

Committee: **Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee**  
 Date of meeting: **22<sup>nd</sup> January 2021**  
 Report Subject: **Proposed amendments to the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Policy**  
 Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Nigel Daniels, Leader / Executive Member Corporate Services**  
 Report Submitted by: **Andrea J. Prosser – Head of Organisational Development**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
x	26.11.20	11.01.21			22.01.21		28.01.21	

## 1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to give Scrutiny Members the opportunity to scrutinise, challenge and give views on the proposed revisions to the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence policy (VAWDASV) (“the existing policy”) (Appendix 1) in accordance with the draft amended Domestic Abuse, Violence and Sexual Violence Policy (“the amended policy”) (Appendix 2).

## 2. Scope and Background

### 2.1 Title of policy

The amended policy is entitled: “Domestic Abuse, Violence and Sexual Violence Policy” which represents a change from “Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Policy”. It is a requirement of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 (“VAWDASV”) that all devolved public sector employers have a work place policy for Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence. The amended policy fulfils that requirement but the title of the amended policy makes clear that this policy is not exclusive to women, in recognition that men, women and non-binary individuals are victims of violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence. This demonstrates that the amended policy is free from gender bias and that all individuals suffering from domestic abuse/violence are covered, and supported by, a policy which is applicable to them, irrespective of gender.

### 2.2 Scope of policy

The amended policy applies to Council and school based employees.

### 2.3 Key changes to the Policy

The aim of the amendments is to ensure that effective and practical support mechanisms are in place across the Authority to assist victims of domestic abuse/violence and include;

- Definitions and key legislation
- Leave, up to 5 days paid safe leave and other supportive measures for victims
- Details the role of the manager

### 3. **Options for Recommendation**

The Corporate Leadership Team considered this report on the 26<sup>th</sup> November 2020 and support the proposed amendments to the Policy.

3.1 **Option 1:** (preferred option) Members of the Committee to consider the revisions to Policy and recommend approval to Council.

3.2 **Option 2:** Members of the Committee suggest further amendments/additions to the Policy.

### 4. **Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

#### 4.1 **Statutory Responsibilities**

As outlined at 2.1 above, it is a requirement of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 (“VAWDASV”) that all devolved public sector employers have a work place policy for Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence.

#### 4.2 **Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

The amended policy, by offering increased support to victims of domestic abuse/violence helps to promote the following aspects of the Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan:

- Safe and friendly communities
- To encourage and enable people to make healthy lifestyle choices in the places that they live, learn, work and play.

### 5. **Implications Against Each Option**

#### 5.1 **Impact on Budget**

There is no direct cost to the amendment of this policy. There will be costs associated where a member of staff needs to take safe leave and the post will need to be covered.

#### 5.2 **Risk**

Failure to amend the policy would mean non-compliance by BGCBC with Welsh Government’s request for Local Authorities to become role models, helping to support victims and survivors of domestic abuse, in terms of following Neath Port Talbot’s example and other good practice which exists e.g. Joint Council for Wales (JCW) Joint Statement on Domestic Abuse, GMB’s Work to Stop Domestic Abuse, Workplace Policy, and Unison’s Domestic Violence and Abuse: a Trade Union issue – a Unison Guide.

#### 5.3 **Legal**

As above, it is a requirement of VAWDASV that all devolved public sector employers have a work place policy for Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence.

#### 5.4 **Human Resources**

The amended policy, by enabling BGCBC to act as a role model, in terms of providing increased practical support to employees who are affected, in accordance with good practice could: improve employee well-being; aid employee recruitment and retention; reduce absences from work resulting from acts of domestic abuse/violence; and assist in improving any performance issues.

### 6. **Supporting Evidence**

#### 6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

Statistical Information from the British Crime Survey Statistical Bulletin indicates the following:

Domestic abuse:

- Will affect 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men in their lifetime
- Leads to, on average, two women being murdered each week and 30 men per year
- Accounts for 16% of all violent crime (Source: Crime in England and Wales 04/05 report), however it is still the violent crime least likely to be reported to the police
- Has more repeat victims than any other crime (on average there will have been 35 assaults before a victim calls the police)
- Is the single most quoted reason for becoming homeless (Shelter, 2002)
- In 2010, the Forced Marriage Unit responded to 1735 reports of possible Forced Marriages.

In addition, approximately 400 people commit suicide each year who have attended hospital for domestic abuse injuries in the previous six months, 200 of these attend hospital on the day they go on to commit suicide.

#### 6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

Members of the public external to the Authority may be attracted to an employer, which endorses good practice and acts as a role model by providing increased support for victims of domestic abuse/violence. This may also contribute positively to the Council's reputation among members of the public.

#### 6.3 **Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)**

Consultation, engagement and participation regarding the amended policy has been internal to the Council, along with the Trade Unions who are supportive of the amended policy.

#### 6.4 **Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)**

The amended policy is intended to provide increased support to all Council and school based employees and the clear aim and aspiration of the amended policy is that, long-term (and short-term), victims of domestic abuse/violence will be assisted by it, particularly by the additional supportive measures proposed.

#### 6.5 **Preventative focus**

The amended policy aims to train staff regarding how to identify victims of domestic abuse/violence, where possible, so that if they seek support and assistance, they can receive it as soon as possible with the aim of preventing further domestic abuse/violence.

**6.6 Collaboration / partnership working**

The amended policy promotes collaboration in terms of multi-agency / partnership working, which would be necessary, for example, if information had to be shared in terms of safeguarding vulnerable children.

**6.7 Integration (across service areas)**

The additional support proposed by the amended policy is intended (among other aims and aspirations) to try to reduce absences from work resulting from acts of domestic abuse/violence and assist in improving any performance issues by offering practical support to employees who are affected. This could positively impact on all service areas.

**6.8 EqIA (screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)**

The amended policy promotes equal opportunity.

**7. Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 It is recognised that due to confidentiality issues and sensitivities around cases of violence, domestic abuse and/or sexual violence, monitoring and evaluation is not always easy. However, the following information may be recorded and shared with the Violence Against Women and Domestic Abuse Team in Welsh Government:

- How the Policy has been promoted and staff awareness raised;
- Details of planned training and/or numbers of staff who have completed training; and
- The number of hits on the Blaenau Gwent intranet page hosting the workplace policy.

**Background Documents /Electronic Links**

Appendix 1 - Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse, Sexual Violence Policy ("existing policy")

Appendix 2 - Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Policy ("amended policy")