to specific duties or workload.
- Use of an agreed code word, phrase, or other signal to raise an alert discretely and safely that the employee can use if unable to talk at a particular time.
- Daily check-ins or calls with a colleague, especially if working from home or 'out and about', including checking that staff have arrangements for getting safely to and from home.
- Agree with the employee what to tell colleagues and how they should respond if the perpetrator telephones or visits the workplace.
- Consider if a change of workplace could be facilitated as a temporary measure.

- Ensure that your employee's details are removed from public information or public facing arenas. This can be especially important if their perpetrator or their perpetrator's friends/family members also work at SADC.

11.0 Confidentiality

- 11.1** Where an employee has discussions with their Line Manager, an alternative Line Manager, the HR Service Desk, or Domestic Abuse Champion that they are being subjected to domestic abuse, confidentiality will be maintained as far as possible in line with SADC procedures. There are, however, circumstances in which confidentiality cannot be assured. These circumstances occur when there are concerns about children or vulnerable adults, where high risk to safety has been identified, or where we need to act to protect the safety of members of the public, including other colleagues.
- 11.2** Where an employee or family member(s) are in immediate danger, this will be reported to the police. Reporting in non-emergency instances will be subject to prior discussion with the employee whenever it is reasonably practicable to do so.
- 11.3** Personal data will be stored in accordance with SADC's data protection policy.

12.0 Leave arrangements

Where an employee needs time off to access support and/or manage any legal issues or family requirements, employees should discuss this with their Line Manager (who should contact the HR Service Desk) to agree how much leave is required and the leave types available. These may include Emergency Leave (paid), Flexible Working, Annual Leave and Unpaid Leave.

SADC recognises that for some employees, the workplace will be a sanctuary or safe place. This may result in some employees wanting to be supported to continue working, or perhaps spend more time at work.

13.0 Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse

- 13.1** SADC will not tolerate or condone domestic abuse, regardless of the identity or seniority of the perpetrator. If SADC becomes aware that an employee is or may be perpetrating domestic abuse, we will take appropriate action, which could include disciplinary action in line with the Disciplinary Policy.
- 13.2** Any domestic abuse that endangers another employee or uses company equipment to inflict that abuse, such as mobile phones or laptops, will result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal for Gross Misconduct. Disciplinary action may be appropriate in some circumstances even where the perpetrator's behaviour takes place outside work.

13.3 SADC recognises that in some cases it may be appropriate to signpost employees who disclose that they themselves are perpetrators of domestic abuse and who genuinely want to change their behaviour to specialist services.

13.4 Managers should refer any employee disclosing as a perpetrator and expressing a desire and willingness to seek help to change their behaviour, to the local **Chrysalis Centre**. This is the Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire-wide gateway for perpetrators, providing education and support to enable healthy, safe and positive relationships.

14.0 Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

14.1 Under the Equality Act (2010), the Council has a legal duty to fulfil the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).

14.2 Through this duty, the Council will carry out its functions in a way that:

a) Removes discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is unlawful under the Equality Act (2010)

b) Promotes equal opportunities between people who have a protected characteristic(s) and those who don't

c) Encourages good relations between people who have a protected characteristic(s) and those who don't

14.3 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been carried out during the development of this policy. The EIA highlights that this policy will draw attention to staff and members of the public that domestic abuse can happen to anyone, regardless of their gender, age, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, disability, or background, but some people are more likely to experience domestic abuse than others. This policy will therefore aim to have a positive impact on people with certain protected characteristics, by highlighting this.

For example, this policy draws attention to the fact that no assumption can be made about older employees or residents. Domestic abuse can happen to people of any age. Similarly, it draws attention to those with disabilities. Those with disabilities are more likely to experience domestic abuse than non-disabled people.

Domestic abuse can also be more hidden in certain faith communities. The individual nature of this policy will assist in identifying and dealing with this.

There are more incidents of domestic abuse during and after pregnancy. By acknowledging this, it is used as a risk measure when interviewing someone.

Overall, this policy works to support victims and survivors of domestic abuse and prevent future incidents of domestic abuse.

Communication and Consultation

Policies are held on our website along with details of the services we provide. Paper copies including an easy read version can be available upon request. Requests can also be made for responses in other formats.

SADC will circulate the policy amongst the voluntary and community sectors within the district.

15.0 Domestic Abuse Related Death Review

This was previously called a Domestic Homicide Review (DHR). This review will take place whenever there is a death (including suicide), that has, or appears to have, resulted from domestic abuse. This includes physical abuse, along with controlling or coercive behaviour and emotional and economic abuse. The goal is to help to ensure that lessons are learned from fatal domestic abuse cases.

Appendix 1 – Useful Contacts

<p>Hertfordshire Domestic Abuse Website – www.hertssunflower.org</p> <p>Safer Places advice and assistance service - 03301 025811 (24 Hour emergency Line) E-mail: info@safeplaces.co.uk Website: www.saferplaces.co.uk</p>
<p>St Albans and Hertsmere Women’s Refuge - 01727 824425 Outreach service 01727 827621</p>
<p>Hertfordshire Domestic Abuse Helpline – 08 088 088 088 An information line giving advice and information</p>
<p>National Domestic Violence Helpline – 0808 2000 247 24 hr helpline run in partnership between Womens Aid and Refuge</p>
<p>National Centre for Domestic Violence (NCDV) – 0844 8044 999 Legal advice and help with injunctions</p>
<p>Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) – 01707 638420 Support and advice for persons aged 16 and over.</p>
<p>NSPCC – 0808 800 5000 Help with child protection issues</p>
<p>Southall Black Sisters – 0208 571 0800 Advice for black and ethnic minority women</p>
<p>ManKind: advice and support for men experiencing domestic abuse - www.mankind.org.uk/help-for-victims Men's Advice Line: 0808 801 0327 - Confidential helpline for male victims of domestic abuse and those supporting them. Or visit www.mensadvice.org.uk</p>
<p>Broken Rainbow 0300 999 5428 24 hr helpline for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender victims</p>
<p>Karma Nirvana - Forced Marriage and Honour Based Abuse: 0800 5999 247.</p>
<p>Hourglass: Supporting Older Victims of Abuse: 24/7 helpline 0808 808 8141 or free text 078 6005 2906 .</p>
<p>Jewish Women’s Aid – 0808 801 0500 Help for victims from the Jewish community.</p>
<p>National Rape & Sexual Abuse Support Line: 24/7 free phone and online chat service for anyone aged 16+ in England and Wales who has been affected by rape, child sexual abuse, sexual assault, sexual harassment or any other form of sexual violence. Call 0808 500 2222 or start an online chat (247sexualabusesupport.org.uk) .</p>
<p>Solace Women’s Aid - 0808 802 5565 Refuges, advice and information for victims from the Irish and Irish traveller community.</p>
<p>National Stalking Helpline - 0808 802 0300 - www.stalkinghelpline.org Advice on personal safety, collecting evidence and legal options</p>
<p>Victim Support - 0845 30 30 900 Information and support to victims of crime</p>
<p>Community Outreach Services (COS) – 0300 002 008</p>

Provides emotional and practical support in the community to victims and survivors of domestic abuse.

Appendix 2 - Support for Perpetrators

The Chrysalis Centre: Chrysalis Centre - the Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire-wide gateway for perpetrators, providing education and support to enable healthy, safe and positive relationships.

Respect Phone line: the national specialist non-judgemental listening and advice line.