

# SAFER STREETS

Tackling Violence  
Against Women and Girls  
in South West London

Employers - Policy Guidance



A partnership between



# EMPLOYERS - POLICY GUIDANCE

## **Violence Against Women and Girls is wholly unacceptable and inexcusable behaviour.**

Kingston, Merton, Richmond and Wandsworth Councils are working together with the Met Police as the South West London Safer Street's Partnership to tackle violence against women and girls.

We all have a role to play to help keep women and girls safe – and that includes employers. Employers should strive to create a working environment that promotes the view that abuse against people, and all forms of Violence Against Women and Girls, is unacceptable.

In the UK workforce, the 2022 Randstad Gender Equality report revealed that **72% of women have experienced inappropriate behaviour from male colleagues** and **32% believe sexual harassment in the workplace has had a negative impact on their careers**. We want women and girls in South West London to feel confident and welcome to enjoy the places where they live and work.

This document contains guidance and resources on how you, as an employer, can create or refresh your Policy on Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls, with a particular focus on domestic abuse, as the most common form.

## **What is Violence Against Women and Girls?**

The first step in tackling the issue is educating ourselves on what violence against women and girls is.

The term violence against women includes domestic abuse, rape and sexual violence and many other forms of violence that predominately affect women. They are grouped together by the term violence against women to highlight that they are a cause and consequence of women's inequality.

Domestic abuse is the most common form of Violence Against Women and Girls, **there are 2.3 million victims each year**, and it can be psychological, emotional, and coercive.

The term Violence Against Women and Girls is used due to the disproportionate effect on women. Men do experience domestic and sexual violence, in same sex relationships and from female partners and their experience may differ to women's and require specialist support.

## **The business case**

Violence against women and girls, including domestic abuse, is a productivity and performance issue that may lead to absenteeism and presenteeism in the workplace. Research from KMPG shows **UK businesses lose £316 million** in economic output each year as result of work absences related to domestic abuse. Making workplaces safe for all and supporting those experiencing violence against women and girls is important for individuals and for business.

## THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

**Employers have a legal duty, and duty of care, to ensure a safe workplace for employees. Under health and safety law employers are responsible for managing health and safety risks in their businesses.**

Under the Human Rights Act all public bodies are under obligation to ensure individual's human rights are not violated. A workplace policy will help ensure human rights duties are met in relation to incidents of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence:

- ▶ The legal obligations on domestic abuse include: the duties within the Human Rights Act (1998) and the European Convention on Human Rights to protect life and to protect individuals from inhumane and degrading treatment. And the Care Act 2015 which extends the categories of abuse to include domestic violence and abuse, demonstrating a recognition of the significance of domestic violence and abuse and the impact on children of adults at risk.
- ▶ The Equality Act 2010 states that sexual harassment is a form of unlawful discrimination. The law says it's sexual harassment if the behaviour is either meant to, or has the effect of: violating your dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.
- ▶ There is also the **Worker Protection Bill (Amendment of Equality Act 2010)** currently being read in Parliament (March 2023). The Bill introduces a duty on organisations to prevent sexual harassment and reinstates employer liability for third-party harassment. The new duty on employers to take all reasonable steps to eliminate sexual harassment in the workplace will be enforceable by the equality regulator, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). The changes may not be operational until early 2024.

### Taking action as an employer

Every organisation is different, and your approach should reflect the size and structure of your business. Taking simple steps can be incredibly effective in supporting employees. There are key actions for employers wanting to help create safer spaces for women and girls:

- ▶ Engage your employees and networks to raise awareness of the issue
- ▶ Download Safer Streets toolkit which includes tools such as a Bystander Guide and education materials for employees
- ▶ Review and update your business policies on Violence Against Women and Girls



## ESTABLISHING A WORKPLACE POLICY

Establishing a workplace policy and offering specific guidance on Violence Against Women and Girls is critical to:

- ▶ Raise awareness of the issue
- ▶ Identify responsibilities and the process for support for disclosures
- ▶ Create a culture where employees feel able to disclose domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is the most prevalent form of violence against women and workplace policies should outline the support and guidance for those experiencing, or those who have previously experienced, domestic abuse. However, it is critical to note that sexual violence and harassment often come hand-in-hand with domestic abuse.

The [Employer's Initiative on Domestic Abuse](#) is free to join and offers a legally endorsed policy template that organisations can adapt to meet the needs of its employees.



An effective policy will:

- ▶ Make an organisational commitment to oppose all forms of Violence Against Women and Girls
- ▶ Define Violence Against Women and Girls, which can be based on the definition given by the [United Nations Declaration](#) in the elimination of violence against women, and include guidance on the signs to look out for
- ▶ Be regularly reviewed
- ▶ Make employees aware that misconduct in and outside the workplace can result in disciplinary action and that Violence Against Women and Girls can lead to a criminal conviction
- ▶ Clearly identify the roles and responsibilities for managers and HR
- ▶ Create a culture where people feel safe to disclose any issues related to Violence Against Women and Girls (see the Safer Streets Disclosure Guide)
- ▶ A commitment to confidentiality and safeguarding
- ▶ Signpost support and services at a local and national level and provide information on workplace support measures
- ▶ Consider reasonable adjustments for those whose health and performance are adversely affected
- ▶ Be distributed to all employees

**The Equality and Human Rights Commission also suggests some practical support measures for employers to consider when creating a policy:**

- ▶ Using existing policies to allow an individual to change work patterns or workload and allow flexible or more flexible working or special leave to facilitate any practical arrangements
- ▶ Diverting phone calls and email messages
- ▶ Alerting reception and security staff if the abuser is known to come to the workplace
- ▶ Providing a copy of any existing orders against the abuser and a photograph of the abuser to reception and security staff
- ▶ Checking that staff have arrangements for getting safely to and from home
- ▶ Reviewing content of personal information, such as temporary or new addresses, bank or health care details
- ▶ Reviewing the employee's next of kin information
- ▶ Where practical, considering offering a temporary or permanent change of workplace, working times/ patterns
- ▶ Where practical, offering changes in specific duties, such as not expecting the employee to answer telephones or sit on reception
- ▶ Moving the employee out of public view i.e. ensuring that they are not visible from reception points or ground floor windows
- ▶ Ensuring that the employee does not work alone or in an isolated area
- ▶ Agreeing with the employee what to tell colleagues and how they should respond if the violent partner/ ex-partner telephones or visits the workplace

- ▶ Keeping a record of any incidents of abuse on the workplace, including persistent telephone calls, emails or visits to the employee by their partner/ ex-partner

**Employers should also consider:**

- ▶ Providing further training to people so they know the steps to take to support colleagues (and clients, where relevant)
- ▶ Engaging with your extended business network, such as your supply chain and network of clients/customers. Spread the word about what you are doing to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls and encourage them to support the initiatives – see the Safer Streets External Communications tools



# SIGNPOSTING AND SUPPORT

**A workplace policy should include internal processes for reporting and support as well as information on further external resources and reporting measures:**

## Local services:

Email: [safer.merton@merton.gov.uk](mailto:safer.merton@merton.gov.uk)

Website: [merton.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/crime-prevention-and-community-safety/vawg/safer-streets](https://merton.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/crime-prevention-and-community-safety/vawg/safer-streets)

## Regional and national Services:

### Police

- ▶ In an emergency, call 999
- ▶ In a non-emergency, call 101
- ▶ **StreetSafe** is a service for anyone to anonymously tell us about public places where you have felt or feel unsafe, because of environmental issues, e.g. street lighting, abandoned buildings or vandalism and/or because of some behaviours, e.g. being followed or verbally abused
- ▶ **Walk & Talks** are open to women aged 18 and above, living or working in London, who would like to go for a walk with an officer in their local area and discuss their views on women's safety
- ▶ **Report Domestic Abuse**
- ▶ **Report a Crime**

## National and regional helplines

- ▶ National Domestic Violence Helpline: 0808 200 0247 (24 hours)
- ▶ Pan London Harmful Practices Helpline: 0808 169 4455
- ▶ **GALOP** (LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline): 0800 999 5428
- ▶ **Men's Advice Line** (support for male survivors): 0808 801 0327  
[info@mensadviceline.org.uk](mailto:info@mensadviceline.org.uk)
- ▶ **Hourglass** – support around elder abuse: 0808 808 8141
- ▶ **Rape Crisis South London** - 0808 802 9999 or [info@rasasc.org.uk](mailto:info@rasasc.org.uk)
- ▶ **Respect Phone Line** - Confidential helpline for people who are being abusive and want help to change: 0808 802 4040
- ▶ **National Stalking Helpline**: 0808 802 0300

## Sources

- ▶ **CIPD and EHRC, Managing and supporting employees experiencing domestic abuse: a guide for employers**
- ▶ **Equality and Human Rights Commission - Domestic abuse: workplace policies and managing and supporting employees**
- ▶ The **Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse**
- ▶ **Business in the Community: Domestic Abuse**
- ▶ **Unison - Domestic violence and abuse: a trade union issue. Includes 'Model workplace agreement on domestic violence and abuse**