

Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership

To: Communities, Social Mobility, and Inequalities Committee

Meeting Date: 8 July 2021

From: Assistant Director for Community Safety, Rob Hill

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Outcome: Services to support victims of domestic abuse, including those required under the terms of the new Domestic Abuse Act 2021, will be fit for purpose and responsive to their needs.

Recommendation: The Committee is asked to:

- a) Note and comment on the funding investment proposals; and
- b) Approve the joint recommissioning of refuge provision for victims of domestic abuse across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough from 2022/23.

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1. Background

- 1.1 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 came into force in late April 2021. The Act places a statutory duty on local authorities regarding the provision of safe accommodation for victims of Domestic Violence. This includes refuge accommodation which is currently commissioned in Cambridgeshire until March 2022.
- 1.2 This report provides detail on the Statutory Duty, the funding granted to the council from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), and a progress report relating to our White Ribbon accreditation. It also highlights the demand for services during 2020-21 and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Main Issues

- 2.1 The four duties of the new Domestic Abuse Act 2021 are as follows:
- i. Tier 1 local authorities will be required to convene a multi-agency Local Partnership Board (LPB) to support them in performing certain specified functions. These will be to:
 - Assess the need and demand for accommodation-based support for all victims and their children, including those who require cross-border support
 - Develop and publish strategies for the provision of support to cover the locality and diverse groups of victims
 - Give effect to strategies by making commissioning / de-commissioning decisions
 - Meet the support needs of victims and their children
 - Monitor and evaluate local delivery
 - Report back to central Government (annually)
 - ii. A duty on MHCLG to produce the Statutory Guidance
 - iii. A duty for local authorities to have regard to Statutory Guidance in exercising the above functions; and,
 - iv. A duty on Tier 2 district, borough and city councils and London Boroughs to co-operate with Tier 1 authorities.

2.2 Local Partnership Board

- 2.2.1 The Board will support Tier 1 authorities in exercising their functions under the duty, including advising on undertaking a local needs assessment, developing, and publishing strategies and reporting back to the Government.

- 2.2.2 Authorities should work closely with local services, drawing on their expertise and experience of supporting victims to further understand the varying needs and appropriate approaches needed to address them.
- 2.2.3 Tier two authorities must, so far as reasonably practicable, cooperate with lead authorities in exercising the requirements under this duty.
- 2.2.4 Across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough there is already a Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership Board in place, which meets the duty as set out in legislation.

2.3 Needs Assessments and Strategies

- 2.3.1 Needs assessments will take place every 3 years, with an annual refresh, using a standardised needs assessment form from the MHCLG. Needs Assessments will explore the level of need for support services within safe accommodation for victims of domestic abuse, including those presenting from out of area. As well as the level of need more broadly, it should include an assessment of the level of need for specialist support services.
- 2.3.2 Using the needs assessment, Tier 1 authorities will develop strategies clearly setting out the local approach in supporting victims of domestic abuse within safe accommodation.
- 2.3.3 Tier 1 local authorities, with support from the Local Partnership Board, will need to submit a report to the MHCLG setting out how they have met their duty towards the end of 2021.

2.4 Funding

- 2.4.1 Cambridgeshire County Council has been allocated £1,140,318 for 2021/22 to support our responsibilities under the new Act. In addition, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Domestic Abuse Partnership has also been allocated an additional £408,000 from the Home Office, as continuation of the Children Affected by Domestic Abuse funding. This fund will continue to be held and managed by Cambridgeshire County Council to support young people.
- 2.4.2 Both MHCLG and the Local Government Association have indicated there is funding for future years, however, the level of funding will not be confirmed until autumn 2021. The Home Office funding is expected to end in March 2022.
- 2.4.3 The conditions of the MHCLG grant as set out in the Memorandum of Understanding are as follows:
- “The grant only covers revenue expenditure relating to the functions set out in the new statutory duty (within the Domestic Abuse Act) on Tier 1 Local Authorities relating to the provision of support to victims of domestic abuse and their children residing within safe accommodation”.
- 2.4.4 The Act will put in place a statutory framework for the delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse and their children residing within safe accommodation, including:
- Assessing the need for accommodation-based support for all victims and their children, including those who require cross border support.

- Preparing and publishing strategies for the provision of support to cover the locality and diverse groups of victims.
- Giving effect to strategies by making commissioning/de-commissioning decisions to meet the support needs of victims and their children.
- Monitoring and evaluating local delivery of the strategy.
- Reporting back to Central Government; expected to include:
 - Reporting on local delivery – setting out how the functions have been executed under the new duty (including reporting on strategy), as well as how partnership working has been approached working across key agencies and across neighbouring areas.
 - Evidence that adequate needs assessments have been undertaken.
 - Evidence that local strategies are in place and working effectively.
 - Evidence that local commissioning decisions have been informed by needs assessments and that there is adequate suitable provision.
 - An evaluation of the impact of decisions locally including service delivery outcomes.
 - Evidence on spend and feedback on delivery, including challenges faced and best practice.

2.4.5 A full needs assessment is taking place as described above to identify gaps in current provision, but the following have already been identified as the key challenges for the local Domestic Abuse system:

- Provision of easily accessible accommodation to those at risk of abuse and their children but safe to stay within the county if provided with additional support.
- Provision of therapeutic support to victims and their children who have experienced domestic abuse.
- Ensuring greater support is provided to the housing sector and the health sector to improve awareness and support to those experiencing domestic abuse.
- Ensuring a consistency of support across both urban and very rural areas, as rurality provides challenges for this work.

2.5 Use of Funding

2.5.1 The Domestic Abuse Partnership Team have consulted with district and city councils, specialist domestic abuse providers, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, the

Local Government Association, MHCLG and the Regional Housing Board to develop a plan for prioritising the use of the funding during 2021/22. We believe the proposals will develop a consistent offer across the area and are in addition to our current services of refuge accommodation across the county, Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA) and outreach domestic abuse services. The priorities for spend are summarised as follows:

2.5.2 Dispersed Safe Accommodation

- i. This will not replace in any way the need for refuge accommodation for those at immediate risk of harm. This accommodation will increase the options and choice for survivors and is purely for residents in this area who are being abused.
- ii. This investment will provide access to safe accommodation for victims/survivors and their children who are not able to live in a communal facility, people who need a carer, large families, those with disabilities, people with pets, male victims, families with teenage boys (many refuges will not allow boys over the age of 12), people from the LGBT+ community, and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic victims whose needs are not met with traditional refuges.
- iii. Being supported in these homes means the survivor may be able to maintain their occupation where this is assessed as safe. Survivors can still access their support network if safe to do so, and they would have regular support provided by Housing IDVAs. The Housing IDVAs would support them to move back to their own homes with all safety measures in place, where this is safe to do so.
- iv. Homes will be sought from landlords for a period of a year, which would be extended on announcement of further funding. The properties would be furnished and available across the county, with an aim of a minimum of two properties per tier 2 local authority area (10 in total) and building upon this number.
- v. The scheme gives a client and their family a chance to take a breath and make those life changing decisions in an environment that is self-contained, is homely and safe. During their stay in our accommodation the officers will support the clients to look at their long-term plans for housing and work with them to find their forever home.
- vi. A Programme Manager will oversee the development of this work and will work closely with district council housing teams, specialist domestic abuse services and a range of other partners. This post will be an initial 12-month contract with the option to extend if funding is in place. This post will manage the team of Housing IDVAs.

2.5.3 Housing IDVAs

- i. There will be a team of five Housing IDVAs (one for each district or city council area). Where a district or city council Housing Advice team become aware they are working with someone suffering domestic abuse they will refer into the team, with the IDVA focussing on safety and options, and housing officers taking the lead for their housing. These posts will be trained to IDVA standard.
- ii. These post holders will support the victims/survivors in the Dispersed Safe Accommodation. The posts will be for 12 months with the option to extend.

2.5.4 Refuge Support Costs

The MHCLG funding will enable continuation of the funding of refuge provision across Cambridgeshire. There are currently 3 refuges across the county, and the current providers are Cambridge Women's Aid and Refuge. These contracts end in March 2022 and members are asked to agree to the recommissioning of this provision for April 2022 onwards. It is proposed that this would be a joint commissioning process with Peterborough City Council.

2.5.5 Housing First

Housing First is managed within the County Council and is an approach which uses stable housing to support people experiencing complex issues to improve their outcomes. The proposal is to have a Housing First role focussing on those who have suffered domestic abuse and find it difficult to engage with standard support services due to multiple disadvantages. This post will link with the IDVA service and would receive specialist training and support.

2.5.6 Flexible Funding

Flexible funding supports victims/survivors to achieve or maintain safe and secure housing. It is low-barrier and does not require victims/survivors to provide evidence of abuse. Unlike most other funding sources, there is no set list of what will be funded and victims/survivors are encouraged to ask for whatever will make the most difference to their housing situation and their lives, in order that the victim/survivor and their children can stay safe.

2.5.7 Additional security

The Bobby Scheme works with specialist domestic abuse specialists to enable households at risk of further domestic abuse to remain in their own homes and reduce repeat victimisation through the provision of enhanced security measures. This funding would go towards the support costs of the security advisers and recruitment of an additional post.

2.5.8 Children's Workers within Refuges

These posts work with children in the Refuges and their mothers to rebuild relationships and to help the children cope and recover from the abuse they have experienced.

2.5.9 Therapeutic Support for those in Safe Accommodation

Around a third of female suicides are driven by their experience of domestic abuse and we are working with mental health organisations to improve knowledge of suicide and domestic abuse from both sides. This funding will enable provision of specialist therapeutic support to enable victims to better cope and recover from the abuse they have experienced.

2.5.10 DAHA Support

The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance's (DAHA) mission is to improve the housing sector's response to domestic abuse through the introduction and adoption of an established set of standards and an accreditation process. This funding will extend the DAHA Support post, to support Housing Associations and Local Authorities to gain DAHA Accreditation, as well as additional support to those authorities and Housing Associations seeking accreditation.

2.5.11 Managed Reciprocals

This would fund administration and promotion of the managed reciprocals scheme across the county, which facilitates tenancy moves across districts in Cambridgeshire.

2.5.12 Therapeutic Support for children experiencing domestic abuse

This funding would provide counselling and therapeutic support for children who have experienced domestic abuse.

2.5.13 Additional Outreach Support in Huntingdonshire and Fenland

Funding would be invested in additional outreach support to ensure victims/survivors were identified and could access support at the earliest possibility.

2.5.14 Needs Assessment and Commissioning

A requirement of the Domestic Abuse Act is the production of a Needs Assessment and Strategy in August 2021, and this funding will enable specialist research support to ensure the Needs Assessment is as effective as possible.

2.6 White Ribbon Accreditation

2.6.1 As members will be aware the White Ribbon Campaign is part of a global initiative to end male violence against women. Cambridgeshire County Council recently gained re-accreditation, and there is a coordinated plan across our human resources, communications, and community safety teams to promote these messages, which are embedded within the newly reviewed "Respect at Work" Policy.

2.6.2 Traditionally, the council has identified a lead Member to champion this work, and the Committee is asked to consider this in the separate report on Appointments to Outside Bodies and Internal Advisory Groups and, if supported, nominate a Member to fulfil this function. We will also be seeking further White Ribbon Ambassadors who have a formal role to promote and champion the programme.

2.7 Impact of Covid-19

2.7.1 The impact of COVID-19 on increased reporting of domestic abuse has been well documented in the media, with national charities and organisations reporting increases in referrals and calls for help. This picture has been replicated locally with an 18% increase in referrals to the IDVA Service compared to the previous year. There have been particular increases in referrals for young people (+64%) and A8 Eastern European referrals (+109%).

- 2.7.2 The IDVA Service has also achieved an engagement rate of 75% (target 70%) with a repeat referral rate of 32%.
- 2.7.3 Outreach services have also seen an increase in referrals with an increase from 557 to 802 for Refuge and 567 to 977 for Cambridge Women's Aid, compared to the previous year. This has been an increase of 39% and 72% respectively.
- 2.7.4 The Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership is in the process of compiling their Annual Report for 2020/2021 which will be published and circulated once complete.

3. Alignment with corporate priorities

3.1 Communities at the heart of everything we do

This report sets out a range of measures and interventions that are designed to support victims of domestic abuse to remain living independently and within their communities. The proposals have been developed following expansive partnership dialogue informed by the experiences of affected residents.

3.2 Good quality of life for everyone

The measures and investments set out in this report are designed to ensure victims of domestic abuse are provided with all the support necessary to enable them to recover and, eventually, to improve their outcomes.

3.3 Helping our children learn, develop and live life to the full

It is estimated that between a quarter and a third of children have been exposed to domestic abuse at some point during their lives. The investment proposals described in this report will help to focus on young people ensuring they are more able to achieve their full potential.

3.4 Cambridgeshire: a well-connected, safe, clean, green environment

There are no significant implications for this priority

3.5 Protecting and caring for those who need us

The measures set out in this report are designed to ensure the individual and collective needs of victims of domestic abuse are front and centre in our response to them.

4. Significant Implications

4.1 Resource Implications

The report above sets out details of the resource implications in section 2.

4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

Procurement and contract procedure rules will need to be followed when commissioning the new services described in the paper. The dispersed accommodation scheme will be managed through the local authority and by staff employed through Cambridgeshire County Council.

4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

The report above sets out details of the statutory, legal and risk implications in section 2.

4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence are highly gendered crimes, therefore there will be greater impact on female residents in Cambridgeshire. Any public awareness activity will make it clear that the issue includes violence against men and boys, as well as women and girls.

4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

White Ribbon accreditation and future activity will require support from the community engagement and communications teams, both of which are represented on the White Ribbon Working Group.

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

White Ribbon reaccreditation will involve the continued engagement of the Member Champion and by Members more generally.

4.7 Public Health Implications

Violence is a public health issue at individual and population levels. The DASV Partnership and White Ribbon campaign will help increase awareness and understanding of this particular violence issue and awareness raising is an important element for the delivery of the wider Domestic Abuse Strategy.

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Yes
Name of Financial Officer: Martin Wade

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the LGSS Head of Procurement? Yes
Where expenditure with external bodies takes place the Public Contracts Regulations and the Contracts Procedures, must be followed
Name of Officer: Henry Swann

Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's Monitoring Officer or LGSS Law? Yes

Name of Legal Officer: Fiona McMillan

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your Service Contact?

Yes

Name of Officer: Adrian Chapman

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?

Yes

Name of Officer: Amanda Rose

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact? Yes

Name of Officer: Adrian Chapman

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health?

Yes

Name of Officer: Val Thomas

If a Key decision, have any Environment and Climate Change implications been cleared by the Climate Change Officer?

N/A

Name of Officer:

5. Source documents

Domestic Abuse Act 2021 [Domestic Abuse Act 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/contents/enacted) or <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/contents/enacted>