



ORKNEY
ISLANDS COUNCIL

Item: 2

Human Resources Sub-committee: 1 September 2026.

Supporting Colleagues Experiencing Gender-Based Violence including Domestic Abuse Policy.

Report by Director of Infrastructure and Organisational Development.

1. Overview

- 1.1. This report presents a new policy on Supporting colleagues experiencing Gender-Based Violence including Domestic Abuse, for members' approval.
- 1.2. Gender-Based Violence, including domestic abuse, can have a significant impact on employees' safety, wellbeing, attendance and performance at work. As a key employer in Orkney, the Council has a responsibility to create a safe, supportive and inclusive workplace where employees affected by Gender-Based Violence (GBV) including Domestic Abuse can access appropriate support and workplace adjustments.
- 1.3. The Supporting Colleagues Experiencing Gender-Based Violence, including Domestic Abuse Policy, attached at Appendix 1 to this report, supports the Council's commitment to employee wellbeing, equality, inclusion and prevention of violence against women and girls. It also aligns with Scotland's Equally Safe Strategy and the Council's participation in the Equally Safe at Work accreditation programme.
- 1.4. By introducing this Policy, the Council aims to reduce stigma, raise awareness, and ensure that any colleague affected by GBV is able to access timely, compassionate and appropriate support. It also helps equip managers with the knowledge and confidence to respond effectively, contributing to a safer, more supportive organisational culture for everyone.
- 1.5. The Policy has been subject to significant input and feedback from appropriate partner stakeholders.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. It is recommended that members of the Sub-committee:
 - i. Approve the Supporting Colleagues Experiencing Gender-Based Violence, including Domestic Abuse Policy, attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

3. Background

- 3.1. Gender-Based Violence is recognised as a significant societal issue which affects individuals regardless of age, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability or background, although evidence shows that women and girls are disproportionately affected. The impact of GBV can extend to anyone in the workplace, affecting safety and wellbeing as well as attendance and productivity.
- 3.2. The Council is committed to providing a safe working environment where employees feel supported and able to seek help when required. While a range of existing employment policies provide support relating to wellbeing, absence management and equality, there is currently no standalone policy specifically addressing GBV including Domestic Abuse.
- 3.3. The purpose of the Policy is to:
 - i. Increase awareness and understanding of gender-based violence and domestic abuse.
 - ii. Encourage employees to seek support where required.
 - iii. Provide managers with guidance on responding to disclosures appropriately and sensitively.
 - iv. Outline workplace support arrangements and reasonable adjustments.
 - v. Signpost employees to specialist support organisations and services.
 - vi. Support a workplace culture that is safe, inclusive and trauma informed.

4. Consultation

- 4.1. The draft Policy has been developed by Human Resources and Organisational Development and informed by best practice, Equally Safe at Work principles and consultation with relevant stakeholders including recognised Trade Unions and appropriate internal and external partners. Feedback received during development has been incorporated into the final draft policy where appropriate.

For Further Information please contact:

Andrew Groundwater, Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, extension 2253, Email andrew.groundwater@orkney.gov.uk.

Implications of Report

1. **Financial** – There are no significant direct financial implications arising from approval of this policy. Implementation may result in limited costs associated with management support, staff training, workplace adjustments, temporary cover arrangements and employee wellbeing measures. Any such costs are expected to be

managed within existing service budgets and may be offset by benefits arising from improved employee wellbeing, attendance and retention.

2. **Legal** – Although there is no statutory requirement for a standalone Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Domestic Abuse policy, the proposed Policy supports the Council in meeting its duties as an employer in relation to employee wellbeing, equality (specifically relating to reducing gender inequality), health and safety, and data protection. The Policy has been developed with regard to the Equality Act 2010 and the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018.
3. **Corporate Governance** – Not applicable.
4. **Human Resources** – HR implications are covered within the body of the report.
5. **Equalities** – An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and is attached as Appendix 2 to this report.
6. **Island Communities Impact** - As this policy is unlikely to have an effect on an island community which is significantly different from its effect on other communities (including other island communities) within Orkney, a full Island Communities Impact Assessment has not been undertaken.
7. **Links to Council Plan:** The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the following Council Plan strategic priorities:
 - ☐ Growing our economy.
 - ☐ Strengthening our communities.
 - ☐ Developing our Infrastructure.
 - ☒ Transforming our Council.
8. **Links to Local Outcomes Improvement Plan:** The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the following Local Outcomes Improvement Plan priorities:
 - ☐ Cost of Living.
 - ☐ Sustainable Development.
 - ☒ Local Equality.
 - ☐ Improving Population Health.
9. **Environmental and Climate Risk** – Not applicable.
10. **Risk** – Not applicable.
11. **Procurement** – Not applicable.
12. **Health and Safety** – None arising directly from this report.
13. **Property and Assets** – Not applicable.
14. **Information Technology** – Not applicable.
15. **Cost of Living** – This is covered within the Equality Impact Assessment under socio-economic disadvantage.

List of Background Papers

None.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Gender-Based Violence including Domestic Abuse Policy.

Appendix 2 – Equality Impact Assessment.

Supporting colleagues experiencing Gender-Based Violence including Domestic Abuse

Prepared by HR and Organisational Development

Document Control Sheet

Review / approval history.

Date.	Name.	Position.	Version Approved.
TBC	General Meeting of the Council	N/A	

Change Record Table.

Date.	Author.	Version.	Status.	Reason.
Next scheduled review in xxxx.				

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Introduction

At Orkney Islands Council we believe that every colleague has the right to feel safe, valued and supported at work. We know that some colleagues may be affected by gender-based violence (GBV) including domestic abuse, either directly or through concern for someone close to them. We want you to know that you are not alone and that support is available.

This policy sets out how we will support colleagues who may be experiencing gender-based violence. It does not describe the wider statutory duties the Council holds as a local authority.

For further information on our statutory responsibilities, relevant legislation, and the multi-agency public protection framework in Orkney, including arrangements to safeguard children, adults at risk, and those affected by gender-based violence, please refer to the following resources.

- [Public Protection Committee](#)
- [Protect Orkney](#)
- [Safer Orkney - Orkney Partnership For Action Against Gender Based Violence and Abuse](#)
- [Domestic Abuse Policy for Housing Services](#)
- [Child Protection](#)

We acknowledge that GBV is rooted in gender inequality and is not just experienced by women, it can impact anyone, including men, trans and non-binary people and those in same sex-relationships. Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is recognised nationally as part of GBV but our approach aims to support all victim-survivors.

We all need to have a better understanding of how to support our colleagues and team members who are impacted by GBV and wider awareness raising is fundamental to reducing the stigma that can sometimes be attached to these types of subjects.

If you're reading this because you've been affected, we want you to know that we are here to listen and will support you to feel safe at work if you speak out. We're committed to supporting all our colleagues and it is our intention to deal constructively, compassionately, and sympathetically with cases of domestic abuse when they are reported to us.

The purpose of this policy is to help you understand what gender-based violence is and give you information about what help is available both inside and outside of work whether you need it for yourself or to help someone else.

The aims of this policy are:

- To encourage us to talk more about gender-based violence (GBV) including domestic abuse.
- For those experiencing any form of GBV, to feel you can ask for the support you need.
- For managers to have the knowledge and confidence to know what to do if you need to provide support to a team member through this time.
- To give all colleagues information about where to access further guidance and support.
- To signpost specialist external organisations who can provide additional help and advocacy support.

If you are a concerned manager or colleague reading this policy, it's important to remember it's not your responsibility to be an expert on GBV or take on the role of counsellor. What you can do is be alert to the potential signs, provide support by listening and signpost to the appropriate, specialist help at the end of this policy.

If you're a manager and want to know more about how to help a colleague, you can read our guide for managers.

Who this policy is for

This policy applies to all employees of Orkney Islands Council, whether you're in a permanent or temporary role. It covers staff employed under Scottish Joint Council (SJC), Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT), Orkney College Academic (NJNC), and Chief Officials terms and conditions.

What is Gender-Based Violence?

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is a broad term that includes domestic abuse, sexual violence, coercive control, harassment, stalking, so-called 'honour-based' abuse, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, and other forms of violence rooted in gender inequality.

We recognise the definition used nationally and by specialist services that describes domestic abuse as a pattern of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading or violent behaviour between people who are personally connected. This includes people who are, or have previously been married, in civil partnerships or in relationships, or have a child together, or are relatives, including abuse of adult parents or adult children.

Gender-Based Violence can include (but is not limited to):

- Physical or sexual harm.
- Violent or threatening behaviour.
- Controlling or coercive behaviour.
- Economic or Financial Abuse.
- Digital or online Abuse.
- Psychological and emotional abuse.
- Stalking or harassment.
- Abuse linked to gender norms or expectations.
- 'Honour-based' abuse, forced marriage or Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

Abuse can occur in any relationship regardless of gender, age, family structure, sexual orientation or cultural background, While GBV disproportionately affects women and girls, anyone can experience harm.

Recognising the signs of gender-based violence

Knowing the signs of gender-based violence is an important first step in ensuring that support can be offered.

It's important to remember that GBV including domestic abuse isn't always just physical abuse and can include:

- Being cut off from family and friends and intentionally isolating someone.
- Bullying, threats, or controlling behaviour.
- Controlling finances.
- Monitoring or limiting use of technology.
- Physical and/or sexual abuse.
- Controlling medication.
- Stalking either in-person or online.
- Being subjected to sexist, homophobic, transphobic or culturally-based controlling behaviours.
- Isolation linked to cultural or community pressures.
- Harassment or coercion linked to gender identity or sexual orientation.

Changes in someone's usual behaviour can be a sign that they are struggling and could benefit from a supportive check-in. The following examples can have many explanations but can be an indication of GBV:

- Frequent absence from work, lateness or needing to leave work early.
- Changes in work performance such as missed deadlines.
- Working longer or irregular hours.
- Changes in the way a colleague communicates – many personal calls or texts or a strong reaction to personal calls.
- Physical signs and symptoms such as unexplained or frequent bruises or other injuries.
- A change in behaviour – for example becoming more withdrawn than usual.
- Change in the amount of makeup worn.
- Changes in social behaviour – for example not turning up to social activities.

Telling someone

We know that you might not want to talk to anyone about what you are going through. However, you can speak to any trusted route you are most comfortable with. Your manager can provide initial support, signpost you to resources and help you with any disclosure conversations you would like to have with your colleagues. You do not have to tell your manager if that does not feel safe or comfortable.

Who you can speak to

You may choose to disclose to:

- Your line manager.
- HR and OD.
- A Wellbeing Champion.
- A Trade Union representative.
- Another trusted manager.
- A specialist external agency (e.g. Women's Aid Orkney or ORSAS).

What happens after you tell someone

There is no obligation to make a formal disclosure or take action you are not ready for. You will never be pressured to contact the police or pursue legal options unless required due to immediate risk.

If you're not ready to disclose anything to anyone at work, we would strongly encourage you to contact one of the [specialist support agencies](#) listed at the end of this policy. You may wish to seek support from one of the specialist support agencies to advocate for you when making a disclosure at work or when discussing and agreeing any workplace support plans or adjustments.

Your manager's role is to:

- Be alert to spotting the possible signs of GBV and have a supportive conversation with you if they are concerned.
- Provide initial help and support, including signposting to appropriate sources of professional help and support (like those at the end of this policy).
- Protect your confidentiality unless there is an immediate risk to your safety or a safeguarding concern involving a child or vulnerable adult.
- Support you to make any initial calls for help on a work phone if needed.
- Help you get paid differently if your abuse is financial.
- Agree measures to prioritise safety at work and make sure that your health and safety is protected.
- Help you to remain productive and efficient whilst at work.

Our **Employee Assistance Programme** also provides 24/7 access to telephone support, every day of the year. You can speak to a qualified counsellor by calling 0808 168 2143, or you can access support online through [Optima Health EAP](#) using the login details below:

Username: OIC001

Password: Wellbeing365!

If you are unsure about what you are experiencing and whether it is abuse or not, you can learn more about the signs by visiting one of the websites at the end of this policy.

If you're a manager and want to know more about how to help a colleague, you can read our guide for managers.

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Roles and Responsibilities

Supporting colleagues affected by gender-based violence is a shared responsibility. Managers and HR and OD each play an important role in ensuring that disclosures are handled sensitively, support is offered appropriately, and any risks are managed.

Managers should refer to the Supporting colleagues experiencing gender-based violence: A guide for managers for detailed guidance on how to apply this policy in practice.

The role of line managers

Line managers are often the first point of contact for colleagues who choose to disclose their experience. Their role is to provide a supportive, non-judgemental response and to help ensure that appropriate workplace support is in place.

Line managers are expected to:

- Respond to disclosures sensitively, calmly and without judgement.
- Listen and believe the colleague and respect their choices.
- Maintain confidentiality and handle information appropriately.
- Work with the colleague to identify and agree appropriate support.
- Put in place reasonable workplace adjustments to support safety and wellbeing.
- Be aware of potential safeguarding concerns and take appropriate action where required.
- Seek advice and support from HR/OD when needed.
- Keep appropriate records in line with data protection requirements.
- Continue to review and adapt support over time.

Further guidance on how to carry out these responsibilities in practice is available in the manager guide.

Managers are not expected to be experts in gender-based violence or to take on the role of counsellor. Their role is to support colleagues within the workplace and help them access appropriate internal and external support.

Detailed guidance on how to respond to disclosures, have sensitive conversations and implement support is provided in the manager guide.

The role of HR and Organisational Development (HR and OD)

HR and OD provide advice, guidance and support to ensure that situations are handled appropriately, consistently and in line with organisational policies.

HR and OD will:

- Support managers in responding to disclosures and agreeing appropriate support.
- Provide advice on workplace adjustments, safety planning and risk management.
- Help ensure a consistent and fair approach across the organisation.
- Maintain confidentiality and handle information appropriately.
- Provide guidance on how this policy links with other policies and procedures.
- Support any formal employment processes where required, including where concerns relate to conduct.
- Promote awareness, training and organisational learning on GBV.

Time off work

We know that if you are experiencing GBV including domestic abuse, you may need time away from work to manage legal or accommodation issues and deal with family demands. We also know everyone's situation will be unique. We won't assume to know how much leave you might need as everyone's situation is different and, in some cases, time off work may make things more difficult for you. This policy isn't about creating a one-size fits all approach. It's about highlighting all the different ways that we can support you, so you can decide what works best for you.

Time off or changes to working patterns would need to be agreed in discussion with your manager. We will always be led by you and agree a reasonable amount of unpaid time off to support you.

If you need to take unplanned leave you can read more in our Leave of Absence policy. You may also wish to consider using flexible working arrangements to help manage your time.

If you are off sick for reasons relating to GBV including domestic abuse, then the discretion process can be applied. Please refer to our Managing Sickness Absence policy for further details.

Confidentiality

We understand how difficult it can be to speak about abuse. If you tell someone about your experience, it will be treated as confidential information and will only be shared with others with your agreement unless there is:

- An immediate risk to your safety.
- A safeguarding concern involving a child or vulnerable adult.
- A legal requirement or overriding public protection duty.

Where confidentiality must be broken, you will be informed unless doing so puts you or others at further risk.

Any breaches of confidentiality by any colleague will be taken seriously and may be subject to disciplinary action.

Providing feedback on your experience

We recognise that choosing to disclose an experience of gender-based violence or domestic abuse takes courage. It is important that colleagues feel supported, listened to and treated with respect throughout this process.

You are encouraged to share feedback on how your disclosure or the support you received was handled. Your feedback helps us to understand what is working well and identify where we can improve our approach.

You can provide feedback in a way that feels safe and comfortable for you. This may include:

- Speaking to Organisational Development, you can make initial contact by emailing od@orkney.gov.uk.
- Providing feedback through a trusted manager, trade union representative or wellbeing champion.
- Completing our [confidential feedback form](#).

Providing feedback is entirely voluntary and will not affect any ongoing support or decisions related to your situation.

Where feedback is provided:

- It will be handled sensitively and confidentially.
- It will be reviewed by Organisational Development, to identify any learning or improvements.
- Any actions taken will focus on improving practice, support and consistency across the organisation.
- Feedback will be used in an anonymised way where possible to inform policy development, training and awareness.

We are committed to creating a culture of continuous improvement, where colleague experiences help shape how we support others in the future.

Your safety at work

Your safety is our priority. Where your experience of GBV may impact your safety at work, we will work with you to consider what measures may help you feel safer, such as:

- Screening or diverting phone calls and email messages.
- Making sure you don't work alone or in an isolated area.
- Helping you make alternative arrangements for you to travel safely to and from home or work.
- Changing contact details where appropriate.
- Planning an alternative entrance or exit from work.
- Considering a temporary change to your working patterns so they're not predictable to others.
- Agreeing what information to share with colleagues where appropriate, and how they should respond if a perpetrator visits the workplace.
- Providing a safe place to work in an OIC location even if most of your role can be carried out at home.

If you're managing someone who has disclosed GBV including domestic abuse to you, you should not directly involve yourself in the situation for example by confronting the alleged perpetrator. This could make things more difficult for them.

Your role in this situation is to:

- Provide support for your colleague in the workplace and make any adjustments to support their safety.
- Help your colleague find the right professional help.

Getting professional support and counselling

If you would prefer to speak to someone who is specially trained in GBV, you can contact one of the specialist organisations listed at the end of this policy.

Our **Employee Assistance Programme** offers direct and confidential support to all employees. This includes 24/7 access to telephone counselling, every day of the year. You can speak to a qualified counsellor by calling **0808 168 2143**, or you can access support online through [Optima Health EAP](#) using the login details below:

Username: OIC001

Password: Wellbeing365!

Making adjustments to support you

As well as making small changes to help keep you safe, there may be adjustments we can make at work to help you if you need to make temporary changes to working patterns to manage family demands.

We will work with you in a sensitive and supportive way to understand your needs and identify appropriate and reasonable support options. This may include:

- Temporary adjustments to your working hours.
- Hybrid or flexible working arrangements, if appropriate. Read more in our Hybrid and Remote Working Guidance.
- A safe and confidential space for conversations or support meetings.
- Adjustments to duties or work location to reduce contact or risk.
- Time during the working day to attend support appointments (for example solicitors, housing or social services).
- Turning your camera off when on video calls.
- Support with pay arrangements if financial abuse is occurring, **where safe to do so**.
- Signpost the support available through the Employee Assistance Programme.

Where your experience is likely to affect you at work, your manager will work with you to complete a risk assessment to understand more about how this might impact you and to discuss any adjustments you might need. They might also consider a safety plan to ensure your safety at work and they will always work with you to agree this. You can also use a Wellness Action Plan to identify how your experience has impacted you at work and use this to discuss any changes you might need. You can read more about Wellness Action Plans in our Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy or use the templates on our Staff Hub [here](#).

Finances and pay

We want you to be in control of the pay that you receive from Orkney Islands Council. If you experience economic or financial abuse you may not have control of your MyView account or have access to the pay we give you. Your manager may be able to help you to reset your MyView password and change your bank details to a bank account you have control of, where this is safe to do so.

Helping someone else

We recognise that often employees are the first to spot the signs of GBV in their colleagues. Employees may also witness behaviours linked to GBV, such as harassment or coercive control. If you are worried about a colleague, we recommend that you can contact Women's Aid Orkney on 01856 877900, or Orkney Rape and Sexual Assault Service on 01856 872298 or by emailing contact@orsas.scot.

If you see or hear an assault or think that your colleague is in an emergency situation, call 999 and report it to the Police.

Procedures and Guidance

The Council has a range of supporting procedures and guidance to support implementation of this policy. These do not form part of the approved policy and, as such, are able to be amended and updated to reflect necessary changes to support more efficient and effective recruitment for the Council without formal review.

Review and Monitoring

This policy will be reviewed by Human Resources in conjunction with recognised Trade Unions in line with the Council's schedule for reviewing all Human Resources policies and procedures, normally every five years.

Where changes to employment law, best practice recommendations, or schemes of Conditions of Service require, a review may be undertaken within this timescale by agreement with the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development.

Where provisions differ for teaching or other employee groups, this will be identified separately within the policy.

Raising awareness of gender-based violence

We recognise that GBV does not occur in isolation, it is closely linked to wider inequalities, including disparities in the types of jobs people do, how they are paid, and how they progress in the workplace.

The impact of gender-based violence on employees and the organisation

Gender-based violence (GBV), including domestic abuse, can have significant impacts on individuals and on the workplace. These impacts will be different for everyone and can affect physical health, emotional wellbeing, and day-to-day life.

For colleagues affected by GBV, this may include:

- Difficulties with concentration, confidence, or decision-making.
- Increased stress, anxiety, or trauma-related responses.
- Physical injury or ongoing health concerns.
- Sleep disruption or fatigue.
- Financial challenges, particularly where economic abuse is involved.
- Changes in attendance, such as absence, lateness, or altered working patterns.
- Feeling isolated, unsafe, or less able to engage at work.

We recognise that work can provide an important source of stability, routine, and support. However, without the right understanding and adjustments, the effects of abuse can make it more difficult for someone to manage work alongside their personal circumstances.

There can also be an impact on teams and the wider organisation. For example:

- Changes in workload or team capacity.
- Increased need for management support.
- Potential health and safety considerations where abuse affects the workplace.
- Wider impacts on team wellbeing.

By recognising these impacts, we can take proactive steps to support colleagues and help create a safe, inclusive and supportive working environment. Early understanding and support can make a meaningful difference in helping colleagues to remain in work and access the help they need.

Creating an open and informed workplace culture is key to reducing stigma and encouraging people to seek support when they need it.

GBV, inequality and financial independence

GBV is both a cause and a consequence of inequality. When people face barriers to equal access to employment, such as lower pay, fewer opportunities for promotion, or limited access to flexible working, it can reduce financial independence and limit choice. This can make it harder for someone experiencing abuse to leave unsafe situations or remain in work.

We also understand that financial dependence and poverty can increase vulnerability to abuse and reduce resilience. That's why supporting workplace equality is an important part of preventing violence and promoting safety.

Barriers and inequalities in the workforce

People from different backgrounds may face additional challenges. For example, individuals who are disabled, minority communities, Muslim, LGBTQ+, refugees, or older adults may experience multiple barriers to accessing and progressing in employment. Socio-economic background also plays a role, with those from working-class backgrounds more likely to be in lower paid or undervalued roles.

We see gendered patterns in jobs; women are more likely to work in care, admin, and early years roles, while men are more often found in IT, trades, and refuse collection. These patterns reflect wider gender norms and stereotypes, and they contribute to ongoing inequality.

Our commitment to equality and prevention

We're committed to addressing these issues. By promoting equal access to quality jobs, supporting flexible working, and tackling the gender pay gap, we can help create a workplace where all women feel safe, valued, and empowered.

Creating an inclusive workplace

You can find training resources on [iLearn](#) to increase your knowledge and skills on these following topics:

- Flexible Working.
- Sexual Harassment modules one and two.
- Violence against women and work modules one and two.
- Trauma skilled module one.
- Psychological First Aid – general module.

We also provide an in-person training sessions to equip you for Having sensitive conversations through our [Corporate Learning Programme](#)

Supporting colleagues and creating an inclusive, equitable workplace helps us all thrive and aligns with Scotland's national Equally Safe Strategy and our participation in Equally Safe at Work accreditation.

Related policies and other sources of support

Other related policies

Domestic abuse can intersect with other forms of unacceptable behaviour in the workplace, including bullying, harassment, and discrimination. If you are experiencing behaviour that undermines your dignity at work, you may also find support through our **Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Policy**. This policy outlines our commitment to fostering a respectful, inclusive, and safe working environment for all colleagues.

The Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Policy works alongside this policy to ensure that all employees are protected from harm and supported in raising concerns. If you're unsure which policy applies to your situation, please speak to your manager, or to HR.

Where you can find other support

There are lots of charities and other specialist support groups who offer information and support about domestic abuse. Here are some that you might find helpful:

Orkney Rape and Sexual Assault Service (ORSAS)

Provides free and confidential information, advocacy, and support to anyone in Orkney (age 13 and over) affected by any form of sexual violence. This includes survivors of sexual violence and their friends, partners and families. ORSAS also provide advice and support to staff in other agencies who are working with survivors.

Call: 01856 872298, email contact@orsas.scot or visit <https://www.orsas.scot/> for more information.

Women's Aid Orkney

Provide free and confidential support to women and children who have been affected by domestic abuse.

Call: 01856 877900 or email: info@womensaidorkney.org.uk

Scottish Women's Aid

Scotland's lead domestic abuse organisation working towards preventing domestic abuse and supporting victim-survivors. Visit www.womensaid.scot for more information.

Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline

Support for anyone experiencing domestic abuse or forced marriage, as well as their family members, friends, colleagues, and professionals who support them. Call the 24hr service: 0800 027 1234, WhatsApp / Text: 07401 288595, or visit www.sdafmh.org.uk for more information.

Scottish Women's Rights Centre

Free legal information and advice for women experiencing gender-based violence.

Call: 08088 010 789, or visit www.scottishwomensrightscentre.org.uk

Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline

The national helpline for rape and sexual assault support.

Call: 08088 01 03 02 or text 07537 410027 – every day between 5pm – midnight

Email: support@rapecrisisscotland.org.uk or Webchat: www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk

Shakti Women's Aid

Support and information for Black and minority ethnic women, children, and young people experiencing or who have experienced domestic abuse. Call: 0131 475 2399 or visit

www.shaktiedinburgh.co.uk

Amina Muslim Women's Resource Centre

Culturally sensitive signposting and support service for Muslim and ethnic minority women.

They also offer a service, Sahara, which provides support for women experiencing domestic or sexual abuse Helpline from Mon-Fri 10am-4pm: 0808 801 0301, visit

www.mwrc.org.uk, or email sahara@mwrc.org.uk

Hemat Gryffe Women's Aid

Support to Asian, Black and minority ethnic women, children, and young people. Call the helpline (24hrs) on 0141 353 0859 or visit www.hematgryffe.org.uk

LGBT Helpline Scotland

Information and support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. The Helpline is open on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursday from 12-9pm and Sundays from 1-6pm. Call:

0800 464 7000 or visit <https://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/services-support/lgbt-helpline-scotland/>

Feniks

Counselling support for adults from Polish and other Central Eastern European communities. Visit www.feniks.org.uk for online support.

Men's Advice Line Call: 0808 801 0327

Mankind Call: 01823 334 244

Galop - Supporting victims of domestic abuse in the LGBT+ community. Call: 0800 999 5428

Suzy Lamplugh Trust – Call the National Stalking Helpline on 0808 802 0300

Respect Helpline – For anyone worried about their own behaviour. Call: 0800 802 4040

The Lucy Faithful – Support for anyone wanting to change their own behaviours in relation to child abuse, especially online. Call: 0808 1000 900 for confidential support.

Hestia Respond to Abuse Helpline – a free resource for employers. Employers can call 020 3879 3695 Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, or email advice@hestia.org for support, guidance or information about domestic abuse and how to support employees and colleagues experiencing domestic abuse

CrimeStoppers is an independent charity giving people the power to speak up about crime 100% anonymously.

Perpetrators

We do not tolerate or condone gender-based violence in any form. We recognise that the responsibility for GBV lies with the perpetrator. However, if a colleague tells us about their abusive behaviour and genuinely wants to change, we will engage with them to identify the appropriate external support. This could include providing access to specialist support services decided on a case-by-case basis. Speak to your manager if you are looking for help or you can contact [The Respect Helpline](#) confidentially on 0808 802 4040.

Any use of OIC equipment, premises or time to commit acts of GBV will be seen as gross misconduct. It may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. If the behaviour constitutes a criminal offence, we have a duty to contact the Police.

The safety of victim-survivors will always take precedence.

If you have been accused

We know that some colleagues may be in personal relationships at work, and we recognise that being accused of GBV can be upsetting. If an allegation is made, we will investigate it fairly, sensitively, and without pre-judging the situation.

If we find the allegation is untrue, we will ensure you are not treated unfairly in any way and will provide support where required.

This policy and guidance support Orkney Islands Council's commitment to the Equally Safe at Work accreditation programme and Scotland's national Equally Safe strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls, while supporting all victim-survivors of domestic abuse and gender-based violence.



Equality Impact Assessment

The purpose of an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is to improve the work of Orkney Islands Council by making sure it promotes equality and does not discriminate. This assessment records the likely impact of any changes to a proposal or changes by anticipating the consequences and making sure that any negative impacts are eliminated or minimised and positive impacts are maximised.

Should you have any questions or wish for your draft EqIA to be reviewed by our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Adviser, please contact OD@orkney.gov.uk.

1. Identification of the Proposal or Change

Name of proposal or change being assessed.	Gender-Based Violence (including Domestic Abuse) Policy
Responsible Service and Directorate.	HR and OD, Infrastructure and Organisational Development
Date of assessment.	February 2026
Is the proposal or change existing? (Please indicate if the service is to be deleted, reduced or changed significantly).	New corporate policy designed to support employees experiencing Gender-Based Violence (GBV), including domestic abuse, and to establish a consistent organisational approach to awareness, support, workplace safety and signposting to specialist services.

2. Primary Information

What are the intended outcomes of the proposal or change?	The intended outcome is to establish a clear and supportive framework for employees affected by Gender-Based Violence (GBV), including domestic abuse. The policy aims to increase awareness and understanding of GBV, encourage early disclosure where appropriate, and ensure employees can access support safely and confidentially. The policy provides guidance for managers and employees on recognising signs of abuse, responding appropriately to disclosures, implementing workplace safety measures, making reasonable workplace adjustments, and accessing specialist support services. It also seeks to promote a culture where colleagues feel safe, valued and supported, whilst contributing to wider organisational commitments under Equally Safe
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	at Work and supporting the Council's equality, wellbeing and employee experience objectives.
Is the proposal or change strategically important?	Strategic plans include major investment plans, new strategic frameworks or plans such as annual budgets, locality plans or corporate plans. Where a proposal is identified as strategic, evidence relating to socio-economic impacts and inequalities will be required in the relevant section No
State who is or may be affected by this proposal or change, and how?	All Orkney Islands Council employees. The policy is likely to have the greatest impact on employees experiencing GBV, including domestic abuse, as well as managers who may be required to provide support and implement workplace adjustments.
How have stakeholders been involved in the development of this proposal or change?	Development was informed through engagement with the Equally Safe at Work Working Group, HR and Organisational Development colleagues, trade union representatives, and a review of national guidance, employer good practice and specialist support organisations working in the field of gender-based violence.
Is there any existing data and / or research relating to equalities issues in this policy area? Please summarise. E.g. consultations, national surveys, performance data, complaints, service user feedback, academic / consultants' reports, benchmarking.	Evidence consistently demonstrates that GBV disproportionately affects women and girls but can impact people of all genders, sexual orientations, ages and backgrounds. Research from Equally Safe, Scottish Government, Scottish Women's Aid, Close the Gap, ACAS and Equally Safe at Work identifies significant impacts on safety, health, wellbeing, attendance, performance and financial security. Evidence also highlights that some groups, including disabled people, minority ethnic communities, LGBT+ individuals and those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, can face additional barriers to accessing support and reporting abuse. The policy has been developed with reference to Equally Safe at Work accreditation standards, Scottish Government guidance, ACAS guidance on domestic abuse at work, and examples of good practice from Scottish public sector employers.
Is there any existing evidence relating to socio-economic disadvantage and inequalities of outcome in this policy area? Please summarise. E.g. For people living in poverty or for people of low income. See The Fairer Scotland Duty Guidance for Public Bodies for further information.	Evidence indicates that financial dependence, poverty and economic abuse can increase vulnerability to GBV and create barriers to leaving abusive situations. Individuals in lower-paid employment may have fewer financial resources and support networks available to them. Economic abuse is recognised within the policy and mitigations include support with pay arrangements, flexible working arrangements, workplace adjustments, signposting to specialist agencies and access to support services.

Could the proposal or change have a differential impact on any of the following equality areas?	Please provide any evidence – positive impacts / benefits, negative impacts and reasons:
1. Race: this includes ethnic or national groups, colour and nationality.	Positive: recognises that people from minority ethnic communities may face additional barriers to seeking support and accessing services. Signposts culturally appropriate support organisations. Risk: language, cultural or immigration-related barriers may discourage disclosure.
2. Sex: a man or a woman.	Positive: acknowledges the gendered nature of violence against women and girls whilst providing support for all victim-survivors regardless of sex. Supports organisational commitments under Equally Safe at Work.
3. Sexual Orientation: whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes.	Positive: recognises abuse can occur within same-sex relationships and that LGBT+ individuals may experience specific forms of coercion or control. Risk: some individuals may fear disclosure due to concerns about discrimination or confidentiality. Mitigated by signposting specialist support services.
4. Gender Reassignment: the process of transitioning from one gender to another.	Positive: explicitly recognises that trans and non-binary people can experience GBV and provides inclusive support arrangements. Risk: some individuals may fear disclosure due to concerns about discrimination or confidentiality. Mitigated by signposting specialist support services.
5. Pregnancy and maternity.	Positive: pregnant employees and those on maternity leave may benefit from specific workplace safety and support measures. Evidence suggests pregnancy can increase vulnerability to domestic abuse.
6. Age: people of different ages.	Positive: policy applies equally across all age groups. Younger and older employees experiencing abuse are encouraged to seek support and access workplace adjustments where needed.
7. Religion or belief or none (atheists).	Positive: acknowledges that cultural and faith-related factors can affect experiences of abuse and access to support. Signposts specialist support organisations where appropriate.
8. Disability: people with disabilities (whether registered or not).	Positive: promotes reasonable adjustments and individualised support. Recognises disabled people may face increased barriers to leaving abusive situations or accessing support. Risk: communication and accessibility barriers could affect disclosure if adjustments are not proactively offered.

9. Marriage and Civil Partnerships.	Positive: policy covers abuse occurring within marriages, civil partnerships and former relationships, ensuring equitable protection and support.
10. Caring responsibilities	Positive: flexible workplace support and adjustments may assist employees balancing caring responsibilities while managing the impact of abuse.
11. Socio-economic disadvantage.	Positive: recognises the role of economic abuse and financial dependence as barriers to safety and independence. Support measures may help reduce some of these inequalities.
12. Care experienced	Positive: acknowledges that individuals with previous experiences of trauma may require additional support. Trauma-informed approaches and signposting to specialist agencies may be beneficial.

3. Impact Assessment

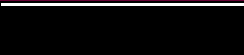
Does the analysis above identify any differential impacts which need to be addressed?	Yes. Some groups may experience additional barriers to disclosure, accessing support or engaging with workplace processes. These include disabled employees, LGBT+ employees, minority ethnic employees, those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage and employees with previous experiences of trauma.
Does the analysis above identify any potential negative impacts?	Yes. Potential negative impacts include concerns regarding confidentiality, fear of victimisation, cultural barriers to disclosure, accessibility barriers and the possibility of re-traumatisation when discussing experiences of abuse.
Do you have enough information to make a judgement? If no, what information do you require?	Yes. Sufficient evidence is available from national research, Scottish Government policy, Equally Safe at Work resources, specialist support organisations and employer guidance. Ongoing monitoring and employee feedback will inform future reviews.

4. Equality Impact Assessment Action Plan

Please complete the following action plan where you have identified any differential impacts or potential negative impacts in Section 3 of the Equality Impact Assessment.

Impact Identified	Action to be taken	Owner	How will it be monitored	Date Action to be completed
Employees may experience barriers to disclosure or accessing support.	Provide multiple confidential routes for disclosure, including managers, HR and OD, trade unions, wellbeing champions and external support organisations.	HR and OD / Service Managers	Review employee feedback and monitor policy implementation.	End 2026
Risk of re-traumatisation or distress during disclosures.	Promote trauma-informed approaches, manager guidance and access to specialist support agencies and the Employee Assistance Programme.	HR and OD / Service Managers	Monitor feedback and training uptake.	Ongoing
Disabled employees or those requiring adjustments may experience accessibility barriers.	Ensure reasonable adjustments and accessible communication methods are available throughout any support process.	HR and OD / Service Managers	Review requests for adjustments and employee feedback.	Ongoing
Potential fear of confidentiality breaches or victimisation.	Reinforce confidentiality requirements, manager training and clear guidance on information sharing and safeguarding responsibilities.	HR and OD / Service Managers	Monitor complaints, feedback and policy reviews.	Ongoing

5. Sign and Date

Signature:	
Name:	Nicola Fyffe
Date:	12 February 2026